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An Ecostylistic Scrutiny of Human Excessive Extractivism, phases of the ailing earth, and demand for Eco-consciousness and Sustainability in Osundare's *Green: Sighs of our Ailing Planet*

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Abstract

Niyi Osundare's *Green: Sighs of our ailing planet* (2021), the selected collection for this study, is constructed within the poet-scholar's belief in art's transformative capabilities. In spite of the pungency depiction of humans' excessive ecocidal extractivism as the underlining factor of various environmental crises across the world, the volume has not received critical responses in the literature. This ecostylistic study fills the vacuum by using stylistics toolbox and insights from Systemic Functional Grammar to investigate the representation of environmental crises, victims of humans' anthropogenic activities, and demand for eco-consciousness from humans. Findings reveal that the poet uses repetition, unusual space management, value-laden words, and the subjectivity of the nonhuman components of nature, amongst others stylistic strategies are deployed by the poet to drive home his point that the Earth is ailing and needs urgent healing from its ailment to make it supportive to all life forms within the ecosphere.

Keywords: Ecological crisis, environmental literature, ecopoetry, ecostylistics, eco-consciousness

Introduction

The continuity of the Earth, the only planet that supports humans and other life forms, is currently being threatened, endangered by ecological degradation and environmental crises arising from humans' anthropocentric activities. Evidence shows that the idea of human centralism which ascribes a superior position to humans over non-human materials of the ecosphere, making them lords of the earth and promoting their acquisitive occupation of the earth is the major factor promoting all human anthropogenic activities. Ogunmodede, et al (2023) describe anthropogenic activities as reclamation of wet lands, deforestation, oil drilling and exploration, emission of carbon monoxides from automobiles, tree felling, and the overexploitation of air, water, atmospheric elements, soil and other earth materials to suit the growing human population and the unbridled quest for urbanisation in the guise of civilisation and modernisation.

The foregoing implies that human centralism activates extractivism. Chagnon, et al (2022, 760) view extractivism as a complex ensemble of self-reinforcing practices, mentalities, and power differentials underwriting and rationalizing socio-ecologically destructive modes of organizing life through subjugation, violence, depletion, and non-reciprocity. This, no doubt, is responsible for the 'staggering changes in the balance of most ecosystems' (Zurrus, 2024, 88) and the victimisation of the ecosphere (Adeniyi & Onanuga, 2023, 263). Viewing the environment as the lone victim of anthropogenic activities within the Environment Frame, according to Lakoff (2010, as cited in Zurru, 2024, 94), "sees the environment as separate from, and around, us." However, if the environment is considered from the larger picture of Nature, humans would realise that they are not separate from Nature but are an inseparable part of Nature, hence humans are equally victims of their own activities (Lakoff, 2010, as cited in Zurru, 2024, 94),.

That humans are part of nature conveys the urgent need to end all despoiling activities in order to save the Earth from total collapse and make it sustainable to its human and non-human materials. The task to save the Earth has become a pressing one that different agencies, organisations, and disciplines are frenetically arising to. Within environmental humanities for example, linguists have been assessing language system to determine how beneficial discourses

promote eco-friendly mentalities and practices and how, in the same way, destructive and ambivalent discourses contribute to ecological crisis. For literary scholars, literature functions as an interventionist platform for educating about ecological crisis and advocating sustainability. It is within this environmental literature landscape that one finds ecopoetry and other creative works which imaginatively interrogate environmental conditions (Adegoju & Olugbeko, 2023, 70).

Nwagbara (2012, 61) states that ecopoetry is concerned with environmental politics and ecological implications of humankind's activities on the planet. To this end, Nwagbara (2012, 61) takes ecopoetry as a platform for upturning environmental justice; and for decrying man's unbridled materialist pursuits. To Nwosu (2022, 116), ecopoetry, otherwise, called environmental poetry, describes the innovative and ingenious deployment of the artistic craft and resources of poetry to sensitise people to the dangers of environmental pollution. Egya, et al (2022) equally classify ecopoets as artists who use their works to pursue environmental justice by unveiling the plight of the environment, how biodiversity is depleting, dying, being wiped out of existence, and how humans become helpless to challenge powerful institutions. Egya, et al (2022) therefore aver that ecopoets consider the task to save the environment an urgent one so they "assume the mindset of environmental activists engaged in a fight against powerful institutions on their own behalf (the poets consider themselves as victims too) and on behalf of other bio-diverse life-forms."

Niyi Osundare's *Green: Sighs of our ailing planet*, the volume under study, is an ecopoetry which falls within the class of literature in environmental humanities. Odia (2020), delineating between ecocritical and ecotopian, classifies Osundare as an ecotopian ecopoet for exhibiting new consciousness, new ideological direction and new artistic vision. Odia (2020) says ecocritical poetry "draws attention to ecological problems without suggesting solutions to them, leaving the reader with the sense of hopelessness, fear and defeat" (p. 169), where ecotopian poetry does not only bemoan the degradation of the environment, but also mobilises humanity to wake up to the reality of environmental preservation, the responsibility to keep an eye on the environment and above all, the duty to secure it for the benefit of humanity (p. 170). Odia's conclusion about Osundare is not surprising because Jeyifo (1983, as cited in Anyokwu, 2015, 2) has described him as an initiator of 'a revolution in poetry and poetry of revolution. While classifying Osundare as a second-generation Nigerian literary artist, Anyokwu (2015, 2) argues

that his art characteristically revolts against the *ancien regime* represented in works of first-generation artists like Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, and Christopher Okigbo. These first-generation poets, Jeyifo (1983, as cited in Anyokwu, 2015, 2) argues, "deployed diction and a metaphoric, highly allusive universe calculated to exclude all but a small coterie of specialists." Osundare, in contrast, pushes forward what Anyokwu (2015, 3) construes as the 'Democracy of poetry', an "Osundaresque *disembourgoisement* or/and demystification of the language of poetry… an oblique broadside against the poetic practice of the Soyinka-Clark-Okigbo coterie." Anyokwu (2015, 4) explains that Osundare accomplishes the democratisation of poetry through his deliberate and conscious demystification of the language of poetry which renders poetry in simple, lucid and accessible terms.

