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"Outside Is Dead": Africfuturist Cinema and the Making of Climate Truth in *Pumzi*

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ABSTRACT

In the context of climate governance, cinema functions not only as representation, but as a site where climate knowledge is shaped, communicated, and made credible. Such representation has often privilege data-driven authority obscuring the epistemic politics through which environmental futures are defined and limited, particularly within the postcolonial contexts. However, in Africfuturism, this article argues that cinema intervenes by challenging the technocratic regimes of ecology through which climate knowledge is produced and understood. Through a close textual analysis of a film titled Pumzi (2009) using postcolonial ecocriticism and Ivakhiv's biomorphy, the study revealed two key findings: 1) Pumzi portrays climate governance as a technocratic regime in Maitu Community that stabilises ecological collapse by converting environmental life into data, metrics, and bodily calibration. Thus, reproducing colonial hierarchies of control under the language of sustainability; 2) Through the central character's dream and soil discovery, the film reframes climate truth in an ancestral-present epistemic return as relational and embodied. Therefore, exposing the data-driven climate narratives as a form of epistemic closure. By positioning cinema as a site of epistemic struggle, this study reconceptualises climate governance, not as the management of ecological systems but as a world-making apparatus that determines which eco-life can be perceived and allowed to endure. By unsettling the technocratic axiom, condensed in the dictum "Outside is dead," Pumzi exposes climate governance as a colonial epistemic project that produces ecological death as a condition of knowledge as oppose to responding to planetary crisis.

Keywords: *Climate truth, Africfuturism, postcolonial ecocriticism, biomorphy, technocolonialism.*

INTRODUCTION

Climate change (CC) has become a central concern of global governance, mediated through communicative forms that shape how CC is understood and made credible. In particlular, cinema operating as a mediating space where climate knowledge is represented, interpreted, and contested (Brereton, 2016;2022). Within dominant climate discourse, governance has increasingly relied on technocratic systems of data, metrics, and institutional expertise to stabilise environmental risk (Wilkens & Datchoua-Tirvaudey, 2022). These approaches foreground coordination and institutional capacity within international frameworks, at the same time orients historical responsibility, uneven vulnerability, and the unequal distribution of environmental harm (Ogunbode et al., 2024). Yet climate change cannot be understood solely as a material or technical problem (Merzdorf et al., 2019). What is also at stake is an epistemic one, over how ecological crisis is defined, which forms of knowledge are deemed credible, and who holds the authority to represent environmental future and made imaginable through cinema.

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In postcolonial contexts, these struggles over climate knowledge unfold within longer histories of colonial environmental governance, where institutional and scientific knowledge have often been privileged over local, Indigenous, and embodied ecological understanding. Scholars such as Layden et al. (2025) argued that colonial administration treated local ecological practices as irrational or destructive, replacing them with "scientific" management systems that centralised control while erasing situated knowledge. This epistemic hierarchy continues to shape contemporary sustainability discourse, where technocratic expertise persists to be positioned as neutral and universal, even as it reproduces patterns of exclusion and epistemic marginalisation (Bäckstrand, 2004; Hartley, 2020). At this level, engaging climate governance, therefore, requires attention not only to policy outcomes, but to how environmental truth is produced, stabilised, and normalised through specific regimes of knowledge. Such an approach shifts the focus from idealised accounts of climate management to the ways ecological futures are actively shaped through practices of inclusion, exclusion, and epistemic control.

In that vein, cinema played a crucial role within this terrain, shaping how CC is understood and communicated. Mainstream films often frame environmental crisis through dominant narratives and visual regimes that render CC visible and actionable through scientific authority or spectacular disaster. For instance, *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim, 2006) relies on data visualisation, and expert narration, while *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004) translates climatic processes into dramatic catastrophe (Brereton, 2016, 2022; Rust, 2012). Despite their differences, such approaches often universalise environmental experience, flattening uneven histories of responsibility, vulnerability, and governance.

However, in African cinema, scholars have ascertained that climate cinema approaches environmental crisis from a different epistemic position. Diawara (1992) and Harrow (2023) argues, African filmmaking has long engaged the question of power, survival, and knowledge production within the postcolonial condition. For instance, Kalinde (2022) claimed that films such as *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (Ejiofor, 2019) employ a realist narrative foregrounding survival, resource control, and institutional authority within lived environmental conditions, contrasting with abstract climate data films. Contrastingly, speculative narratives like *Pumzi* (Kahiu, 2009)*, and Afronauts* (Bodomo, 2014) demonstrate how cinematic temporality, spatial enclosure, and material aesthetics of hope make environmental governance perceptible in everyday life (Harrow, 2020; Iheka, 2021; Podruczna, 2025). In these contexts, cinema becomes a site of epistemic struggle, where scientific, bureaucratic, embodied, and ancestral ways of knowing the environment are placed into tension.

With this critical engagement, Africfuturism cinema extends this tension, offering a distinct intervention into how climate futures are imagined and governed. As Okorafor (2020) and Eshun (2003) aver, Africfuturism grounds futurity in African histories and local epistemologies, instead of universalising technological solutions. Situating speculation within lived historical experience, Africfuturism enhanced by Macdonald and Petty (2020) as Afrofuturism with '2.0' challenges the assumption that environmental futures must be governed solely through technological systems of knowledge. Instead, it opens an imaginative space for alternative relations between technology, ecology, and social life.

