International Journal of Science and Research Archive
eISSN: 2582-8185
Cross Ref DOI: 10.30574/ijsra
Journal homepage: https://ijsra.net/

(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

Check for updates

Elemental Ideologies in Osundare's Green: Sighs of our ailing planet

Abosede Oyinlola Shaguy [1,*] and Moses Akanbi Alo [2]

[1] *Department of Languages, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos. Nigeria*
[2] *Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria*

International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2023, 09(02), 1144-1154

Publication history: Received on 07 June 2023; revised on 02 August 2023; accepted on 04 August 2023

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/ijsra.2023.9.2.0318

Abstract

This study explores the ideological architecture of Niyi Osundare's Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet (2022), a poetry collection that confronts environmental degradation through the lens of African cosmology, postcolonial critique, and linguistic innovation. Moving beyond conventional thematic interpretations, the study applies Ogungbemi's (2016) Integrated Model of Ideological Representation in Discourse (IMIRD), which combines insights from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and lexical connotation analysis, to uncover how Osundare encodes ideologies, resistance, agency, and ecological subjectivity in poetic language. Focusing on nine poems, "Water," "River," "The Rainmaker's Daughter," "Dewdrop," "Wind," "The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes," "A Paddle Made of Words," "Lily," and "Magnolia (1 & 2)", the analysis reveals a complex discursive ecology where natural elements are not passive backdrops but sentient, moral agents capable of memory, speech, and protest. Osundare's strategic use of transitivity patterns assigns action and emotion to flora and landscapes, while metaphors and lexical choices rooted in orality, ritual, and body imagery transform environmental harm into affective, communal experiences. The study demonstrates that Osundare's ecopoetry functions as a counter-hegemonic discourse that resists capitalist exploitation and anthropocentric worldviews, while affirming indigenous epistemologies and environmental ethics. By giving poetic voice to rivers, winds, and blossoms, Osundare calls for a relational ontology grounded in Yoruba cosmology, where nature is kin and justice is ecological. The findings contribute to African ecocriticism by offering a discourse-level framework for interpreting how poetic form and linguistic structure enact ideological intervention in postcolonial environmental contexts.

Keywords: Ecopoetry; Discourse Analysis; Indigenous Epistemology; Environmental Justice; Niyi Osundare

1. Introduction

Amidst the accelerating crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental pollution, and ecological inequality, literature has emerged not merely as a mirror of environmental concerns but as an active participant in shaping ecological discourse. Among literary forms, ecopoetry, poetry concerned with the environment and human-nature relationships, has taken on a significant rhetorical function. It challenges extractivist ideologies, disrupts anthropocentric worldviews, and reimagines the relationship between humanity and the nonhuman world (Buell, 2005; DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011; Tredinnick, 2005). Ecopoetry, in this light, functions as a mode of cultural resistance and epistemological intervention.

This is particularly salient in African literary traditions, where environmental degradation is often entwined with the legacies of colonialism and the continuing violence of global capitalism. In such contexts, poetry becomes not just a medium for artistic expression but also a vehicle for ecological justice, memory, and spiritual renewal (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010; Nixon, 2011). African ecopoetry, distinct from Western literary environmentalism, often draws from oral

* Corresponding author: Abosede Oyinlola Shaguy

traditions, indigenous cosmologies, and community-based environmental ethics, foregrounding the sacredness of land, water, and other elemental forces.

Within this tradition, Nigerian poet Niyi Osundare stands as a central figure whose work seamlessly blends activist poetics, environmental consciousness, and cultural rootedness. Since the publication of *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), Osundare has used his verse to explore the consequences of environmental mismanagement, corporate greed, and political irresponsibility in Nigeria and beyond (Ogunsiji & Ogungbemi, 2016). In his more recent collection, *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* (2022), Osundare elevates elemental voices, wind, water, river, rain, and dewdrops, into subjects of lament, memory, and resistance. The poems move beyond aesthetic lamentation; they are structured as rhetorical interventions that critique ecological collapse and call for cultural and ethical transformation.

