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Ecocritical Sensibility and Verbal Art Expressions in Niyi Osundare's *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*

David Ifeanyichukwu NWAKANMA
Department of English and Literary Studies,
Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike.
Email: davidnwakanma54@gmail.com

Abstract
This paper explores Niyi Osundare's *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* through an ecocritical perspective, examining how his poetic expressions serve as both artistic reflections and urgent environmental advocacy. Osundare, a poet deeply attuned to ecological and socio-political realities, crafts a compelling dialogue on environmental degradation, climate crises, and humanity's fractured relationship with nature. Grounded in Ecocriticism, with particular emphasis on Postcolonial Ecocriticism, this study interrogates the intersections of ecological injustice, colonial exploitation, and indigenous environmental ethics. Through striking imagery, metaphor, and verbal artistry, Osundare's poetry exposes the scars of deforestation, pollution, and unsustainable practices, urging a radical rethinking of human-nature interactions. His work not only critiques the anthropocentric exploitation of the planet but also offers a vision of ecological harmony rooted in African cultural traditions. By situating the selected poems in the collection within the broader discourse of African environmental literature, this paper highlights Osundare's role in shaping eco-conscious narratives. More than just poetic lamentation, the poems are urgent call to action – one that fuses aesthetics with activism, challenging readers to reconsider their environmental footprint. This paper contributes to the expanding field of ecocritical studies in African literature, underscoring the power of verbal art as a tool for ecological resistance and sustainability advocacy. In an era of mounting environmental crises, Osundare's selected poems in *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* emerge as a resonant, necessary voice, reminding us that the fate of the planet is inseparable from the words we use to describe it.
Keywords: Niyi Osundare, Ecocriticism, African Literature, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Oral Poetics, Verbal Art.

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Introduction

Niyi Osundare's *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* (2022) epitomises a rare poetic intervention in contemporary African literature, wherein ecological consciousness and verbal artistry coalesce to form a sustained meditation on natural environment. His poetry moves beyond the conventional portrayal of environment as a passive backdrop, instead presenting it as an active site of meaning and agency. Osundare's ecological vision resonates with the principles of ecocriticism, which, as Cheryll Glotfelty argues, is premised on the idea that "all literature is shaped by environment and, in turn, shapes our conception of it" (p. xviii). By foregrounding the intricate and interdependent relationship between humanity and nature, he situates the environment not as mere scenery but as a vital participant in human history and social reality. This ecological consciousness is amplified through his use of verbal art and oral tradition – praise songs, proverbs, chants, and call-and-response rhythms – drawn from indigenous African aesthetics to render environmental discourse both accessible and culturally resonant. Thus, Osundare embodies what Greg Garrard calls the "mutual constitution of nature and culture" (p.10), producing a distinct African ecopoetics that refuses to aestheticise nature while affirming its centrality to survival, justice, and community memory. His poetic sensibility, deeply rooted in indigenous African epistemologies, demonstrates a critical departure from the Eurocentric tradition that frequently privileges anthropocentric perspectives. Instead, *Green*: *Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* aligns with the emergent field of ecocriticism, articulating an urgent environmental consciousness that resonates with global ecological discourse.

This paper does not seek to merely delineate Osundare's thematic preoccupations in *Green*: *Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* but rather interrogate his verbal art, specifically the linguistic and stylistic mechanisms through which his ecological vision is actualised. While his preface to the collection provides a lucid articulation of his poetic objectives, a more critical examination reveals the complex interplay between African oral traditions and modern literary sensibilities. His poetry oscillates between an African voice – rooted in indigenous oral poetics – and a contemporary consciousness shaped by formal English literary training. By synthesising these dual registers, Osundare crafts a unique ecological poetics that not only asserts African traditions in global environmental discourse but also enunciates an urgent plea for ecological preservation through the cadence of poetic expression. In doing so, it underscores the ways in which his poetic diction, imagery, and rhetorical strategies function as both aesthetic and ideological instruments in articulating the precarious state of our planet's ecology. Through this engagement, the paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on African environmental literature, asserting Osundare's poetry as a crucial nexus between traditional African ecological wisdom and contemporary environmental anxieties. This approach also draws on the resources of African verbal art, where, as Ruth Finnegan observes, oral tradition such as proverbs and praise-poetry serve as vital repositories of ecological consciousness and communal values (p. 37).