Following Macdonald and Petty line of critique on the contestation over ecological authority to define eco-reality extends beyond cultural representation into the technological infrastructures. Recent critiques of climate governance highlight the influence of digital

infrastructure and computational systems in shaping how environmental realities are known and governed. The reliance on technological infrastructure like climate models, satellite imagery, environmental sensors, and algorithmic risk assessments, though, presents itself as neutral tools of measurement, yet they exercise substantial epistemic authority (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Scholars describe this formation as data-colonialism, showing how it reproduces imperial relations, through the extraction of information, the centralisation of knowledge, and the imposition of external logics of governance in the Global South (Dahiya, 2023; Kwet, 2019). In African contexts, the reliance on artificial intelligence and algorithmic governance in Africa risks deepening this asymmetries by translating ecological knowledge into technical datasets that marginalise local, embodied forms of knowledge (Salami, 2024; Kanu, 2025). Thus, these systems are seen not simply translating environmental conditions into information; they shape what counts as risk, which futures appear governable, and what forms of intervention are deemed legitimate.

Despite growing scholarship on cinema and climate governance, a sustained and systematic engagement with African speculative cinema remains limited. Additionally, existing research on Afrofuturism has largely focused on literary text (Grue, 2020; Ogunsiji, 2024; Rahmatullah, 2025) and thematic representation in cinema (Osei, 2020; Prabasmoro et al., 2019; Wachira, 2020), paying less attention to how cinematic form intervenes in climate by producing alternative modes of environmental truth. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into how Africfuturist films contest technocratic regimes of climate knowledge by producing ecological counter-truths through cinematic form. Addressing this gap is crucial for understanding how climate knowledge in Africfuturist cinema contests technocracy, reproducing alternative ecological-truths through cinematic forms.

Therefore, this study aims to critically explore how the film *Pumzi* (Kahiu, 2009), challenges technocolonial regimes of ecological knowledge through biomorphic representations of humans and nonhuman life, embodiment, and ecological memory. This article argues that by foregrounding embodied knowledge, eco-memory, and care-based regeneration, the Africfuturist cinema produces ecological counter-truths that challenge technocratic monopolies over climate futures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cinema, Climate governance and Africfuturist Interventions

Cinema has positioned climate governance as not simply represented but actively remodelled through sensory, affective, and narrative forms. Scholars like Siddique (2026), cross-media analysis demonstrates how narrative form shapes the temporal and emotional registers through which climate change is apprehended, complicating the linearity and urgency typical of institutional climate discourse. Similarly, Rust's (2012) explore how films such as *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim, 2006), and *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004) mediate climate knowledge by combining scientific authority with affective persuasion, translating abstract data in experimental forms. Beyond representation, cinema situates CC within broader materialist and historical conditions. As Mahajan's (2021) highlights how climate imaginaries circulate across media through processes of textual hybridity and palimpsestuous reception, while Kim (2023) analysis of *Parasite* (Joon-Ho, 2019) from a materialist perspective, and Bergstrom's (2023)

analysis of *First Reformed* (Schrader, 2017) shows how cinematic forms link climate disruption within an intertwined ecology of labour, debt, and class, suggesting that cinema carries the weight of unsettling anthropocentric assumptions and demands ethical reckoning. Hence, these studies position cinema as a cultural infrastructure through which CC is felt, contested, and given meaning. Nevertheless, little is known about cinema as a communicative infrastructure actively reorganises climate knowledge, authority, and futurity, particularly within African cntexts. However, this gap becomes pronounced when situated within critiques of technocratic climate governance reproducing colonial forms of power. Couldry and Mejias (2020) and Salami (2024) conceptualisation of data colonialism reveals infrastructures such as climate models, satellite monitoring systems, and algorithmic risk assessments function not only as observational tools but as infrastructures that determine how ecological conditions are rendered visible, actionable, and governable. As scholars note, this concentrates epistemic authority within transnational actors while marginalising local communities and situated ecological knowledge (Mamudu, 2024; Mupaikwa, 2025; De Meyer et al., 2021; Murodova, 2025; Niu et al., 2023). In African context, such dynamics are reinforced by digital political ecocomics that entrench technological dependence and epistemic exclusion (Kwet, 2019; Mwema and Birhane, 2024), resulting in ecological knowledge being abstracted, centralised, and removed from local control (Mohamed et al., 2020). In this sense, climate governance not only manages environmental risk but structures the terms through which ecological reality is known.

Moreover, Africfuturism intervenes in these conditions by reconfiguring ecological futurity as a site of political and epistemic resistance. Across literary, and cinematic forms, Africfuturist narratives produce counter-ecological imaginaries that link environmental justice to histories of colonialism, racialisation, and technological control (Agbeno, 2025). In speculative cinema, these narratives mobilise embodied and structural forms of resistance, foregrounding vulnerability, exclusion, and uneven distribution of ecological harm (Moffit, 2023). At the same time, Africfuturism disrupts the fixed distinction between human, machine, and environment, challenging dominant ontologies embedded in technocratic climate discourse (Collins, 2023; Crowley, 2023). These interventions align with decolonial critiques of development that reject linear progress in favour of alternative temporalities and mode of futurity (Hanchey, 2023). From an ecological perspective, Africfuturist texts further foreground the agency of land, matter, and non-human forces interrogating petroculture, material extraction, and ecological violence, reframing storytelling as a counter-epistemic practice through which suppressed ecological knowledge is recovered and mobilised beyond institutional data regimes (Gbeassor, 2024; Ogunsiji, 2024; Rahmatullah, 2025).