Osundare also differentiates from his predecessors in terms of the first generation's "excessive preoccupation with the poet's private grief and emotions over and above societal tragedies and triumphs" and "an undue eurocentrism, deviationism, obscurantism and private esotericism" (Aiyejina, 1988, as cited in Anyokwu, 2015, 2). Osundare, instead, replaces that personalised and elitist type of poetry with "poetry of social mobilisation, social conscientisation, a revolutionary aesthetics as against the preceding practice in which poetry was a 'cultic' and alienatingly elitist affair" (Anyokwu 2015, 4). This, for Egya (2021, 4), show Osundare's shifts towards the bucolic, the agrarian and the local people that live in rural society. To wit, Egya (2021, 4), hinging on Louise Wei's (2003) submission, describes Osundare's poetics as ideological because of its preference for an inclusive artistic stance that does not intend to alienate the people.

Right from his coming on board the Nigeria/African literary scene in the 1980s, Osundare revolutionary art has notably demonstrated the writer as a 'righter' writing within the transforming capabilities of art. To Osundare (2007, 6), therefore, the enterprise of writing is "almost entirely deliberate and social, a product of social complexes and mutations, not a fortuitous outgrowth of some irrational-inspirationalist anarchy… for long the bourgeois alibi for patently reactionary art." For this, Anyokwu (2015, 4) argues that Osundare's verse is energised by the revolutionary vision encoded in Karl Marx's Theses on Feuerbach that "the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it". Osundare (2007, 10) thus views the sole task of the African literature artists as using the power of their pens to

transform the society positively by being "the healer as the curer of severance and restorer of lost unity."

As a major and leading voice within African and global ecological literature, therefore, Osundare's ecopoetry encapsulates both his drive for social mobilisation, social conscientisation, and social advocacy, and his philosophy about the transformative capabilities of art. This socio-ecological burden is evident in Osundare's earliest ecopoetry like *The Eye of the Earth* (1986). In Egya's (2020) critical reading of Osundare's *Village Voices* (1984) and *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), he reveals that Osundare writes within a socio-ecological vision and an agrarian ecology which celebrate his birthplace pastoralism and mourn its displacement by colonially imposed logics of modernity. In other words, Osundare's eco-consciousness casts upon his ecopoetry the task of constructing and lamenting the deplorable degradation of the environment, critiquing humans' anthropogenic activities and disconnect from nature, and advocating eco-consciousness as the pathway to nature's renewal and sustainability.

As expected, the call to rise and save the Earth dominates *Green: Sighs of our ailing planet* (henceforth *Green*), his most recent ecopoetry collection. However, *Green,* unlike Osundare's previous collections, has not received adequate critical attention from scholars. This lack of critical responses to *Green* motivates the selection of the volume for analysis in this study. Working within the field of ecostylistics, the aim of this study is to scrutinise *Green* for the representation and lamentation of environmental crisis, the critique of human's excessive extractivism, and the demand for eco-consciousness as a means to saving the ailing earth and preserving it.

Statement of Research Problem

As noted above, in spite of Osundare's pungent treatment of global ecological degradation/environmental crisis in *Green*, the volume has not received attention from scholars. This may be because the volume was published in the United States of America, making it more expensive for and less accessible to scholars in the Global South who undertake the bulk of critical responses to Osundare's poetry. However, Courtois (2023) has undertaken an ecocritical study of plant subjectivity in the collection. Without doubt, Courtois' work alone cannot attend

to the gamut of ecological/environmental issues raised in *Green*. This study therefore fills this gap in the literature by examining the volume from the perspective of ecostylistics. The study will engage the analytical method of ecostylistics and the general tools of stylistics to attend to its goal.

Data and method

The ecopoems which constitute the data for analysis in this study are selected from Niyi Osundare's *Green*. The five poems purposively selected for analysis are: "Green", "Hole in the Sky", "Igi Da (The Tree has Fallen)", "Malingering Mountain?", and "Eco-Hints". The poems are subjected to an ecostylistic scrutiny which involves "a careful reading of the texts and discourses under scrutiny, and an interpretation of their linguistic data and ecological aspects by means of the wide-ranging paradigms and approaches developed and supplied by contemporary literary and non-literary stylistics" (Virdis, 2022, 65). To wit, the selected poems for the study are analysed qualitatively using an eclectic approach that employs foregrounding, style markers (Leech & Short 2017, 61-66), and relevant insights from Systemic Functional Grammar for observation, explanation, and interpretation.