Theoretical Framework

The theory that guides this research is the Postcolonial Ecocriticism. As a theoretical approach, Postcolonial Ecocriticism emerged in the early 21st century; it examines the intersection of colonial histories, environmental degradation, and literary representations of nature. Unlike traditional Western ecocriticism, which often romanticises nature as an aesthetic or pristine

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wilderness, postcolonial ecocriticism interrogates the historical and socio-political dimensions of environmental degradation, particularly as they relate to colonial exploitation and neo-capitalism (Cilano & De Loughrey, n.d.73). Initially developed by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), the theory also critiques the Eurocentric bias of mainstream environmentalism and foregrounds the ecological challenges faced by formerly colonised regions. It therefore interrogates the ways in which colonial exploitation, extra-activism, and global capitalism have contributed to environmental crises in the Global South (Huggan & Tiffin, p. 2).

This framework is crucial in analysing Osundare's *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*, as his poetry encapsulates the ecological consciousness of postcolonial Africa while critiquing the environmental destruction engendered by colonialism and its lingering capitalist legacies. Osundare's work challenges the consequences of deforestation, climate change, and resource depletion, all of which have roots in Africa's colonial past. By applying postcolonial ecocriticism, the paper explores how his poetry fuses traditional African ecological wisdom with contemporary environmental activism, positioning nature not only as a subject of lyrical beauty but also as a site of resistance against environmental imperialism.

Other notable scholars in Postcolonial Ecocriticism include Rob Nixon, Elizabeth De Loughrey, and Pablo Mukherjee. Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), expands on the theory by introducing the concept of "slow violence" – the gradual, often unseen environmental destruction that disproportionately affects marginalised postcolonial communities (p.4). De Loughrey and Handley, in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011), examine how postcolonial literature represents ecological crises, emphasising the cultural significance of indigenous environmental knowledge (De Loughrey& Handley p.5). Mukherjee, in *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (2010), critiques how postcolonial writers depict ecological degradation within the framework of global capitalism (p. 9).

Postcolonial Ecocriticism encourages readers to re-evaluate dominant environmental narratives and recognise how colonial histories continue to shape contemporary ecological challenges. By engaging with Osundare's work through this theoretical framework, the paper not only highlights African poetic responses to ecological crises but also promotes a more inclusive, historically informed approach to environmental studies. Through this framework, Osundare's poetry is repositioned as both a literary and activist intervention, compelling readers to acknowledge the urgency of ecological preservation while resisting the enduring structures of environmental imperialism.

Verbal Art and the Fusion of Oral and Written Traditions

Osundare's poetry exemplifies a sophisticated fusion of indigenous African oral traditions and modern literary expressions, reinforcing his commitment to both artistic innovation and cultural preservation. His linguistic and stylistic choices reflect the cadence of traditional African poetry, incorporating proverbs, call-and-response patterns, and incantatory rhythms while engaging with contemporary socio-political and ecological concerns. By fusing oral performance traditions with written technique, Osundare forges a hybrid poetic voice that is at once accessible to a wide

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readership and intellectually profound. This interweaving not only foregrounds his rootedness in indigenous African aesthetics but also situates his work within the broader continuum of African literary modernity, where the oral and the written are no longer seen as dichotomous but as mutually enriching modes of expression.

One of the most striking features of Osundare's verbal art is his use of proverbial wisdom, medley of voices, and oral cadence, particularly in *Waiting Laughters* (1990). In this collection, his poetry adopts the interactive nature of indigenous African performance, where meaning is co-created between the poet and the audience. For example, the poet intones:

> Tonalities. Redolent tonalities
> I pluck these words
> From the lips of running winds
> When earth, yolk-yellow, clamours
> For warrant of wings
> Tiptoe on the prudence of an anthill,
> My covenant is clay,
> Wisdom is my silent wheel
> Tonalities. Redolent tonalities. (p. 5)