In African cinema, these concerns are articulated through visual and affective form. For instance, Harrow (2020), in his analysis of *Pumzi* (Kahiu, 2009) and *Felix in Exile* (Kentridge, 1994), situates environmental crisis within histories of extraction, governance, and inequality, rendering ecological harm as structurally produced rather than naturally occurring (Harrow, 2022; Iheka, 2021). Other studies demonstrate how cinematic temporality, spatial enclosure, and material aesthetics of hope make environmental governance perceptible in everyday life (Hamilton, 2017; Nyawalo, 2016; Shirinde, 2023), while documentary research reinforce this argument situating climate crisis within relations of power, community agency, and imperial extraction (Badru & Aziz, 2024; Okpadah, 2022; Simon, 2020). Despite extensive scholarship on Afrofuturism and African environmental cinema, little research examines how African eco-futurist films intervene

in climate governance, producing ecological counter-truths and challenging technocratic regimes of knowledge through cinematic form.

Framework: Biomorphy in Africfuturism Cinema

Biomorphy is an analytical concept within ecocinema for examining how climate cinema reconfigures ecological futures and challenges technocolonial regimes of environmental knowledge. According to Ivakhiv's (2013, pp. 87–92) process-relational ecology of cinema, biomorphy is understood not as an aesthetic tendency derived from organic form, but as one of the fundamental ways' cinema renders life as movement, affect, and relational becoming. Cinema animates the vitality of bodies, environments, and non-human forces, foregrounding ecological life as processual, interconnected, and resistant to static representation (Ivakhiv, 2013). Therefore, biomorphy operates as a conceptual lens for analysing how films make ecological relations perceptible and how cinematic form participates in shaping understanding of environmental life.

From a postcolonial standpoint, this framework foregrounds life as relational movement, countering representational regimes that reduce nature to data, resource, or risk. This insight is significant for climate cinema, where ecological knowledge is shaped by technocratic epistemologies emphasising abstraction, surveillance, and managerial control (De Meyer et al., 2021; Mai, 2024). Against such an approach, biomorphic cinema offers a different orientation by emphasising emergence, adaptation, and interdependence. Instead of presenting the environment as an object to be measured and managed, it renders ecological life as dynamic and relational, thereby resisting its reduction to quantifiable data or technological optimisation.

Moreover, situating biomorphy within Africfuturism clarifies its relevance for analysing ecological futures. According to Okorafor's (2020), Eseonu and Okoye's (2024), argues that African futures must be grounded in lived African histories, cosmologies, and material conditions rather than Western techno-utopian or apocalyptic projections. Within this context, Africfuturist imaginaries envision futures shaped not by technological mastery but from continuity, care, and relational survival. This orientation resonates with Eshun's (2003) understanding of African futurism as a temporal and epistemic disruption that unsettles linear narratives of progress and development. Through biomorphic movement and affect, Africfuturist cinema renders ecological time as uneven, embodied, and historically sedimented, making visible the persistence of colonial and extractive logics within contemporary environmental governance.

Additionally, the concept provides a framework for analysing ecological truth-making in cinematic form. For Ivakhiv, cinema does not simply represent ecological realities but participates in shaping how relations between life, environment, and power are perceived and felt. In this sense, ecological truth is not confined to scientific accuracy or data representation but emerges through affective engagement with ecological processes. In Africfuturist cinema, biomorphic imagery materialises ecological knowledge that remains inaccessible within institutional climate infrastructures. By animating relations between bodies, environments, and nonhumans, cinema allows environmental crisis to be encountered as lived, embodied, and relational rather than distant or abstract.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative single-case study, using *Pumzi* as the text for analysis. The film was selected through purposive sampling, a technique that prioritises conceptual relevance and analytical depth over representativeness (Patton, 2022; Suri, 2011). Instead of seeking to generalise across African cinema, this approach identifies *Pumzi* as an information-rich case through which questions of climate governance, ecological knowledge, and Africfuturism can be examined in detail. As Denzin et al. (2023) argue, single-case qualitative analysis allows sustained attention to symbolic density, spatial organisation, and affective meaning-making, which are central to cinematic engagements with environmental power.

The study analysis uses a deductive interpretive textual analysis of films. This analysis is guided by Ivakhiv's (2013) concept of biomorphy, which serves as the interpretive lens. The analysis applies biomorphy to interpret how cinematic form renders relations between human and nonhuman life. Our interpretation focuses on the films' key scenes, narrative structures, and formal elements, including mise-en-scène, spatial organisation, visual symbolism, and bodily movement. These elements are analysed to understand how ecological meanings and climate imaginaries are constructed through cinematic forms.

Applying the biomorphy framework to *Pumzi* enables an examination of how climate Africfuturist cinema configures ecological life, governance, and futurity through cinematic form. The film is approached as a biomorphic cinematic artefact in Ivakhiv's sense: a moving-image ecology that organises relations between bodies, environments, and institutions through rhythm, affect, and relational vitality. From this perspective, the film set against the post-water-war is not analysed as background world-building, but as an ecological condition that structures cinematic time, bodily movement, and the distribution of agency between human and non-human elements.

Therefore, the analysis examines how biomorphy operates across key narratives in the film, including post-war ecological environments, regimes of resource militarisation, the institutional authority of the MUSEUM, and the climactic act of planting the seed. These elements are treated as zones where ecological life is either constrained or allowed to emerge. By tracing how water, bodies, waste, and organic matter are visually and narratively organised, the study investigates how *Pumzi* distributes vitality and agency across ecological and institutional forms. This approach foregrounds the tension between technocratic governance, which seeks to stabilise and control life, and biomorphic processes that unfold through emergence, decay, and regeneration.