In these poems, Osundare does not depict nature as a passive victim but as an active participant in human history, one that remembers, reacts, and resists. Through strategies such as personification, animism, metaphor, and orality, his poems speak from the perspective of the Earth itself, especially within African spiritual frameworks where nature is sentient and sacred (Miller, 1997; Okpewho, 1992). The result is a body of work that gives voice to nonhuman entities and embeds ecological critique within broader discourses of colonialism, capitalism, and indigenous resurgence.

The context in which Osundare writes is essential to the meaning of his poetry. Nigeria's ecological crises, from desertification in the north to oil spills and gas flaring in the Niger Delta, are not isolated environmental incidents but the consequences of long-standing structural violence (Watts, 2008; Ohagwam, 2018). These crises disproportionately affect rural, Indigenous, and economically marginalized communities whose livelihoods are tied to land and water. In Osundare's work, these local struggles are connected to a global history of environmental injustice, particularly what Nixon (2011) calls *slow violence*: environmental harm that is incremental, invisible, and unequally distributed across time and space. Osundare's poetics of slow violence operate by layering natural imagery with political urgency, exposing the enduring wounds inflicted on the land and its people.

His poetry also intersects with the philosophical foundations of Yoruba cosmology, where nature is not just a resource but a realm of spiritual agency and relational ethics (Irele, 2001; Miller, 1997). In this worldview, rivers have names and personalities, wind carries ancestral voices, and rain is both a physical and metaphysical blessing. By drawing from these traditions, Osundare not only reclaims indigenous ecological epistemologies but also challenges the epistemic dominance of Western technoscientific models that often overlook relational and spiritual dimensions of the environment.

Despite a growing body of global ecocritical literature, African ecopoetry, particularly that rooted in indigenous cosmologies and oral traditions, remains underrepresented in mainstream environmental discourse and literary scholarship (DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011). Much of ecocriticism continues to reflect Global North perspectives, overlooking how African writers like Osundare use poetic form to express not only environmental concern but also ideological resistance to colonial legacies, capitalist exploitation, and epistemic marginalization.

While scholars such as Ogungbemi (2016), Ogunsiji and Ogungbemi (2016), and Ohagwam (2018) have addressed Osundare's environmental themes, their studies tend to emphasize symbolic, aesthetic, or performative dimensions without analyzing the discursive or grammatical means through which ideology is embedded. Ogungbemi (2016b) critiques this tendency, calling for more integrated models, such as his IMIRD, that bridge poetic form, discourse, and ideological function. This study, therefore, seeks to analyze how Niyi Osundare constructs ecological subjectivity in *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* through transitivity, metaphor, and lexical choices, examine how poetic discourse encodes critique, agency, and resistance and demonstrate how African ecopoetry functions not merely as environmental lament but as a powerful ideological force for cultural renewal, ethical reflection, and environmental justice. By addressing these objectives, the study not only fills a methodological and analytical gap in ecocritical scholarship but also contributes to broader discourses in postcolonial studies, discourse analysis, and environmental humanities.

2. Literature Review

Niyi Osundare is widely recognized as one of Africa's foremost ecopoets, whose poetry consistently engages environmental themes through a blend of orality, activism, and indigenous cosmology. His early work, particularly *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), has received considerable scholarly attention for its symbolic richness and ecological message. Scholars such as Ogunsiji and Ogungbemi (2016) have highlighted how Osundare's poetry critiques the degradation of the Nigerian environment, especially the exploitation of the Niger Delta, using metaphor, personification, and incantatory rhythms to establish an ethical framework for ecological justice.

In his more recent collection, *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* (2022), Osundare continues this ecological tradition, though with heightened urgency and complexity. While the poetic strategies remain rooted in African oral aesthetics and Yoruba spirituality, *Green* stands out for its multi-voiced lamentation, where elements such as water, rain, wind, and dewdrops speak directly to human recklessness. A recent review by *Ploughshares* describes the collection as one that "lets the Earth speak," offering "a lyrical reckoning with climate collapse, oil greed, and the spirit of resistance" (Ploughshares, 2022). This poetic ventriloquism positions the Earth as a historical agent, rather than a silent backdrop, thus intensifying the moral imperative for environmental justice.