In this excerpt, Osundare demonstrates the interactive nature of African indigenous performance by embedding call-and-response structures and proverbial wisdom within its poetic framework. The recurrence of "Tonalities," "Redolent tonalities," at both the commencement and conclusion of the verse reflects the sardonic cadence of oral poetry, whereby refrains promote listener engagement. This technique creates an echoing effect, drawing listeners into the poetic experience and reinforcing the thematic resonance of sound and meaning. The poet employs imagery rooted in African proverbs and oral tradition to communicate wisdom. The line "I pluck these words/ From the lips of running winds" suggests an organic, almost mystical process of poetic creation, reminiscent of Yoruba griots who draw inspiration from nature. The metaphors "My covenant is clay" aligns with African philosophical perspectives that regard the earth as a sacred entity, binding humanity to nature through ancestral wisdom. The phrase "Wisdom is my silent wheel" evokes the Yoruba belief that true knowledge is often unspoken but deeply understood, much like proverbial expressions that rely on inference rather than direct exposition.

In *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* (2022), Osundare's eco-poetics draw from indigenous African cosmologies that revere nature. The poem "Embers" invokes indigenous African cosmology to explore resilience and renewal within nature's cycles.

> Beneath these ashes
> A choir of sighing embers
> Hope
> thin-bodied
> Is bent
> not broken. (*p.*112)

The metaphor of "sighing embers" beneath ashes signifies the African belief in the regenerative power of nature, where fire – often seen as both destructive and purifying – precedes renewal. This aligns with Yoruba cosmology, where elements of nature hold spiritual significance, embodying continuity rather than finality (Ogunyemin.d p.78). The image of hope as "thin-

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bodied" and "not broken" reflects the African oral tradition's didactic nature, emphasising perseverance amid adversity. The brevity of the poem mirrors the conciseness of proverbs, a key stylistic element of indigenous oral traditions. Osundare's ecological vision, like Mazisi Kunene's reverence for land and ancestry, affirms that nature, though fragile, is enduring (Kunene n.d p.45). Osundare's fusion of oral tradition and written form revitalises African poetry by embedding indigenous modes of knowledge within modern literary expression. The synthesis affirms continuity of African intellectual traditions while resisting the erasures of colonial literary paradigms. His stylistic ingenuity also ensures that his poetry retains political urgency, particularly in its critique of social injustice and ecological degradation, while remaining aesthetically compelling.

Nature as Site of Resistance: Colonial Legacies and Ecological Degradation

In *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*, Osundare personifies the Earth, allowing it to voice its suffering due to human actions, particularly those stemming from exploitative practices. This personification serves as a powerful literary device, compelling readers to confront the environmental degradation resulting from colonial legacies. The collection reflects a deep concern for commodification of nature, a process initiated during colonial times and perpetuated in the neo-colonial era. He critiques the relentless extraction of resources, which has led to significant ecological degradation.

Osundare's *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* engages with themes of environmental degradation and the potential of green energy to mitigate ecological crises, as explored in Courtois's analysis of plant subjectivities and life-worlds in contemporary literature (Courtois, 2024). His poetry serves as a call to action, urging a reevaluation of humanity's relationship with environment and advocating for sustainable practices that honour earth's intrinsic value. Osundare's poetry addresses the neo-colonial dynamics of resource extraction. It vividly portrays the Niger-Delta's landscapes – once teeming with biodiversity – as scarred terrains of oil spills, gas flares, and deforestation, transforming nature from a communal patrimony into a commodified asset for global capital. This depiction not only unmasks the resource-rich regions to poverty and ecological ruin but also underscores the enduring colonial legacies of unequal exchange, wherein peripheral economies like Nigeria's are systematically plundered to fuel metropolitan consumption. As Agofure (2016) elucidates, contemporary Nigerian poets, including Osundare, meticulously examine how such exploitation of natural resources engenders profound environmental, from soil infertility to atmospheric poisoning, thereby alienating indigenous communities from their ancestral life-worlds (p.135).