The framework is operationalised with particular attention to mise-en-scène, spatial enclosure, rhythmic pacing, bodily choreography, and the relationship between organic and technological elements. These cinematic techniques are examined to understand how ecological life is rendered perceptible and how environmental futures are imagined through embodied and relational forms rather than data-driven infrastructures. Through this approach, biomorphy becomes a critical analytical tool for interpreting how *Pumzi* articulates ecological futures and contests technocolonial regimes of climate governance, inviting the following questions: where is life, be it human and nonhuman, allowed to move, where is it contained, and how does cinema reimagine ecological futures through the animation of life itself?

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Pumzi (2009), directed by Wanuri Kahiu, is a Kenyan Africfuturist sci-fi film, set thirty-five years after the Water War, in a sealed technocratic settlement known as Maitu Community. Maitu is defined as "Mother Seed," derived from the Kikuyu terms, MAA (truth), and ITU (ours). From the outset, Maitu is framed in *Pumzi* as a system that claims ownership over life, knowledge, and environmental truth. What appears to promise origin and regeneration operates as a closed structure where survival is tightly regulated through water rationing, air filtration, and data surveillance. The film does not dramatise ecological collapse through spectacle or chaos; it presents scarcity as administratively settled. Within Maitu, ecological loss has already been decided as a settled condition, and what remains is its administration, where nature persists only as an archive governed by a faceless Council whose authority rests on the claim that the outside world is irreversibly dead, a declaration presented not as a hypothesis but as an unquestionable fact.

Here, environmental knowledge circulates through institutional channels that define what can be known, sensed, or believed about the world beyond the enclosure. It is here that the protagonist, Asha, a museum curator, discovers a soil sample that suggests life might still exist outside. When she reports her findings, the ruling Maitu Council, a faceless bureaucratic authority that functions as the antagonist, dismisses her discovery and suppresses her vision of renewal. Driven by conviction, Asha defies the Council's eco-authoritarian control and escapes into the Dormant Earth. Her journey shifts the film's focus from confinement to resistance. Carrying a seed with her, Asha nurtures it with her own bodily fluids, symbolising her fusion with the land. In this act, she embodies both vulnerability and resilience, presenting herself not as a passive subject of survival but as an agent of regeneration.

From an Africfuturist and postcolonial ecocinematic perspective, the film raises a central question that structures this analysis: how do climate futures come to be authorised as final, and who holds the power to declare ecological life finished? This question resonates with Foucault's conceptualisation of power and knowledge, alongside Whyte's (2018) epistemic injustice. The film exposes how technocratic institutions universalise their own partial knowledge while marginalising Indigenous and local ecological ways of knowing, a dynamic rooted in colonial histories of environmental governance. In essence, we read *Pumzi* as a critique of climate governance, focusing on two interrelated dynamics: the technocratic control of environmental information, through which ecological scarcity and bodily survival are regulated; and the production of environmental misinformation through institutional certainty rather than factual error, where alternative ecological truths are foreclosed rather than disproven. In tracing this movement from enclosure resistance, we argue that *Pumzi* positions Africfuturist cinema not as a supplement to climate discourse, but as a critical site where environmental futures are negotiated, resisted, and reimagined.

Technocratic Environmental Governance

This section examines how *Pumzi* stages climate governance as a regime of environmental management, where ecological truth is produced, stabilised, and enforced through technocratic systems. The film imagines a future in which what can be seen, sensed, and believed about the environment is tightly regulated, rendering ecological knowledge inseparable from

infrastructures of surveillance, data extraction, and bodily regulation. In doing so, the film frames the Maitu Community within a bureaucratic apparatus that governs life through the administration of environmental truth.

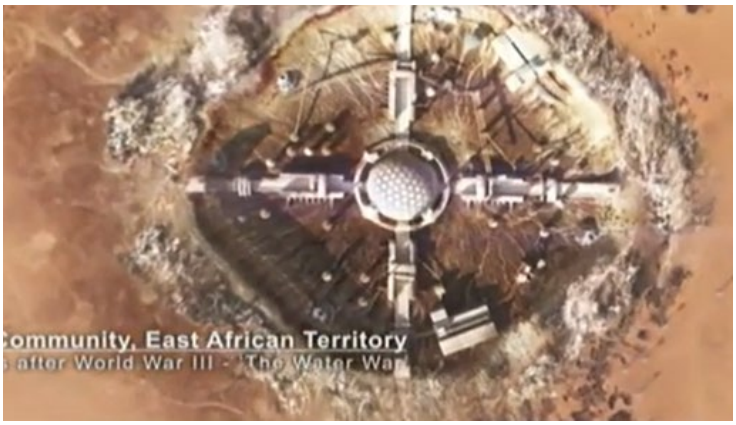

Figure 1: Maitu Community's underground metallic structure

The film opens with eco-governance logic through the introduction of the Maitu Community as a hybrid space. This community operates as a continuation of colonial epistemic hierarchies rather than a radical response to ecological collapse. In a low-angle shot, the metallic compound dominates the frame as shown in Figure 1, embedded in barren soil, and visually severed from any organic surroundings. The absence of vegetation and the overwhelming presence of engineered surfaces immediately situate the environment as something external to life, something to be managed rather than inhabited. As the camera moves inward with deliberate restraint, extreme close-ups isolate water dispensers, filtration devices, preserved skulls, and fossilised remains, while holographic screens overlay the space with streams of data. The mise-en-scène is defined by cold metallic tones, rigid geometry, and sealed interiors, producing an aesthetic of enclosure that visually encodes environmental containment.