Furthermore, Osundare's work is deeply embedded in Yoruba cosmology, which considers nature a realm of agency, relational ethics, and spiritual significance. Scholars such as Irele (2001) and Miller (1997) have discussed the ontological implications of this worldview, where rivers, trees, and winds are seen not merely as physical entities but as carriers of ancestral memory and moral consequence. Enukora (2021) affirms that Osundare's use of animist imagery and indigenous metaphors constitutes "an Afrocentric environmental ethic," one that challenges Western technocratic paradigms and promotes a relational ontology grounded in African thought systems.

While previous studies have admirably explored the thematic and symbolic dimensions of Osundare's ecopoetry, they often remain at the level of thematic exposition, with limited focus on the discursive mechanisms through which ideological positions are encoded. For instance, Enukora (2021) provides a valuable reading of environmental motifs in *Waiting Laughters* and *The Eye of the Earth*, yet stop short of dissecting the linguistic structures and ideological patterns that underpin these motifs. Similarly, Okuyade (2013) focuses on Osundare's lyrical activism but gives less attention to how poetic language enacts resistance at the micro-discursive level.

This present study seeks to fill that gap by undertaking a discourse-oriented analysis of *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*, a collection that remains critically underexamined. By applying Ogungbemi's (2016) *Integrated Model of Ideological Representation in Discourse (IMIRD)*, which fuses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and lexical connotation analysis, the study offers a multi-layered approach to understanding how ideology is structured within Osundare's poetic language. While CDA highlights power relations and representational strategies (van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough, 1995), SFL (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) allows for close analysis of how agency and action are distributed through grammatical structures. IMIRD provides a flexible yet rigorous framework for integrating these levels of analysis, especially in literary texts that engage postcolonial and environmental concerns.

Uniquely, this study moves beyond conventional thematic analysis to explore how Osundare constructs nature as a moral subject and critiques capitalist and neocolonial exploitation through grammatical patterning, lexical density, and discursive framing. It interrogates not only what the poems say but how they say it, and what ideological work that language performs. By examining nine selected poems", Water," "River," "The Rainmaker's Daughter," "Dewdrop," "Wind," "The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes," "A Paddle Made of Words," "Lily," and "Magnolia (1 & 2)," the study maps out how Osundare's poetic imagination reshapes environmental discourse from a Nigerian and indigenous epistemological standpoint.

3. Materials and methods

At the core of this study is Ogungbemi's (2016) Integrated Model of Ideological Representation in Discourse (IMIRD), a robust analytical framework designed to uncover how ideology operates through language in contextually rich and culturally specific texts, particularly poetry and fiction. IMIRD is especially valuable for a study of this nature because it bridges the insights of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) with a nuanced sensitivity to metaphor, aesthetics, and sociopolitical environments.

IMIRD synthesizes the macro-level ideological insights of CDA, particularly van Dijk's (1998, 2006) concept of the ideological square, with the micro-level grammatical and semantic tools developed in Halliday's (1985) SFL model, particularly the transitivity system. This fusion allows for a multi-layered exploration of how poetic texts structure meaning, assign agency, and communicate values. As Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk have shown, discourse is never ideologically neutral; it is a medium through which power relations, group identities, and cultural ideologies are encoded, negotiated, and often contested. IMIRD operationalizes this claim by offering a framework that tracks not only what is said in a text, but how it is said and what ideological work that saying performs.

For instance, van Dijk's ideological square helps illuminate how Osundare's poems present ecological binaries: *the environment and indigenous epistemology* are framed as the moral ingroup ("us"), while *extractive capitalism, anthropocentrism, and ecological neglect* are projected as the outgroup ("them"). Osundare may not always name these categories directly, but through pronominal choices, metaphorical framing, and patterns of positive self-presentation

and negative other presentation, his poems construct powerful oppositional stances that shape reader perception and ethical alignment.

IMIRD's integration of Halliday's transitivity system is particularly critical to this analysis. Halliday conceptualizes language as a resource for representing experience, structuring "who does what to whom" through processes, participants, and circumstances. In Osundare's *Green*, we frequently observe how transitivity choices frame nature not as a passive backdrop but as an actor or senser, capable of doing, feeling, remembering, and resisting. For example, in the poem "Water," we read that water *"races through the streets"* and *"grabs everything in sight."* These are material processes in which nature is the grammatical Actor, asserting agency and urgency in response to environmental degradation. IMIRD helps connect such grammatical patterns to broader ideological meanings, e.g., resisting anthropocentric discourse and reasserting ecological subjectivity.