Usually, an ecostylistic scrutiny is characterised by evaluative language that articulates the interaction between moral and aesthetic criteria, assesses and critically comments on ways of life, thinking and acting, and outlines human responsibilities and duties to the planetary ecology (Virdis, 2022, 17). This makes it important to adopt relevant ecosophies upon which to base the language of evaluation and moral and aesthetic judgement in an ecostylistic inquiry. Ecosophy, a blend of 'ecological philosophy, was coined by the philosopher Arne Naess and defined as follows:

> By an *ecosophy* I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of *sofia* [or] wisdom, is openly normative, it contains *both* norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements *and* hypotheses concerning the state of affairs of our universe. Wisdom is policy wisdom, prescription, not only scientific description and prediction. (Naess, 1995, as cited in Virdis, 2022, 17)

Virdis (2022, 17-18) also describes an ecosophy as "a statement of ecological values and assumptions, a system of philosophical tenets based on and highlighting environmental concerns" and "an ethics of ecological concord" which is "explicitly normative and prescriptive by establishing rules and standards and by implying value priorities." Choosing relevant ecosophies in an ecostylistic study is thus considered essential because they will provide an analyst with the lens with which to observe and evaluate ecological issues, especially those that relate to human-nature and interspecies interactions in the text under scrutiny. To this end, the study adopts the following ecosophies as the touchstones against evaluative language in the study will be placed:

a. **Valuing living**: This ecosophy is a normative principle and a moral imperative since living has the highest worth and importance with respect to the entire ecosphere comprising all human, animal and vegetable species living there, and praises their interpenetration and mutual connection.
b. **Wellbeing:** The thrust of this ecosophy is that living and living well are not the same. To this end, living in good health, in a contented and prosperous condition, enjoying physical and moral welfare, must be pursued for all human, animal and vegetable.
c. **Care:** This ecosophy encompasses the notions of empathy, regret and gratitude. Here, empathy is the consciousness of our negative influence on other organisms; regret means reducing that influence and damage; gratitude is our moral obligation to give something in return to the species and the ecological structures sustaining us.
d. **Environmental Limits**: This points to the fact that the capacity of ecological structures to sustain life into the years and decades to come is affected adversely by us humans overusing goods, materials and energy and generating waste. Accordingly, excessive consumption and waste production worldwide must be cut down urgently and extensively and maintained within environmental limits.
e. **Adaptation:** Since the present ecological, social and economic systems are failing, we humans must change our ways of life and adapt new attitudes and relationships with nature in order for the ecosphere to renew itself and to continue to support life forms.

(Items a-d are adapted from Virdis (2022, 19-24) and item e is adapted from Stibbe, 2015, 14-15)

Theoretical orientation

This study is conducted within ecological stylistics, an emerging subfield of stylistics otherwise called ecostylistics. Virdis (2022, 63-64) traces the first occurrence of 'ecostylistics' to Andrew Goatly's plenary speech at the 30th international conference of Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA) held in Genoa, Italy in July 2010. There, Goatly contrasted Adam Smith's ideas in *The Wealth of Nations* with the philosophy of Romantic Ecology analysed by Jonathan Bate (1991) to uncover how Romantic Ecology can be extended to incorporate ecological criticism for the emergence of ecostylistics. The outcome of Goatly's advocating an ecological turn in stylistic theory and practice (Zurru, 2017, 194) is the subsequent emergence of ecostylistics as a subdiscipline of stylistics that brings together stylistic methodologies and an interest in environments of different kinds (Vermeulen, 2022, 571).

For Zurru (2017, 195), the 'eco' prefix in ecostylistics underscores its environmental (related to environment as the habitat of flora, fauna and organisms at large) and ecological (pertaining to the study of the interrelation between human and non-human fauna and between organisms and the physical surroundings) foci and connects to the subdiscipline's two major aims:

i. to unearth the link between the linguistic representation of physical environment and the style of a certain text, text-type, genre and/or author
ii. to investigate and evaluate (un)ecological linguistic patterns in texts, thus contributing to raising further awareness of global ecological concerns.

These two aims, together with the 'eco' prefix in the ecostylistics' naming, and stylistics' interest in the investigation of both language and literature link ecostylistics to both ecocriticism and ecolinguistics, its two older environmental humanities disciplines. Ecostylistics' first aim aligns

with ecocriticism's interest in "the representation of nature, wilderness or environment in literary works" (Zurru, 2017, 193). However, the relationship between the two disciplines stops at their interest in ecology/environment in literary texts as they have different methodological standpoints:

> Whilst ecocriticism is interested in investigating what a certain literary text conveys in terms of environmentality/ecology, ecostylistics focuses on exploring how that text comes to convey a certain stance, for "stylistic analysis is a method of linking linguistic form, via reader inference, to interpretation in a detailed way and thereby providing as much explicit evidence as possible for and against particular interpretations of texts" (Short 1996: 27). Ecostylistic analyses can therefore complement ecocritical interpretations of literary texts by providing linguistic data in support of, or against, those readings. (Zurru, 2017, 195)

Ecostylistics' second aim of investigating and evaluating (un)ecological linguistic patterns in texts overlaps with ecolinguistics' interest in the investigation of the role of language in the interactions among us humans, animals, plants and the environment (Virdis, 2022, 29). Stibbe (2015, 1) states that ecolinguistics critiques forms of language that contribute to ecological destruction, thereby aiding the search for new forms of language that inspire people to protect the natural world. In essence, both ecostylistics and ecolinguistics are interested in the investigation of the linguistic construction of the environment and ecology-related texts and discursive practices (Zurru, 2017, 196). The point of divergence between the two disciplines is that where ecolinguistics is constrained to the investigation of non-literary texts, ecostylistics "is equipped to also analyse those patterns in literary texts, which are generally excluded from ecolinguistic consideration" (Zurru, 2017, 196). Invariably, ecostylistics builds on stylistics' eclectic scope in terms of theories, methods, and texts studied (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010, 9-12; Virdis, 2022, 436) and is therefore able to explore literary and non-literary texts about nature, the environment and the ecological, and emotional interconnectedness of all human animal, non-human animal, and vegetable species on the planet (Virdis, 2022, 436).