Several studies, like Caspari (2023) and Podruczna (2025) have referred to this metallic community as a museum in a classical sense; here, we argue that it is an ecological data vault, where environmental life is not preserved for collective memory but secured, processed, and rationed through technocratic authority. This spatial organization performs a decisive epistemic transformation; the environment is transformed from a living relational system into layers of technological mediation. This logic is most explicitly visualised through the "Virtual Natural Museum" interface, where animated images of plants appear behind transparent screens, detached from soil, climate, and relational context. Cinematically, the interface does not invite contemplation but asserts control: ecological life is flattened into visual information, available only through institutional access.

As the camera pans the community in a medium shot, signalling a reconfiguration which reveals a central contradiction of eco-governance, where sustainability is achieved through abstraction rather than ecological repair. This climate reconfiguration is captured in a frame on the wall with an inscription, "100% self-power generation" and "0% pollution" functions less as an ecological reality than as a data assertion that legitimises enclosure. In this sense, *Pumzi* exposes how technocratic governance produces environmental truth not through engagement

with living systems, but through the authority of metrics. In this configuration, ecological collapse is managed not by restoring relational balance but by securing environmental information within infrastructures that decide what can be known, imagined, and governed.

However, Maitu Community space functions as a systematic negation of vitality. Ivakhiv biomorphy foregrounds life as relational, generative, and resistant, but this constrained space is systematically suppressed in favour of a technosphere that abstracts ecological processes into data objects. The environment is no longer a field of becoming but a closed system of inputs and outputs, monitored and optimised for survival. In this sense, Maitu operates as a surveillance assemblage of eco-governance, where vitality is rendered threatening precisely because it exceeds calculation and control. This regime of control is further reinforced through the film's depiction of climate communication as a discourse of scarcity. A panning shot across newspaper headlines, such as *"Whole Day Journey in Search of Water"* and *"The Greenhouse Effect: The Earth Is Changing Already,"* reveals how the environmental crisis is framed as both inevitable and administratively manageable. These headlines do not explain causality, responsibility, or historical processes; instead, they normalise deprivation as a condition of existence. Scarcity becomes an informational instrument that legitimises rationing, surveillance, and restriction, echoing real-world climate governance structures in which access to water and air is increasingly controlled under the rhetoric of sustainability. This portrayal resonates with documented cases across Africa, for example, Nestlé's extraction of groundwater in Nigeria and Veolia's monopolisation of municipal water in Johannesburg (Irene et al., 2025; Kaziboni, 2024) reproduce this logic, echoing the film's portrayal of water as a digitised commodity in the hands of bureaucratic elites.

Where the Maitu Community governs the environment through enclosure and informational authority, *Pumzi* extends this technocratic logic inwards, onto the human body as a corporeal calibration. This extension involves the systematic turning of human life to the requirements of infrastructural survival. The film's introduction of Asha signals a shift from her body rendered governable not through force, but through synchronisation, tuned to the rhythms of machines that regulate hydration, movement, and breath. This calibration is reflected in Asha's framing through symmetrical compositions and restrained medium close-ups that emphasise regularity, compliance, and repetition. In the water distribution scene, Asha stands in line beneath the geometric lattice of metallic architecture, her body suspended between other bodies and dispensing units that regulate access to hydration. The camera's steady and frontal orientation mirrors the bureaucratic logic of the space, while the desaturated metallic palette drains the act of drinking of any sensorial or affective richness. In a close-up of hands scanned, hydration is reduced to a moment of registration, through which water appears not as a flowing substance but as a quantified output, released only through authorised technological interfaces. The presence of uniformed enforcers, their bodies equally stylised and mechanised, reinforces the sense that governance operates less through violence than through choreography.

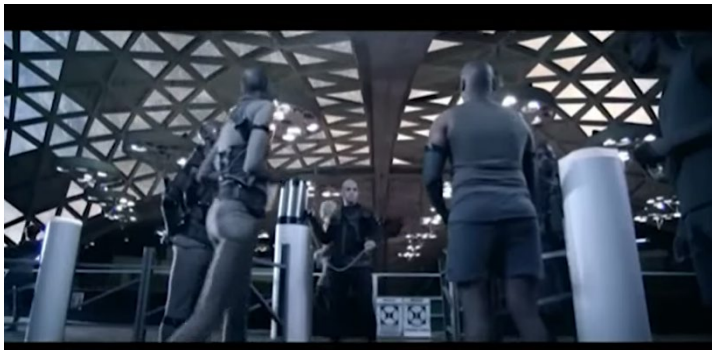

Figure 2: Hydration checks within the community

The function of this staging is to normalise environmental scarcity as an administrative condition. By embedding hydration within a ritual of inspection and compliance, the film reframes water from a shared ecological common into a managed resource distributed through bureaucratic authority. Through hydration checks, as shown in Figure 2, where regulated movement and calibrated breathing unfold in synchrony with the community's technological infrastructure, aligning human survival with systemic efficiency. What the film makes visible is not simply control, but its internalisation, where eco-governance becomes effective precisely because it is routinised. Eco-governance becomes effective precisely because it is habitual: control is internalised as procedure. Thus, survival is no longer negotiated between bodies, land, and water, but executed through compliance with technical protocols. Within a closed-loop system, Asha's body is positioned as an infrastructural node, circulating energy and resources without reciprocity or regeneration. Here, biomorphy becomes suspended, not eradicated; held in a state of managed minimalism. Yet *Pumzi* refuses to allow this calibration to appear seamless. In these moments of hesitation and visible thirsts, the limits of manageability itself, through Asha, a Black female body, becomes a site where eco-governance reveals its dependence on disciplining bodies historically rendered extractable, and in doing so, exposes its own fragility.