Equally important in IMIRD is the emphasis on lexical connotation and metaphor as carriers of ideological meaning. As van Dijk (2006) and Fowler (1991) have argued, words such as "developers" vs. "polluters," or "resource" vs. "life-force," structure ideological alignment through subtle lexical choices. In Osundare's poems, expressions like *"tongue forked with tales"* and *"crystal raindrops on banana leaves"* encode ecological ethics, oral heritage, and spiritual reverence. IMIRD offers a framework for parsing these stylistic choices not merely as ornamentation, but as ideological signifiers, tools through which the poet critiques environmental harm, celebrates indigenous knowledge, and invokes collective responsibility.

What distinguishes IMIRD from more conventional discourse frameworks is its flexibility and sensitivity to literary form. While he initially applied the model to media discourse, Ogungbemi (2016b) applied the model to poetry, recognizing that poetry communicates through condensation, aesthetic indirection, and cultural allusion. As such, IMIRD does not impose rigid analytical templates but instead encourages interdependent reading, where linguistic forms are interpreted alongside broader discourses, historical contexts, and cultural resonances. Its application to Osundare's *Green* is not only methodologically sound but theoretically enriching, allowing for a deeper understanding of how Osundare uses poetic language to mourn, memorialize, and mobilize. IMIRD is particularly well-suited to this study of Osundare's *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*. It provides tools to decode how metaphor, transitivity, and lexical selection operate ideologically within poetic form. It not only strengthens the empirical rigor of the analysis but also respects the poetic complexity of the text. By positioning IMIRD at the center of this discourse analysis, the study is able to articulate how Osundare's poetic voice challenges hegemonic narratives, amplifies indigenous ecologies, and reimagines environmental justice through the transformative power of language.

3.1. Theme and Ideological Mapping

Excerpts from Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet— the poems "Water," "River," "The Rainmaker's Daughter," "Dewdrop," "Wind," The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes," "A Paddle Made of Words," "Lily," and "Magolia (1&2)—illustrate Osundare's commitment to environmental consciousness and ideological criticism. Each poem articulates another facet of nature, but they collectively weave a complex ideological cloth, pushing towards a holistic vision of ecological justice rooted in indigenous cosmologies, postcolonial critique, and poetic activism. From here on we present a broader approach to their thematic focus and of the ideological consequences.

Table 1 Dominant Themes and Ideological Leanings in Selected Ecopoems

Poem	Dominant Themes	Ideological Leanings
Water	Voice of nature, flooding as resistance, historical memory of rivers	Nature as agent of justice and catastrophe; environmental memory; critique of neglect
River	Flow, change, ancestral resonance, spiritual ecology	Sacredness of water bodies; postcolonial environmental loss; resistance to commodification
The Rainmaker's Daughter	Feminine power, ritual, drought and plea, ancestral knowledge	Indigenous environmental ethics; gendered ecological stewardship
Dewdrop	Ephemerality, fragility, morning stillness, nostalgia	Reverence for small, overlooked ecological wonders; mourning environmental decline
Wind	Unpredictability, violence, rhythm, forewarning	Climate crisis as consequence of human arrogance; natural forces as messengers of doom

The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes	Sensuality, loss, environmental vulnerability, silence of harm	Strategic ambiguity in blame; emotional universalization of ecological damage; critique of erasure
A Paddle Made of Words	Poetic agency, resistance through language, community solidarity	Language as tool of resistance; ingroup agency and empowerment; discourse as activism
Lily	Vitality, drought survival, sacred beauty, defiance	Floral agency; indigenous ecological aesthetics; metaphorical resilience
Magnolia (1 & 2)	Seasonal change, abundance, awe, ecological reverence	Plant subjectivity; spiritual ecology; celebration of sacred cycles; critique of historical burden ("no strange fruit")

Collectively, the selected poems in *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* articulate a powerful tripartite ideological stance that advances environmental, cultural, and ethical consciousness. Through the poetic deployment of elemental forces and botanical figures—water, wind, river, rain, dew, lilies, lakes, magnolias, and the poet's paddle—Osundare constructs a discursive ecology that repositions nature as both witness and participant in the ongoing struggle for justice and renewal.