Osundare's resistance manifests through an ecopoetic strategy that anthropomorhises the natural element, enduring rivers, forests, and winds voices of protest against anthropocentric hubris. For instance, in *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*, elemental figures such as the beleaguered 'River' and the vengeful 'Wind' (p.17) embody a Yoruba-inflected cosmology, where nature is not inert matter but a sentient kin network, capable of retribution against its despoilers. This ideological framing, rooted in indigenous epistemologies, challenges the Cartesian dualism inherited from colonial modernity and advocates for a relational ontology that prioritises ecological harmony over profit-driven degradation. Such portrayals align with broader postcolonial ecocritical discourses, which view environmental injustice as an extension of imperial violence, wherein

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subjugation of land parallels the historical enslavement of peoples (Nwagbara, 2013). Through oral traditions like Yoruba *oriki* (praise poetry), chants, and proverbs, Osundare democratises resistance, urging a collective awakening to reclaim nature as a site of decolonial praxis rather than passive victimhood.

Thus, Osundare's oeuvre transcends lamentation to forge aesthetics of insurgency, where poetry becomes a tool for environmental activism, echoing the calls of earlier eco-conscious Nigerian writers while amplifying the urgency of contemporary climate imperatives. As Aboh (2024) observes in his analysis of indigenous eco-consciousness, Osundare's reverence for the earth as humanity's 'greatest gift' in collections like *The Eye of the Earth* and *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* foster a decolonial environmentalism that integrates African ontologies with global sustainability agendas, offering pathways to heal the wounds of colonial extraction and neo-liberal excesses. In this vein, Osundare diagnoses the maladies of ecological imperialism but also prescribes poetry as antidote, cultivating a vision of resistance where nature's sighs evolve into roars of renewal.

Anthropocentrism vs. Ecocentricism in Osundare's Poetic Vision

Anthropocentrism, derived from the Greek words *anthropos* (human) and *kentron* (centre), is a philosophical perspective that positions human beings at the centre of existence, often to the exclusion or marginalisation of other entities. This worldview assumes that humans are the most significant species and that non-human nature exists primarily for human use and benefit. The concept is deeply embedded in Western thought, shaping ethical, environmental, and literary discourses. Anthropocentricism in literature is often reinforced through the dominant paradigms of humanism and rationalism, which prioritise human reason as the defining attribute of existence. According to Cary Wolfe, "humanism must always set itself against the animal in order to define itself as human" (p.1). This binary opposition between human and non-human constructs an ethical hierarchy that legitimises exploitation. Literature, as a cultural artifact, reflects and perpetuates this worldview by privileging human narratives over ecological and non-human concerns.

Environmental literary scholars such as Lawrence Buell argue that traditional literary forms, especially the realist novel, tend to "efface the non-human world" (p.7). This effacement is evident in canonical works where landscapes, animals, and ecosystems are subordinated to human conflicts and aspirations. Even when nature is depicted as powerful, it is often anthropomorphised or imbued with human-like qualities, reinforcing an implicit human dominance. The interplay between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism in African poetry reflects a broader philosophical and cultural discourse on the relationship between humans and nature. In the poetry of Osundare, a leading African eco-poet, this tension is particularly evident. His poetry challenges the anthropocentric worldview that privileges human concerns over ecological well-being, advocating instead for an ecocentric perspective that recognises the intrinsic value and agency of the natural world. His poetic vision aligns with African oral traditions that view nature as an active participant in human existence than as a passive resource. In much of African poetry, particularly in the works of earlier poets influenced by nationalists and modernist concerns, nature often serve as a metaphor for human struggles. This is evident in the poetry of Wole Soyinka, where landscapes and natural elements frequently symbolise political resistance

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and cultural identity (Ojaide 2014 p.14). Such representations, while acknowledging nature, do not necessarily accord it intrinsic value; rather, they subordinate it to human narratives.

Osundare, however, moves beyond this anthropocentric tendency. His poetry does not merely use nature as a symbolic backdrop for human affairs but instead foregrounds ecological concerns, urging a rethinking of the human-nature relationship. His poetic sensibility embodies an ecocentric philosophy that challenges exploitative attitudes towards the environment. In *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*, Osundare exemplifies this ecological consciousness. In poems such as "Still We Sing," the poet embodies a strong ecological consciousness, primarily aligning with an ecocentric worldview. The poem celebrates nature's vitality and resilience while subtly critiquing human actions that have led to environmental degradation. Through vivid imagery and evocative diction, Osundare presents vision of harmony between humanity and the natural world, echoing deep ecological principles.