Virdis (2022, 65) concludes that where ecostylistic investigations around the representation of natural or human made scenery, especially in literary texts, have been prompted by ecocriticism, the more political ecostylistic analyses that criticise eco-destroying discourses, usually in non-literary texts, have been prompted by ecolinguistics. Being more focused on

ecostylistics' first goal, this study is interested in scrutinising *Green* for the depiction of a degraded environment in the world of the poems as well as the attending consequences of the degradation.

Analysis and discussion

The analysis is undertaken in three subsections relating to the representation of ecological degradation and critique of human's excessive extractivism, representation of the Earth's ailment, and demand for eco-consciousness and Earth's sustainability.

Humans' anthropogenic activities and a poet's lamentation of the degraded ecosphere

The idea of human centralism is one major story-we-live-by that fuels human anthropocentric and ecocidal activities that mete out despicable havocs to the ecosphere. Stibbe (2015, 3), citing Kingsnorth and Hine (2009), avers that the most dangerous story that we live by is "the story of human centrality, of a species destined to be lord of all it surveys, unconfined by the limits that apply to other, lesser creatures." Similarly, Adeniyi and Onanuga (2023, 263) opine that it is the oversubscription to anthropocentric cosmology that places humanity at the centre of the biosphere and relegates nature to the periphery of human-environment interactions. Against this backdrop, *Green*'s poet persona depicts and laments various anthropogenic activities in the worlds of the ecopoetry with stanza 2 of "Malingering Mountain?" starting thus:

> Moon after moon after moon, they plundered the Mountain for its gold;
> harried the hill for its coal, foraged the flower for its scent…

This is a grim picture of human's parlous, unbridled, and endless exploitation of the natural habitat. Foregrounding, as found in the repetition of the adverbial phrase "moon after moon after moon" and the engagement of the local chronometer that construes months/seasons as "moon", contributes to the picture showcasing humans' mindless and unbridled abuse and degradation of the environment. Contributing to this is the choice "plundered", "harried", and "foraged", all

vale-laden verbs depicting humans' deliberate wickedness to nature. Ethically, the activities are unjust because they rob the ecosphere and make it empty.

In stanzas 5 and 6 of "Act of God", the poet persona depicts a degraded environment already experiencing environmental limits:

Mountains scooped and savaged
By improvident greed
Forests lumbered into extinction
And the consequent lumbago of an ailing earth

Both "improvident greed" and "extinction", the nominal groups serving as the complements of the prepositional groups "by improvident greed" and "into extinction" show the effects of human excessive extractivism and lack of care and empathy for nonhuman materials of the ecosphere. The poet persona distraught about how humans empty the ecosphere is subsequently depicted in the latter part of section v of "Hole in the Sky" where the poet persona laments thus: "Alas, the boundless rainforest of my youth/Has shrunk to a frightened eyebrow/On the forehead of the coast". In this same way, "Igi Da" laments the devastating effects of humans' excessive extractivism on the ecosphere:

Once virgin forests with golden wood
Now rings out like hollow shells
The canopy which tames the raging heat
Has become a thing long forgotten.

Further reflecting on the tragedies of humans' materialist domination over nature, "Igi Da" calls out

…the owners of the prodigal axe
Who cut and cut as if tomorrow does not exist
Who turn blooming forests into wastelands
And water-soaked terrains into famished regions.

Here, "the prodigal axe" metonymically refers to the owners of logging businesses. The pathetic picture of turning forests into wastelands is a reality the world is grappling with today as Lai (2024) reveals that there has been a loss of 420 million hectares of forest globally since 1990, meaning that around 10 million hectares of forest are lost every single year. This justifies the use of the value-laden adjective "prodigal" to qualify the "axe" as a metonymy for its owners. As a

biblical allusion, the adjective intertextually refers to the parable of the prodigal son, in Luke 15:11-19, who got his share of his father's inheritance and squandered it in a short while. For this, the repeated verbal group "cut and cut" foregrounds humans' unbridled and endless extraction of earth's materials.

The identified Participants and Processes in "Igi Da" all work within this symbolism of prodigality. By naming actors as "the blind plunderers of the forest", "You owner of the greedy axe", and "you wedded to wanton waste", the poet persona represents the wastefulness inherent in the actors' interactions with the nonhuman materials of the ecosphere. The names thus tease out and decry humans' wasteful domination over the natural habitat and their lack of concern about environmental limits and the moral and/or ethical responsibility to care for the nonhuman materials of the ecosphere and ensure their wellbeing. Material Processes such as "*cut and cut* as if tomorrow will never come," "*kill* the tree," and "*empty* the forest of its irreplaceable wealth" paint nature and its materials as victims of humans' violent and despoiling activities. Pathetically, these despoiling activities subsequently deplete plants and trees stocks and exterminate animals:

> Tree stocks are vanishing in the forest
> The big-chested barrigona is disappearing without replacement
> So are the mountain-rumped elephant
> The buffalo whose mighty horns affright the hunter
> The monkey, magic acrobat on the tree top