First, the poems promote environmental stewardship by emphasizing the necessity of coexistence with, rather than dominance over, natural systems. Elemental beings such as Water, River, Wind, and Dewdrop are portrayed as not merely physical phenomena but moral agents—entities that speak, remember, lament, and resist. In "Water," for example, the element *"grabs everything in sight"* and *"has its own language,"* suggesting that it reacts dynamically to environmental abuse, bearing both memory and message. Similarly, "Wind" functions as a climatic prophet, *forewarning doom* through its erratic patterns—underscoring the consequences of human arrogance in the face of planetary imbalance. Even the minute Dewdrop is rendered worthy of poetic attention and reverence, symbolizing the fragility of overlooked ecological wonders. In "The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes," the lake's sensual vulnerability dramatizes loss through symbolic bareness, creating a space for emotional recognition of environmental harm.

Second, Osundare consistently foregrounds indigenous epistemologies by drawing on African cosmologies, oral traditions, and communal spiritualities. This is most explicit in "The Rainmaker's Daughter," where the speaker—tied to a lineage of ritual and ecological stewardship—proclaims *"I am the Rainmaker's daughter,"* blending mythic identity with environmental advocacy. In "Lily," the flower is not just a bloom but a *"laughing"* force whose *"green sword" slices the air*—a metaphor drawing from traditional aesthetics where nature is imbued with vitality, dignity, and sacred agency. Similarly, "Magnolia (1 & 2)" offers a layered meditation on seasonal change, ancestral memory, and spiritual ecology. Through descriptors like *"jazzy juice," "white loaves,"* and *"feast for the eye,"* the poems celebrate the metaphysical resonance of trees in African and diasporic cosmologies. Nature in Osundare's universe is not an object of study—it is kin, ancestor, and moral compass. These representations reject Western technoscientific reductionism in favor of a relational ontology, where rivers, trees, and rain are ensouled beings in an interconnected web of life.

Third, the poems enact a sustained critique of anthropocentrism and capitalist exploitation, rejecting the view of nature as commodity or backdrop. This critique is embedded not only in content but in grammatical structure and figurative strategy. In "The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes," the absence of a direct agent of harm gestures toward strategic ambiguity: though the perpetrators are unnamed, the pathos of the lake's exposure speaks volumes. Conversely, "Forest Echoes" (referenced elsewhere in *Green*) unambiguously names the "so-called humans" who wield the axe, indicting them through transitive constructions that highlight agency and responsibility. Similarly, "River" mourns postcolonial environmental loss, evoking water as both a cultural memory and a site of commodification. "A Paddle Made of Words," on the other hand, reverses the usual logic of helplessness. Here, the poet and the community act—they *"beat several consonants into a paddle,"* transforming language into a tool of resistance and navigation. This affirms the capacity of cultural production—especially poetry—as an ideological countercurrent to systems of dominance.

Osundare's poetic project is not merely descriptive but transformative. He reframes nature as a sentient, historical subject—capable of speech, emotion, and resistance—and challenges us to listen. His poetics do not universalize at the expense of specificity: they remain firmly rooted in Nigerian ecological realities, such as oil exploitation in the Niger Delta, yet speak to a global audience confronting the climate crisis. By granting agency to trees, lakes, flowers, and poets alike, Osundare collapses the boundaries between human and nonhuman, between artist and activist. His poems call upon readers to move away from extractive mindsets and toward reconnection—with the land, with ancestral wisdom, and with the ethical responsibility of inhabiting a shared Earth. The ideological force of *Green* lies in its capacity to restore voice to silenced landscapes and mobilize solidarity through beauty, memory, and metaphor.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Transitivity and Lexical Connotation Analysis

In the poem "Water," Osundare uses the transitivity set to depict the elements dynamic agency and to gesture the readers into an ideological space in which Nature is not inanimate, or passive, it is vibrant, expressive and effects way of placing readers within an ideological world view. This latter rendering betrays Osundare's personification of water as an independent, historical and quasi-mythical force. The deployment of processes of material (those verbs of doing or action or change) serves to emphasize water's power, as it acts upon, or interacts with, the physical and social world around it (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