Still we sing
of life beyond the geography of pain
far from the quaky temper of violated mountains
Still we sing
of rivers proud of their water
of forests which adore their trees
Still we sing
of the melody of the light which embraces the dawn
the breeze which pulls the beard of ageing palms
Still we sing
of the rain which provokes the seeds
the conspiratorial canopy of laughing leaves
Still we sing
of the invincibility of the human spirit
the laughter which survives the storm
Still we sing
of a Planet sane and sound
of all things green – and beautiful. (*p.*114)

Ecocentricism, as articulated by scholars like Arne Naess, advocates for the intrinsic value of all life forms beyond human interests (Naess, n.d., p. 68). Osundare's poem reflects this philosophy by giving agency to natural elements. The lines "rivers proud of their water/forests which adore their trees" personify nature, portraying it as possessing self-awareness and dignity. This literary strategy resists anthropocentric tendencies that often render nature passive. Additionally, the poem celebrates the regenerative power of ecological processes: "the rain which provokes the seeds/the conspiratorial canopy of laughing leaves." Here, Osundare foregrounds nature's self-sustaining mechanisms, underscoring an ecocentric belief in the interconnectedness of ecosystems. Such imagery aligns with the environmental ethics of Buell, who argues that literature should represent nature as an active presence rather than a mere backdrop to human affairs (Buell, p. 8). While the poem predominantly reflects ecocentric thought, there are traces of anthropocentrism. The phrase "the invincibility of the human spirit/the laughter which survives the storm" suggests human resilience amid ecological challenges. However, this does

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not overshadow the poem's overall environmental ethos. Instead it highlights a vision where human endurance coexists with nature's vitality, rather than dominating it.
Also, in the poem "Yellow Yawn," Osundare demonstrates his ecocentrist philosophy thus:

Autumn yellowed dawn's river
with the philosophy
of a nervous yawn
Rainbowed a colourless noon
with a polyphony of
songs and sundry musings
The evening snored
into night in
the hammock of my dream
Sleep came down
in isolated syllables
on the lips of trembling pillows
Breaking waters
push a poem in the mater
nity of laboring rocks. (p.78)

The poem presents a deeply reflective meditation on nature's cycles and their intricate relationship with human perception. The poem's vivid imagery captures the transitional phases of the day – dawn, noon, evening, and night – infused with organic metaphors that suggest a symbiotic interplay between human consciousness and the natural world.

In the poem, nature is not merely a passive background of human experience but an active force with agency. The phrase "Autumn yellowed dawn's river/with the philosophy/of a nervous yawn" suggests that nature possesses its own rhythm and wisdom, reinforcing the idea that it operates independently of human intervention. The poem's closing lines "Breaking waters/push a poem in the mater/nity of laboring rocks" invoke an image of natural creation, likening the earth's geological processes to childbirth. This reinforces an ecocentric philosophy that sees nature as dynamic and generative, mirroring human existence rather than being subordinate to it.
Despite its ecocentric focus, "Yellow Yawn" contains traces of anthropocentricism, particularly in its reliance on human emotions to frame natural phenomena. The metaphor of the "hammock of my dream" and "trembling pillows" introduces a subjective, human-centred perspective, suggesting that nature's movements are intimately tied to human perception. While this does not undermine the poem's ecological message, it reveals Osundare's tendency to merge human and environmental consciousness rather than entirely displacing human centrality. The poem embodies an ecocentric worldview that affirms nature's agency while subtly incorporating human perception.

Ecocritical Sensibility and Verbal Art Expressions in *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*

Osundare's "Hole in the Sky" embodies these concerns through what he called "Choreo-poem," which he suggests that it be accompanied with musical instruments according to the mood and meaning of each section.