The view of the gruesomely despoiled environment is also given in the ninth stanza of "Malingering Mountain?" thus:

> And the lake, the lake, too lean, too lonely, now it never remembers
> its ancient lore; its squandered boast and bounce, its reach and range,
> its seamless schools of fishes surging, surging in its bold, voluminous
> waters, the flint-finned *alapandagi*, the block-headed *aro*, the fan-tailed
> *shawa*…..…., tutored by the rain, doctored by the wind, certified all sane
> until hostile skies unleashed the sun whose ferocious thirst undid the lake,
> till the pond was powder, the deed was dust, and a liquid paradise became
> an acre of bones and wails. Stench so strong it choked the sky.... And fishing

boats flipped over into steamy coffins. The grass died and took its grace
along. Bushels of dust where once were bowls of blessing. Swarming flies hover
above the carnage. The wind coughed without remembering its throat.

This stanza pathetically portrays the loss of fish stocks and other life forms within the hydrosphere. While the poet persona only identifies three types of fish (*alapandagi*, *aro*, and *shawa*), the unusual and graphologically foregrounded ellipsis conveys that countless other types of fish that have been exterminated through humans' activities. The poet persona also reels out the effects of global warming and ozone layer depletion which engenders the sun's hostility that "undid the lake" until "liquid paradise became an acre of bones and wails." As the lake dries up, both the exterminated fish stocks and humans are implicated as the victims of humans' activities. This is why the "fishing boats", as a metonym for humans, especially those who make their livelihood from fishing, "flip over" as a result of the shallowness of the lake.

The poet persona also represents the degraded deep green vegetation in "Igi da", where missing tree stocks are addressed:

Majestic *Iroko*, lord of the heights
Where are you?
Araba which stands on top of spectacular roots
Where have you gone*? Oganwo*, loyal sentry on the road to Oke Abusoro
Who cut you down in the height of your noon?
Omo whose wood secures our door of wealth
Where have you stopped to balm your wounds?

The direct addresses to *Iroko*, *Araba*, *Oganwo*, and *Omo* utilises apostrophe to lament gross deforestation. The poet persona further mourns the loss of animal stocks in like manner:

Where are you now
You princes and princesses of the palace of the forest
Okere kere, husband of *Oyunkun*
Alagiriwowo wo wo wo
Who built a verandah-ed house between the flanks of *Araba*'s roots
Akokoligi who carves the wood with the dexterity of its restless beak
The red-head toucan can can too can

By representing these losses and absences, the poet persona unveils the gravity of humans' degradation of the ecosphere so as to demand urgent and decisive adaptation of practices that will aid the restoration, renewal, and sustainability of the Earth.

That the vegetal world enjoys subjectivity in the second stanza of section vi of "Hole in the sky" is significant for the representation of the profound effect of human's anthropogenic activities on the materials of the ecosphere:

> The day they killed a tree
> In the ancient forest
> The chainsaw left a dirge
> On the lips of the leaves

Within the system of transitivity, the Process "killed" is an intentional transformative Material Process (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, 232; Thompson, 2014, 96) which captures humans' brutal action, as the Actor, on the tree, as the Goal. While the first two lines of the stanza has an adverbial clause of time, the last two lines paint the abysmal picture of the effect of the transformative action of the Actor on the Goal. In the same vein, rather than choose the verb "fell" or "cut" which would depict the tree as an inanimate material of the ecosphere, the poet persona deliberately chooses the verb "kill". This does not just animate the tree, but also depicts the vegetal part of the ecosphere as active and emotional life forms whose lives must matter in the scheme of things. To Courtois (2023), Osundare uses the stylistic device of hypotyposis to explicate that plants and trees have life, feelings and emotions. This, Courtois (2023) argues, is Osundare's embrace of the '"plant turn", that is, the attention to the fascinating lives of plants among philosophers, anthropologists, popular science writers' (Myers 2015, 40) and a politics of trees and plants that brings the subjectivities and life-worlds of vegetal part of the earth in a context of ecocide and 'coloniality of climate'. In essence, as the vegetal and other nonhuman materials of the ecosphere have life and emotions, humans must relate with them ethically and be morally bound to care for these other life forms.

Phases of the ailing earth and the attendant threats to life forms

Ecopoetry, as a platform for creating awareness about environmental crisis and subsequent threats to all life forms within the ecosphere, is located within the domain of environmental

education, which, Oguh (2014, as cited in Adegoju & Edeh, 2021, 42) describes as the efforts designed to teach how natural environments function and how human beings can manage their behaviour and ecosystems in order to live sustainably. This educative aspect of ecopoetry is taken in "Hole in the Sky" where the Earth is given a voice to address the poet persona and humans, as its inferred readers/listeners:

'Tell my story',
Said the Earth to me
'Oh, tell my story the way it is.
Don't sugarcoat its bile
Don't vanish 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 subjectivity granted the Earth by giving it a voice helps to project its anguishing emotion and pain. The juxtaposition of the antonyms 'sugarcoat vs bile', 'vanish vs rust', and 'scars vs pretty adds to this subjectivity and emotionality. The Earth places a burden of honesty on the poet persona to tell about its ailment. The last four lines of the stanza are significant for meaning-processing since both repetition and spacing management are deployed to picture a gasping Earth struggling for breath in its last moments. These graphological and syntactic foregrounding portray the gravity of Earth's ailment so that urgent measures can be adopted to save it. In response to Earth's request, the poet persona reels out the different ailments plaguing the Earth in section viii of "Igi Da":