This tension carries a distinctly postcolonial resonance. Across African histories of colonial and capitalist extraction, women's bodies were systematically positioned as sites of labour, reproduction, and subordination, conscripted to economies that depleted both land and life (Iheka, 2021; Mbembe, 2006). *Pumzi* refracts this history into its speculative future, suggesting that ecological collapse does not dissolve extractive logics but intensifies them. Here, Asha's thirst functions as a living archive of dispossession, where the regulation of water mirrors an imperial bureaucracy of African ecologies. Water, the most elemental condition of survival, is rendered a rationed commodity, detached from communal obligation, and administered through bureaucratic authority. In this sense, *Pumzi* portrays a post-climate catastrophe where survival is conditional, granted through compliance with systems that privatise what was once held in common. The environment is not destroyed; it is reorganised around scarcity as a mode of rule.

Against this logic, Asha's decision to share her water ration with a cleaner interrupt the system at its most intimate scale. The gesture is visually modest and narratively understated, yet its significance lies precisely in its refusal of spectacle. By redistributing a rationed resource without authorisation, Asha momentarily reintroduces relationality into a system designed to be administratively sanctioned. This act recalls modes of ecological relation grounded in collective stewardship rather than enclosure. In postcolonial ecocinematic terms, this act exposes a

fundamental contradiction of technocracy, that while it can manage resources, a communal ethic of resource stewardship remains vulnerable to the smallest expressions of care that refuse enclosure.

Pumzi's exposure of the technocratic eco-governance through its regulation of space, bodies, and resources reveals that this system of control does not operate solely at the level of material management. The ecological governance in Maitu becomes inseparable from information governance. Despite the establishment of how survival is administered through infrastructural calibration and scarcity, Hence, the film extends its critique into the epistemic domain, revealing how environmental authority is sustained by restricting what can be known, imagined, or sensed about the world.

Environmental Epistemic Closure and Counter-Narrative

This section examines how *Pumzi* stages environmental misinformation not as an incidental failure of knowledge, but as a governing strategy of how ecological reality is delimited, managed, and selectively foreclosed. In the film, misinformation does not simply mean spreading false facts; instead, it's the technocratic authority that operates by establishing hierarchies of environmental truth, determining which forms of ecological knowledge are admissible and which are rendered unthinkable. Climate governance, in this sense, controls not only access to resources like water and air, but also access to meaning, like what can be known, imagined, or believed about the environment. Through Asha's encounters with soil, dreams, and embodied evidence of life, *Pumzi* constructs counter-narratives that contest this closure, foregrounding alternative modes of environmental knowledge grounded in embodiment, memory, and relational care.

The dream scenes mark the film's first decisive rupture from the technocratic epistemic authority. Set against the tightly controlled interior of the Maitu Community, the scene opens with Asha laying her head on the table, transcending into a dreamspace constituting an ancestral-present epistemic return. The mise-en-scène shifts dramatically from the metallic coldness and geometric symmetry of the underground facility, giving way to warm light, organic textures, and fluid camera movement. Instead of projecting a speculative future, the dream reactivates an ecological knowledge that already exists, with the image of a single tree standing in the desert, directly challenging Maitu's assertion of ecological finality. From a biomorphic perspective, the scene suggests persistence rather than extinction: life continues, not as data or evidence, but as dormant vitality. Importantly, the dream is not presented as a fantasy or an illusion; instead, it appears as suppressed ecological memory resurfacing through the body, positioning Asha as a bearer of knowledge that cannot be fully controlled by technocratic systems.

Moreover, the film stages misinformation not as ignorance but as bureaucratically enforced refusal. Upon Asha's return from the toilet to her seat, she discovers a soil sample on her table and reports the soil's vitality. The council dismissal, *"I didn't send anything. Report it to security and move on,"* marks the institutional boundary of what can count as ecological truth within Maitu. This exchange is mediated through holographic interfaces that convert knowledge into data, only to discard it when it exceeds authorised parameters. The interface does not evaluate Asha's claim; it neutralises it. In this moment, *Pumzi* exposes how technocratic climate governance suppresses ecological possibility by filtering knowledge through systems designed to

stabilise scarcity rather than interrogate it. This suppression echoes what Spivak (1988) identifies as epistemic violence: the historical invalidation of African ecological knowledge unless rendered legible through Western or colonial scientific rationalism. The soil, therefore, functions as more than material evidence; it becomes a decolonial artefact that disrupts the hierarchy of climate knowledge production. Its refusal to conform to the regime's narrative of ecological finality exposes misinformation as a structural practice, one that maintains control by foreclosing futures that cannot be managed, predicted, or enclosed.

Against this apparatus, Asha embodies a counter-epistemology grounded in relational ecological memory. Her insistence on the soil's vitality signals the soil as a biomorphic insurgent, which aligns with the eco-epistemologies that affirm the indigenous understandings of land agency rather than extractability. The tension between Asha and the Council crystallises two competing futures: one governed by eco-authoritarian management as Mbembe (2001) calls the "commandement", a mode of postcolonial governance that enforces control through surveillance, restriction of mobility, and the policing of ecological access, and the other imagined through Africfuturist resistance. By positioning a Black African woman as the bearer of ecological truth rather than its administrator, the film reclaims Black female agency from its colonial conscription into technocratic governance.

Figure 3: Asha in dreamspace

This counter-communicative logic deepens in another Asha's dream scene, triggered after sniffing the soil. Within this dreamspace, as shown in Figure 3, water, systematically erased from Maitu's environment, returns as a sensorial presence. As Asha struggles within it, her body transforms into an archive of ecological memory, suggesting that environmental knowledge persists at the level of embodiment even when erased from official discourse. The transition from waking surveillance to dreamspace marks a shift from institutional climate knowledge to embodied ecological knowing. Hence, dream in Africfuturism is anchored in the lived present and the remembered past instead of an abstract futurity, as Mbiti argues on African temporality.