'Tell my story,
Said the Earth to me

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'Oh, tell my story the way it is.
Don't sugarcoat its rust
Don't varnish its rust
Don't cover its scars with pretty words
Tell my pain the way it is
The way it is
The way the way the way it is
Tell my pain, the way it is'
….
The day the river caught fire
And the lake burnt like Devil's oil
The mountain coughed like a broken giant
The sky's eyes were red with grief…
Factories whose lethal spills
provoked the plague
Lay fortressed behind the hills
Ayekooto sighted their owners
On their way to the city bank (*p.*110)

From the standpoint of Osundare's ecocritical sensibility, the Earth's personified plea "Tell my story/ Said the Earth to me/ 'Oh, tell my story the way it is" suggests nature is no longer an inert backdrop to human activity but an active entity with a voice. The repetition of "the way it is" reinforces a demand for unembellished truth, resisting the sanitisation of environmental destruction by corporate and governmental interests. This aligns with Nixon's concept of "slow violence," where environmental degradation is often obscured and its impact on marginalised communities downplayed (Nixon, p.6).

Osundare intensifies his critique through dystopian imagery: "The day the river caught fire/And the lake burnt like Devil's oil." These lines evoke both real and symbolic ecological catastrophes, reminiscent of oil spills in the Niger Delta, where corporate exploitation has rendered water bodies toxic (Watt, n.d.,p.21). The phrase "Devil's oil" further implicates multinational oil corporations whose activities devastate ecosystems while enriching themselves.
Osundare's poetic style draws heavily from African oral traditions, which amplify his ecocritical message. The refrain, "Koko gbakokodi/Koko didikokodi" resembles the call-and-response technique found in Yoruba oral poetry. This rhythmical, almost incantatory refrain engages audiences beyond mere reading, reinforcing the urgency of the poem's ecological plea. Additionally, the reference to *Ayekootu* (a parrot symbolising truth in Yoruba mythology) further connects the poem to indigenous epistemologies that emphasise harmony with nature. By fusing verbal art with ecological consciousness, and through his evocative imagery, oral poetics, and socio-political critique, Osundare exposes the intersection between environmental destruction and neocolonial capitalism. His work not only documents ecological crises but also serves as a call to resistance, ensuring that nature's voice is heard.

In "Tree Talk" Osundare exemplifies an ecocritical sensibility, employing personification to foreground the plight of the natural world and critique anthropocentric dominion. This shows an emergent ecocritical consciousness in African poetic expression.

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Iroko greets the Oak
Obeche salutes Elm
The Mahogany hails the Maple
Araba trades tall tales with the Red Wood

Green salutations, anxious whispers
"Why are so-called humans
So cruel with their axe",
Olive
Asks the Cedar.
"Human", did you say?"
Retorts the Barrigona
Can't you see what they do
To their fellow humans?" (p.25)

The poem stages a botanical dialogue across continents, personifying trees to foreground environmental degradation wrought by anthropogenic activities. Through Osundare's signature eco-poetic vision, the poem combines lyrical aesthetics with ethical urgency that critiques anthropocentricism and advocates for planetary solidarity.

The opening lines – "Iroko greets the Oak/ Obeche salutes the Elm" – establish an ecological communion between African and Western tree species. This globalised arboreal congress is Osundare's poetic strategy for invoking what Buell (2005) describes as "planetary environmental imagination," which bridges local ecosystem and global crises. These trees, animated with speech and gesture, engage in "green salutations" and "anxious whispers," suggesting a deep ecological empathy. The central query, "Why are so-called humans/ So cruel with their axe," serves as a direct indictment of deforestation and environmental degradation, reflecting a profound ecological anxiety from the perspective of the exploited.

Furthermore, the poem extends its ecocritical critique beyond environmental abuse to encompass broader human behaviour. Olive's initial lament is met with Barrigona's sharp retort: "Can't you see what they do/ To their fellow humans?" This powerful interjection broadens the poem's scope, linking environmental violence to intra-human cruelty. It suggests that the same capacity for disregard and destruction that humans exhibit towards nature is mirrored in their interactions with each other. This interconnectedness is a cornerstone of ecocritical thought, highlighting how anthropocentric hubris often underpins both ecological and social justices. "Tree Talk" exemplifies how verbal art can function as a potent vehicle for ecocritical discourse. By giving voice to the voiceless and drawing parallels between environmental and social justice, Osundare fosters empathy for the non-human world and compels readers to critically examine their own place and impact within the global ecosystem. The poem is not merely a lament but a profound call for introspection and a re-evaluation of humanity's relationship with the planet, embodying a rich ecocritical sensibility.