  A hole
A hole
A blazing hole
In the garment of the sky
Oven-hot summers
Winters blind with ice

The Arctic melts like butter
As rising oceans consume the land
Fog-fraught cities grope
Beneath their fuming factories
The rain falls, acid,
On frightened forests
The Earth we used to know
Is once upon a time…

This section of "Igi Da" represents environmental crises like global warming, loss of ice glaciers in the Arctic due to rising global temperatures, and the detrimental effects of acid rain on trees. In the same way, the poet persona in "Eco Hints" laments how "A tree falls in Congo's forest/An iceberg crashes/In distant Antarctic" and concludes that these are all the "Dreadful chain of our dying Planet". Connected to this is how section viii of "Igi Da" ends on a very sad note, concluding that Earth, as we used to know it, is now "Once upon a time."

Further in section v of "Igi Da", the clause "The desert marches towards the sea", repeated four times, graphically represents the unprecedented rate of desertification. Similarly, section iv of "Igi Da" addresses ecological crises such as warming, pollution, and acidification which water bodies face:

Wailing whales wonder about their woes
The deeper the dolphin dives
The shallower its desired relief.

The alliterative effects of the repeated phonemes /w/ and /d/ foregrounds the images of the woes of water bodies and animals the poet persona constructs here. The last stanza of "Eco Hints" also reveals how plastics are major pollutants of water bodies and threats to life form there: "The oceans choke on plastic/A mercury plague un-schools the shoal".

In stanza 1 of "Malingering Mountain?", the poet persona further educates the reader about the prevailing ailment of the ecosphere which underscores the threat to all life forms in the reality of interspecies connection. Thus, the threat to the life of the Mountain is doom-bound for other materials of the ecosphere:

The Mountain is slowly dying; they say it is malingering. The Mountain
which begat the hill; the hill which begat the hillock; the hillock which towers

above the valley; the valley which mothers the flower; the flower which perfumes
the wind; the wind which unwinds the trees.

Here, the poet persona address humans' nonchalance to the dying Mountain for concluding that the Mountain is only pretending to be ill. The poet persona thus unveils that the ailment of the Mountain will subsequently deprive other materials of the ecosphere of their wellbeing. This illustrates Trampe's (2001, 233) idea of the "mutual interdependencies" of the materials of the ecosphere and what Basso (1989, as cited in Carbaugh, 2001, 126) terms the "communicative acts of topographic representation" which, for Carbaugh (2001, 126), is a strategy for deriving symbolic appropriations from the local landscape.

Rendering the "Malingering Mountain?" as a declarative question is also significant for meaning-processing. The declarative question, as Quirk and Greenbaum (1973, 195) explain, is a type of yes-no question which takes the answer yes or no as a forgone conclusion since its assertive character makes its non-assertive form inadmissible. Invariably, the title of the poem taunts the people's shallow thinking and portrays the poet persona's anger towards them for living in denial of the Mountain's conspicuous ailment. The poet persona's annoyance is reinforced with the couplet "The Mountain is dying/They say it's just malingering" which is repeated seven times in the poem. The importance of the Mountain in the ecosphere is inherent in its representation with a capital letter. Though mountain is not a proper noun, it is graphologically foregrounded in the poem to project that it is a life form central to the world of the poem. This is to educate the people about interspecies connection and stir them to save the mountain, as well as other materials of the ecosphere, from dying.

The presentation of the ailing planet will be concluded on the note that section vii of "Hole in the Sky" refers to the ecosphere, in its current state, as "Seasons of omen." This section of the poem emphasises that all is not well with the Earth as well as with all its biotic and abiotic materials. The poet persona's choice of the value word "omen" is to signify global ecological disaster. It is thus not surprising that both humans and animals display different types of malformation while the vegetal world is plagued by "vengeful droughts" which digest the field:

Seasons of omen
Seasons of omen
One-legged frogs
Babies with missing arms

The grass's green laughter
Has yellowed into sickening groan
Vengeful droughts digest the fields

The nominal groups "one-legged frogs" and the "babies with missing arms" name unusual human and nonhuman beings that currently populate the ecosphere. That Earth's ailment is equally distressing to the vegetal world is indicated by how green grass's laughter yellows into sickening groan. The representation of the planet in a season of omen and disaster is evident in the clarion call which opens the first two lines of "Igi Da":

Hear this, oh listeners, hear this:
Here comes Disaster, father of Trouble

Graphologically foregrounding "Disaster" and "Trouble" indicates that the ecosphere in its current portend great danger to the Eartht and all its biotic and abiotic components because of humans' reckless abuse of the materials of the earth.

Demand for eco-consciousness as the sustainable pathway for healing the ailing Earth

The ecosophy of adaptation requires becoming eco-conscious and adopting sustainable habits in order to arrest the spate of global environmental disasters and troubles like climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, pollution, desertification, and the depletion of nature's biotic and abiotic materials. Connecting to the deep (green) ecology movement, the ecosophy of adaptation "considers it a pressing and imperative necessity to simplify human life, to alter our culture and society radically and to implement ecologically responsible policies: this is in order for the earth's wellbeing to be renewed and sustained in the long run" (Virdis, 2002, 38). This pressing need to radically alter our culture and implement eco-friendly policies and lifestyle is pursued in "Green" where the poet persona extensively deploys foregrounding techniques such as repetition, striking lexical relationships, and unusual textual layout to demand eco-consciousness and sustainability.