In the context of climate communication, the dream functions as a counter-space to environmental information. While Maitu relies on screens, archives, and administrative language to define ecological truth, the dream introduces another way of knowing, one based on sensation, emotion, and bodily memory. These dreams, often framed as private escape or personal fantasy, do not imagine a distant future but enact what Mbiti describes as a potential future rooted in the ancestral present. The tree appears as a return of life already known but officially denied, while the water re-emerges as a remembered ecological relation rather than a

resource to be recovered. By encountering water, soil, and trees within her subconscious, Asha engages in a process of remembering that challenges the epistemic violence of technocratic climate governance (any textual evidence?). African subjectivity is not shown as passive or dependent on institutional knowledge, but as an active source of ecological understanding.

Through an ancestral-present epistemic turn, these dreams function as counter-truths to technocratic climate information, showing that ecological knowledge in the film does not move forward through prediction, but resurfaces through memory, embodiment, and continuity. This epistemic turn becomes challenged with immediate policing signalled by automated command, *"Dream detected. Take your medication,"* which makes clear how far governance extends: it reaches into perception, thought, and feeling. The system converts this eco-imagination into a biomedical fault, described by Rose (2001) as a neurochemical governance and Fricker's (2017) epistemic injustice, where misinformation operates through the regulation of consciousness itself. This moment situates the film's critique of climate eco-authoritarianism, where sustainability rhetoric within Maitu functions not to preserve life but to discipline it.

The logic of epistemic closure reaches its most explicit mediation in the confrontation between Asha and the Council for an exit visa. As she pleads to the council, *"I would like to apply for an exit visa; this could mean there is life on the outside,"* introducing an uncertainty as a possibility, while the council responds, *"That's impossible; the outside is dead,"* it functions as an authoritative foreclosure. This moment stages climate misinformation not as error, but as institutional certainty imposed through bureaucratic speech. The declaration does not emerge from evidence; it performs governance by transforming uncertainty into administrative fact. In doing so, the regime suppresses ecological possibility by monopolising what counts as legitimate climate knowledge.

The encounter is structured through a holographic interface that further materialises this hierarchy, framed in a reverse-shot composition visually diminishing Asha, confining her to the edge of the frame, while the Council appears elevated, faceless, and disembodied. Here, authority is abstracted, anonymised, and detached from the ecological life it governs, as power speaks without presence, and truth is produced at a technological distance, abstracted from land and bodies, reinforcing what Dahiya (2023) identifies as the mediation of scientific authority through infrastructural power rather than deliberation. The Council's claim *"the outside is dead,"* signalling eco-finality, exemplifies how environmental misinformation often works through denial of crisis, but through stabilisation of partial knowledge as total truth. By presenting institutional data as exhaustive, the regime forecloses alternative interpretations and renders counter-evidence inadmissible. This scene resonates with Whyte's (2017) account of epistemic injustice in climate governance, where dominant institutions universalise their knowledge while dismissing Indigenous and local ecological observations as unscientific or unreliable.

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Figure 4: Asha walking along the Dormant Earth

Furthermore, the counterevidence to eco-finality culminates in the film's climax through Asha's decolonial ecological return, as her escape reasserts life persistence beyond technocratic control. Her refusal to *"move on,"* which projects into the new-future, is countered by retrieving a suppressed present, where meaning emerges from continuity instead of linear futurity. Asha escapes into the Dormant Earth, often called barren, framed in a wide shot, dwarfing her figure against the desert, replacing the controlled interiors of Maitu with blinding light and spatial openness. As she traverses along the deserted landscape, a close-up on a rusted warning sign, *"Caution: Nuclear Radioactive River,"* as shown in Figure 4, signals an authoritative speech act declaring the landscape dead, dangerous, and uninhabitable, foreclosing alternative readings of the environment before any encounter can occur.

In climate terms, this is not neutral risk communication but a hierarchical production of environmental truth, where technocratic authority defines what counts as knowledge and who is permitted to interpret ecological conditions (Ceyhan & Saribas, 2022; Oreskes & Conway, 2010). Crucially, this sign presents toxicity as permanent and absolute, mirroring how misinformation often functions through epistemic closure rather than outright falsehood. By declaring *"radioactive,"* the regime converts the landscape into a zone beyond contestation, producing what Nixon (2011) describes as slow violence rendered administratively invisible yet symbolically final. Within technocolonial climate governance, such markers operate as tools of epistemic control: they discipline movement, suppress local ecological knowledge, and transform speculative possibility into illegibility (Liboiron, 2021). Yet Asha's corporeal calibration traversal across this terrain resists the narrative of ecological death imposed by the regime, a performative fiction of governance, revealing how substituting bureaucratic inscription for lived ecological encounter. Her persistence echoes African eco-resistance movements, from the Green Belt Movement to Niger Delta women's protests, where land reclamation and ecological care function as political resistance (Maathai, 2003; Turner & Brownhill, 2004).

However, the film reaches its climactic resolution with Asha's encounter with the tree, reconfiguring the desert into a site of ecological possibility, directly countering the regime's "the outside is dead." Initially framed in a long medium-shot, the tree appears distant and precarious, barely legible against the expanse of sand, signalling how ecological life has been rendered improbable under technocratic narratives of finality. As Asha approaches, the camera shifts to a low-angle gaze that elevates the tree into a figure of hope, positioning it not as a relic of the past but as a promise of the future, contradicting the technocratic monopoly over climate truth. In the subsequent medium shot, Asha kneels beside the tree, bringing out the fragile sapling hidden under her cloth, her hands tenderly burying its root into the sand while she pours her limited

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water ration onto the soil. This gesture transforms ecological knowledge from abstract information into embodied verification, functioning as a counter-narrative to institutionalised misinformation that relies on data control, enclosure, and denial.