In another poem entitled "Head in the Sand" Osundare blends incisive ecocritical commentary with dynamic verbal art to satirise global denialism and environmental degradation. Framed with the cadence of Yoruba folk refrain – "*o ntanrareje o, o ntanrareje, Afasegbejo, o ntanrareje*" – the poem not only evokes indigenous African oral traditions but also acts as a dirge for a world

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willfully ignoring its ecological crises. The interplay of oral performance and poetic craft heightens the urgency of environmental advocacy.

(To the accompaniment of the song: *O ntanrareje Afasegbejo, O ntanrareje'*)
Global warming is a figment
Of liberal imagination:
Melting Arctic ice
Is a dollop of cream in the sun
Rising oceans
Are bodies of water at play
The seven-year drought in Utah
Is just a dusty joke
The flood which buried the Koma village
Is a scene from Noah's epic
The desert's coastward march
Is a quest for a cool companion
Afasegbejo o ntanrareje
Seedless pods, treeless forests
Dewdrop dead and acid in the rain
Broiling winters, frigid summers
Toxic tub for global bath
Afasegbejo on ntanrareje
Belch out those carbons
Let factory fumes becloud the sky
That viscous streak on the delta creeks
Is beauty cream on the face of the sea
No price too high
For our glorious Progress. (p.40)

The poem's title metaphor, "Head in the Sand", echoes the ostrich syndrome – a willful refusal to acknowledge danger. This symbolic blindness is portrayed through ironic dismissal of catastrophic ecological phenomena: "Global warming is a figment/ Of liberal imagination," and "Melting Arctic ice/ Is a dollop of cream in the sun" (p.40). These satirical reductions expose the absurdity of denialist discourses, even as nature itself testifies to impending disaster. The poet's ecocritical vision emerges in this deconstruction of capitalist and industrial narratives that obscure environmental truths for economic gain. Verbal art in the poem is embedded in idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and musical refrain. The refrain, "*Afasegbejo o ntanrareje*," intersperses the verses with rhythm and cultural resonance, echoing traditional communal songs that often carried moral and philosophical insights. This aestheticisation of protest enhances the poem's performative force and makes the ecocritical message memorable and engaging. The metaphoric inversion, such as calling oil spillage "beauty cream on the face of the sea," sharply critiques environmental hypocrisy and the cosmeticisation of ecological harm.

Furthermore, Osunadre's poetic voice parodies the corporate glorification of "Progress," revealing its environmental cost: "No price too high/ For our glorious Progress" (p.40). This biting sarcasm unveils the poet's lamentation over humanity's prioritisation of profit over sustainability. The poem collapses binaries – nature vs. development, myth vs. reality – into a

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compact, musically-infused eco-lyricism that critiques anthropocentric arrogance. "Head in the Sand" indeed exemplifies Osundare's commitment to an activist poetics rooted in African oral forms. His fusion of verbal art with ecocritical awareness challenges global complicity and environmental apathy through art that sings, mocks, and mourns.

More so, in the poem, "Many Stars, One Sky" a profound ecocritical sensibility is articulated through a masterfully deployment of verbal art. The poem champions an ecocritical worldview, foregrounding the interconnectedness of all existence, both natural and human.

Orukutinditindi
Orukutinditindi

Many stars
One sky

A pageant of colours
One rainbow

Many trees
One forest

A medley of songs
One choir

Orukufinditindi

Many fingers
One hand
An array of tongues
One language

Many threads
One robe

A throng of people
One world

Orukutindi 'indi
Oruktindi tindi tindi tindi tindi. (p.58)

The above poem exemplifies ecocritical sensibility through a compelling fusion of poetic orature and ecological philosophy. The poem emphasises ecological unity, interdependence, and environmental harmony by invoking nature's multiplicity within a shared and interconnected world. Its verbal artistry, rooted in African oral traditions, is powerful tool that reinforces its ecological message.