"Green" is striking in its unusual graphology as the poem is arranged in two columns. Each column has three sets of four couplets followed by one line, totaling 27 lines in a column and 54 lines in the entire poem. Except the last line of the columns that has one word each, each line in the poem is made up of two words with the colour adjective "Green" as the first word.

The regularity of this colour adjective at the beginning of each line foregrounds the word as an anaphora whose major function is to give structure to an argument, to "hammer home" a point, or to arouse strong feelings (Wales, 2011, 20). On that ground, that 'Green' occurs 53 times and constitutes half of the entire poem emphasises the need to adapt a green story to live by. This regular pairing of "green" with nouns across all lines accomplishes parallelism of the structure ADJ^N. Short (1996, as cited in Gregoriou, 2015, 95) argues for his "parallelism rule" that parallel structures, in addition to the prominence they project, also invite the reader to search for meaning relations in terms of the parts that are varied since parallelism has "the power not just to foreground parts of a text for us, but also to make us look for parallel or contrastive meaning links between those parallel parts". A closer look at the words occurring with "Green" in each couplet reveals a near-antonymy or text-based antonymy relation as the following lines show:

Green salutations Green aspirations
Green intonements Green awakenings
Green affirmations Green migrations
Green denials Green arrivals
Green calculations Green intimations
Green engagements Green estrangements
Green fabulations Green germinations
Green conjectures Green efflorescence
Green skies Green oceans

The near/text-based-antonyms significantly demand eco-consciousness in all shades and tones of human endeavours. While the four couplets relate to the different activities and events that humans undertake, the single lines at the end of each set of four couplets projects the effects of human's adoption of eco-conscious policies on the environment: green skies, green oceans, green clay, and green dust.

The result of adopting eco-friendly activities is reflected in the last couplets of the poem and the single words making up the last lines of the poem:

Green gba Green possibilities
Green gbu Green awakening
Green Planet

While these couplets require humans to be awakened to the possibilities of reverting to absolute eco-consciousness or greenness, the first couplet is foregrounded with the inclusion of two Yoruba words: *gba* and *gbu*. These two linguistic elements have previously appeared in Osundare's *Midlife* (1993):

> Some into *gba*
> Some into *gbu*
> Some into the *gbaagbuu*
> Of *Mehunmutapa*

Osundare (1993, as cited in Anyokwu, 2013, 4) explains that the words mean diversity and the necessity of unity:

> The interpretation of *gba* and *gbu* must start in the mouth before proceeding to the brain! The heaviness of the labio-velar plosive /gb/, the contrasting realisation of the open vowel /a/ and the close /u/, the coming together of both syllables and lengthening (through doubling) of both vowels in *gbaagbuu* is all intended to produce an oral-aural bang with a resonance which reaches back to primordial times. Signified here is the inevitability of diversity (*gba* versus *gbu*) and the necessity of unity (*gbaagbuu*) within a liberating context of the sense of common origins (*mehunmatapa*)"

For Osundare, therefore, the phono-lexico-stylistic play in the contrastive sounds of *gba/gbu* is intended to produce "an oral-aural bang" with a resonance that reaches back to primordial times and demonstrates the inevitability of diversity and unity. In other words, whatever the diversity the words paired with "Green" project, the poet persona demands everyone and everything to work together to achieve the unity that will return our 'ailing planet' into a "Green Planet".

Besides the foregoing, *gbu* and *gba* call to mind the Yoruba word *agbagbu* which means "general" or "entire/ty". *Agbagbu*'s meaning aligns with Osundare's earlier interpretation of *gbaagbuu* as necessity for unity. With this, *gba* and *gbu* may be read as the poet persona's call for humans' unified action to return green and return everything to green in entirety, in spite of their diversities. Whether one subscribes to the meaning of *agbagbu* or *gbaagbuu*, the demand of the poet persona is for humans to be eco-conscious and adapt eco-sustainable habits. The poet persona thus implies that when humans halt all unsustainable practices and eco-distressing stories that have long thrived in culture and adopt sustainable ones, a "Green Planet", inferred

from pairing the last lone words in each column, would be accomplished, the ailing planet would be renewed and become support to the wellbeing of all.

To get humans to be ecologically conscious may, however, require some tinge of militancy which would require the poet persona to pose as an ecoactivist who wages environmental war against anthropogenic forces" (Adegoju & Olugbeko, 2024, 88). This militant poise is what the poet persona displays in section ix of "Hole in the Sky" where after identifying the ailments the earth as a result of human's "coloniality of climate" (Courtois, 2024), the poet persona conveys the hope of Earth's redemption in the gathering of a militant ecoactivist redemption army:

Trumpet sounds in the horizon
Green intimations unfurl the wind
Healing needle to the hole in the sky
Earth's Redemption Army
Is gathering strength beyond the clouds.
Trumpet sounds behind the mountains
Green intimations unfurl the wind

This hope of a healing needle applied to the hole in the sky metaphorises the eco-responsibility of Earth's Redemption Army. In the same way, the idea of the trumpet sound intertextually ties to the idea of rapture in eschatological studies where Jesus will return to the Earth to gather His followers and end time army, heralded by the sound of the archangel's trumpet. The 'trumpet' thus captures the poet persona's call to eco-consciousness as the healing needle to the hole in the sky. This image of the militant ecoactivist is deployed in "Igi da" where the poet persona invites everyone to join minds together to "throw the stone of words" at the despoilers of the environment:

Listen, oh listen
People of our land,
Let us join minds
And reason our way ahead
Let us throw the stone of words
At the owners of the prodigal axe
Who cut and cut as if tomorrow does not exist
Who turn blooming forests into wastelands

And water-soaked terrains into famished regions

This is a call for a collective action to jettison the despoliation of the Earth. While this gives a tinge of violence, Adegoju and Olugbeko (2024, 71), citing Egya (2020), clarify that ecoactivism in ecopoetry is mainly a textual one that focuses on characters' activisms in the texts, not necessarily the authors. Further pushing the ecoactivist stance, the poet persona deploys rhetorical wh-questions in the first three stanzas of "Eco Hints" to castigate humans' passivity to the plights of nature:

When last did you
Hear a river cry
From the lethal pain
Of arsenic poisoning
What did you do
When your favourite lake
Turned from blue to purple
Then to frightening red
When last did you
Sigh at the swansong
Of a falling tree

These rhetorical wh-questions demand care for the materials of the ecosphere, having underscored human's insensitivity, passivity, unresponsiveness, and lack of empathy and regret for the various unpleasant experiences other members of the ecosphere suffer from humans' interaction with them. Grammatically, rhetorical wh-questions are equivalent to a statement in which the Q-element is replaced by a negative element (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973, 200). Replacing the Q-elements of the three questions with negative elements shows that the poet intends to wake the reader to their moral and ethical duty of caring for the materials of the ecosphere and ensuring their wellbeing:

i. You did not hear (pretended not to hear) when a river cried from the lethal pain of arsenic poisoning;
ii. You did nothing when your favourite lake turned from blue to purple then to frightening red; and

iii. You did not sigh at the swansong of a falling tree and the empty agony of shadeless terrains

The negative polarity of the sentences in i-iii above places an urgent need on the reader to rise and save the ecosphere from further degradation.

In "Act of God", the poet persona still poses as an ecoactivist to sternly reject attributing environmental crises to God. This is to make humans responsible their ill-treatment of the ecosphere rather than attribute their irresponsibility to an external being or force:

Nothing act-of-god in this
Nothing
Nuclear plants on the brow
Of quaking mountains
Coal ash in the river
Which minds the village need

The poet persona educates humans about how their act of establishing nuclear plants on the brow of mountains results in earthquakes and how their pouring of coal ash in the river which serves as the source of drinking water for the populace poisons the people and eventually kills them. References to "Stubborn cancers/Which belie the healer's genius" and the "Carbon plague in the air/Hole in the sky" show that human activities are the causes of various environmental crises. Educating the people about how environmental pollutions threaten all life forms is undertaken in the hope that humans will be inspired to deal ethically with the ecosphere. It is on this note that the poet persona concludes in the poem that humans are victims of their harmful domination of nature:

Here goes the tale of the bird
Which pollutes its nest

This stance of human being the victims of their deplorable activities to is also taken in "Hole in the Sky":

Ever heard fruits arguing between the leaves
Over which got the deepest dose
Of the pesticidal plague?
The poison killed the pest

And later buried the people

The poet persona phonologically foregrounds the spraying of 'pesticide' on fruits through the employment of alliteration in "*d*eepest *d*ose" and "*p*esticidal *p*lague". At the lexicosemantic level, the two nominal groups are foregrounded as text-based synonyms. However, the pungency of the representation is inherent in the consideration of the pesticide as a "plague" that is harmful to not just the fruits but also to the people who sprayed it and are subsequently killed and buried by the poison. There is no better way for the poet persona to demand ethical dealing with nature from humans than educating them about interspecies connections where the wellbeing of a part of the ecosphere is a condition for the wellbeing of the others, including humans.

Conclusion

The preoccupation of the study has been to interrogate how *Green*, Niyi Osundare's ecopoetry collection, stylistically presents ecological degradation/environmental crisis in order to give a gruesome picture of our ailing planet and spur people to urgently develop eco-consciousness and adopt eco-sustaining actions. At the background of some selected ecosophies, the study employed foregrounding, style markers, and insights from Systemic Functional Grammar to qualitatively evaluate eco-concerns in the volume. Among other representations, the depiction of the gruesome degradation of the ecosphere, the severity of Earth's ailment, and interspecies connection which makes everyone and everything a victim of humans' anthropogenic activities all work together to demand that humans urgently halt their eco-destroying activities and save the Earth in order to save themselves and other materials of the ecosphere in a capitalist economy that prioritises the 'wealth of nation' over and above the 'wealth of nature' (Goatly, 2017, 95).

Green, therefore, is not a call to just abort anthropogenic activities which excessively expend nature's materials and insensitively handles the ecosphere, the volume works within the transforming capabilities of art, educating everyone, making them aware of earth's ailment which spells an impending doom to the ecosphere, and demanding a shift from eco-destroying habits eco-friendly ones. To this end, unlike the majority of Nigerian eco-literature which usually address the impact of oil extraction and pollution in the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria, *Green* takes a global outlook to the environmental crises threatening the earth and the continuity of life forms.

This, nonetheless, does not mean that Osundare excludes the havocs and the politics of crude oil excavation in the Niger-Delta from the discoursal lens of *Green*. As an urgent interventionist response to global ecological degradation and environmental crisis, *Green* is much more concerned about unveiling the sighs of 'our ailing planet' in different parts of the world, the Niger-Delta inclusive, in the hope that we humans shall rescue it without delay and, in the event, deliver ourselves and all other materials of the ecosphere from destruction.

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