Asha's act mediates a relational ethic in which ecological life is sustained through care and reciprocity rather than accumulation, and what scholars like Corner et al. (2012) described as experiential truth-making, where knowledge is produced through situated practice rather than expert authority alone. The act of watering rejects extractivist logic and information hierarchy simultaneously: water is neither hoarded nor instrumentalised as data but mobilised as proof of life. Hence, *Pumzi* reframes regeneration as a communicative act, where sustainability emerges not from technocratic verification but from care-based engagement that exposes the fragility of eco-authoritarian claims to epistemic dominance, similar to Wahl's (2016) assertion on regenerative culture.

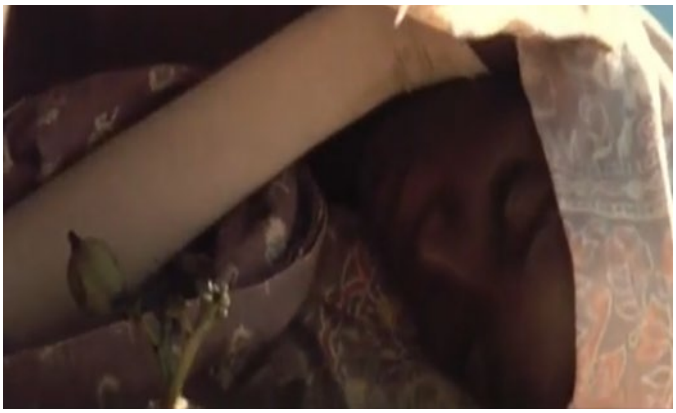

Figure 5: Asha protecting the plant with her body

From a biomorphic stance, this image of care retains agency as human and nonhuman vitality is entangled with regeneration. In essence, the soil responds to water; the plant responds to touch; Asha's body becomes inseparable from the landscape it sustains. In climatic terms, this moment functions as a material counter-narrative to technocratic climate knowledge that locates ecological survival in data, infrastructure, and external intervention. The film does not dispute climate collapse but produces ecological truth through embodied action, allowing regeneration to emerge as something enacted, not declared. The medium shot of her kneeling, followed by her collapse beside the plant positions her as both sustenance and sacrifice, as shown in Figure 5, signals a conduit through which ecological renewal becomes possible. This refusal of heroic endurance disrupts techno-futurist imaginaries that equate survival with control, instead grounding African ecological futures in ancestral-present continuity, sacrifice, and mutual dependence. Thus, *Pumzi* ends with a lone sprout that becomes more than a symbol; it operates as a speculative archive of ecological truth, asserting that African landscapes are not inert victims of catastrophe but living agents capable of renewal beyond technocolonial regimes of climate governance.

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CONCLUSION

So far, our study has argued that Africfuturist cinema, through *Pumzi,* engages the climate crisis by interrogating the epistemic conditions under which climate futures are governed, authorised, and foreclosed. Instead of treating Africa as a peripheral site of global climate impact, the film reveals how environmental reality itself is structured through technocolonial regimes of knowledge that shape what can be sensed, trusted, and acted upon. In this sense, *Pumzi* reframes climate truth as neither locally bounded nor universally neutral, but as something produced through global infrastructures of data, surveillance, and administrative certainty that circulate unevenly while disproportionately disciplining African bodies and landscapes. Thus, climate governance appears less as a technical response to ecological collapse than as a political ordering of life, perception, and possibility.

In our analysis, two interlocking findings are revealed. First, *Pumzi* renders climate governance as a technocratic regime that manages ecological breakdown by abstracting life into metrics, rationing systems, and bodily calibration, rather than repairing damaged relations between land, water, and community. Through the Maitu Community, sustainability is revealed as an administrative achievement sustained by enclosure and epistemic authority, reproducing colonial hierarchies under the language of efficiency and survival. Second, the film reframes environmental misinformation as epistemic closure, not factual error, in which uncertainty is converted into bureaucratic fact, and ecological futures are declared finished before they are encountered. Against this closure, Pumzi mobilises dreams, soil, and care as counter-epistemologies, grounding ecological knowledge in ancestral-present continuity and embodied experience, and not predictive data. These moments do not romanticise indigeneity; they expose how technocratic certainty depends on suppressing forms of knowing that cannot be stabilised, measured, or enclosed.

What this analysis ultimately challenges is the prevailing assumption that climate governance fails primarily because of insufficient data, coordination, or technological reach. *Pumzi* suggests a more unsettling possibility: that climate governance succeeds because it narrows the field of what counts as ecological truth. By reclaiming environmental knowledge through cinematic form, Africfuturist cinema emerges here as a site of epistemic resistance, where potential futures are reopened not through innovation or optimisation, but through care, memory, and relational persistence.

Therefore, this study insists that an engagement with climate governance requires moving beyond policy and infrastructure to confront the epistemic violence embedded in how environmental futures are declared, secured, and governed. In centring Africfuturist cinema, it argues that African cultural production is not supplementary to climate debate but constitutive of how climate futures can still be imagined otherwise. Despite the systematic analysis of the film *Pumzi,* some limitations are identified. The need for an extensive climate governance analysis of Afrifuturist film and a comparative analysis of their dramatization is necessary, as it nonetheless challenges prevailing assumptions about where climate knowledge is produced.

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