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The poem's structure is grounded in repetition and parallelism, a characteristic of African oral poetics. The recurring refrain "*Orukutindi tindi*" mimics traditional incantatory rhythm, creating a chant-like cadence that evokes communal oral performance. As a verbal art form, this orality draws the reader into a shared rhythm that mirrors the ecological oneness the poem celebrates. This style is more than aesthetic – it embodies a philosophical worldview where nature is not fragmented but holistic and relational (Okuyade, 2013).

The poem's imagery, too, evokes ecocritical meaning. Phrases such as "Many stars/ One sky", "Many trees/ One forest", and "Many fingers/ One hand" articulate the poem's central ecoethical principle: biodiversity within ecological unity. Here, Osundare engages the ecocritical theme of "interconnectedness" to critique anthropocentric ideologies that segment the natural world for exploitative purposes (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). Instead, he promotes an ecocentric paradigm where all elements of nature – trees, stars, songs – contribute to a singular, interwoven planetary fabric.

The ecological oneness also functions as a critique of the divisions imposed by colonial and capitalist structures. By suggesting that "a throng of people" belong to "one world," the poem challenges geopolitical and socio-economic boundaries that fragment both humanity and nature. The use of metaphors such as "One robe" and "One choir" suggests that cultural and biological diversity should not threaten unity but enhance it (Nwagbara, 2010). This aligns with deep ecology's call for intrinsic respect for all forms of life (Naess, 1973).
Osundare's verbal artistry thus enhances his ecocritical vision. By invoking oral traditions, rhythmic refrains, and relational metaphors, he crafts a poem that is both aesthetically resonant and ethically compelling. "Many Stars, One Sky" becomes an eco-anthem that celebrates harmony, cultural diversity, and the indivisibility of the Earth's biosphere, advocating for a more inclusive, post-anthropocentric ecological consciousness.

Conclusion

Niyi Osundare's *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* stands as a testament to the poet's unwavering ecological consciousness and his ability to transform environmental advocacy into a work of profound aesthetics and intellectual depth. Through his mastery of verbal art, Osundare fuses African oral traditions with modern literary techniques, creating an ecopoetic discourse that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. His use of repetitions, call-and-response patterns, and incantatory rhythms, as seen in poems like "Many Stars, One Sky" and "Head in the Sand", accentuates a deliberate return to communal orality where poetry functions as both performance and moral instruction. These stylistic features not only preserve African oral heritage but also serve as tools for disseminating ecological awareness and resistance against exploitative ideologies. Anchored in the theoretical framework of postcolonial ecocriticism, the paper demonstrates how Osundare's work interrogates the historical and contemporary forces responsible for environmental degradation. His poems highlight the destructive legacies of colonial extractivism and neo-colonial capitalist enterprises, while simultaneously calling for a renewal of humanity's relationship with nature. By integrating ecocritical perspectives, Osundare aligns with scholars such as Nixon (2011), who explore how environmental degradation disproportionately affects the Global South. His depiction of deforestation, oil spills,

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desertification, and climate change becomes a critique not only of anthropocentric arrogance but also of the socio-political systems that perpetuate ecological harm for economic gain.

Osundare's poetic voice is unique in its ability to merge environmental ethics with aesthetic innovation. For example, the ironic imagery in "Head in the Sand", where oil spillage is described as "beauty cream on the face of the sea," challenges readers to confront the hypocrisy and denial surrounding industrial pollution (p.40). Similarly, "Tree Talk" humanises nature by giving voice to trees, emphasising the interconnectedness of all living beings and echoing the indigenous African cosmology that reveres nature as a living, sacred entity. His eco-aesthetic vision bridges the gap between local cultural experiences and global environmental concerns, presenting nature as both a source of identity and a victim of human greed. The paper also calls attention to how Osundare's verbal artistry enhances the effectiveness of his ecological message. His deliberate choice idioms, proverbs, and folkloric refrains invite readers to actively participate in the interpretative process, much like audiences in traditional oral performances. This participatory mode not only makes his poetry accessible but also amplifies its didactic purpose. Through the convergence of oral and written forms, Osundare creates what can be described as a "performative ecology," where poetry itself becomes a voice for the voiceless environment.

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