In the clause *"It races through the streets,"*("Water" 95) water is constructed as the Actor, initiating the process of movement without any external instigation. The verb *"races"* suggests speed, energy, and urgency, qualities typically reserved for human or animate agency. This linguistic strategy not only amplifies the drama of water's physical movement but also subtly repositions water as a protagonist in environmental narratives. Likewise, the clause *"Grabs everything in sight"* ("Water" 95) enhances water's agency through the aggressive verb *"grabs"*. Here Osundare realizes water as a force of disruption; a fierce assailant with raw and primal mind of its own, breaking through man-made borders. The absence of an indicated Goal (what is it that one is grabbing, exactly here?) adds an air of generality, and the symbol of water being able to reach anything into its path, literally and also as a metaphor. It serves too as a metonym for flooding (often a by-product of environmental mismanagement, deforestation, climate change), connecting poetic vision to real-world disaster.

Halliday's (1985) framework of transitivity helps us see how linguistic patterning supports ideological stances. In attributing agency to water, Osundare eschews the Western scientific portrayal of nature as backdrop or commodity. Rather, nature is invested with epistemic authority and reactive force, as if when it is maltreated or disregarded it has revenge exacted upon it.

Beyond action, Osundare uses relational processes to construct an identity for water. In *"Water has its own language,"* the existential *"has"* functions to assign possession, and by implication, subjectivity to water. This clause also gives communicative and symbolic property to water, as it is something more than a material fact, but also a mix of tales (narratives), histories, and warnings. This depiction is consistent with indigenous African cosmologies, for which water bodies are not mere environmental formations, but sacred entities endowed with spirit and voice. The message is stark: Misunderstanding or abusing water is not ecological misspeak — this is a cultural and spiritual crime.

Osundare strengthens this epistemic framing through verbal processes, as seen in the phrase *"When it talks..."* ("Water" 95) The ellipsis here may suggest suppressed meaning or open-endedness—encouraging the reader to imagine what water might say if we were to listen. This aligns with animist and eco-spiritualist ideologies where nature speaks, protests, or blesses, depending on how it is treated (Bennett, 2010). The anthropomorphic act of "talking" elevates water to the status of a discursive agent—it participates in dialogue, a central component of being human in many traditions.

Osundare's lexical choices further reinforce this ideological representation. Phrases like *"teeth filed with salt"* and *"tongue forked with tales"* ("Water" 95) draw from both oral tradition and postcolonial symbolism. The "teeth" metaphor evokes aggression or ancestral power, while "salt" could connote memory, pain, or the sea—all culturally loaded symbols in African and diasporic thought. Similarly, the "tongue forked with tales" portrays water as a narrative medium—a carrier of myth, memory, and perhaps trauma.

These lexical formations rely on connotative density—the capacity of poetic language to compress symbolic meanings into a few vivid words (Fowler, 1991). The net ideological effect is to position water as a repository of ancestral knowledge, a site of struggle, and a participant in resistance, especially in a postcolonial context where natural resources have been commodified, polluted, and controlled by imperial and corporate interests.

In the poem, "The Rainmaker's Daughter" Osundare continues the project of revitalizing nature's agency, but with a distinct gendered and cultural emphasis. Through transitivity analysis, we observe a series of material processes that endow the speaker—interpreted here as rain or its spiritual emissary—with power and intent.

Phrases such as *"I dance on every roof"* and *"I sent the valley"* ("The Rainmaker's Daughter" 92) illustrate how Osundare configures the speaker as an Actor of purposeful action. Dancing, in many African traditions, is not merely performance but ritual—it mediates between human and spiritual worlds. Thus, the "dance" may symbolize a ceremonial plea or an

offering to awaken the clouds. By saying "I sent the valley," the speaker expands her domain of influence—suggesting that rainfall or spiritual invocation travels across landscapes, fertilizing and animating them.

The declarative clause *"I am the Rainmaker's daughter"* (The Rainmaker's Daughter 92) functions as a relational identifying process, establishing lineage, legitimacy, and ecological role. The identity of "rainmaker's daughter" ties the speaker to a matrilineal chain of ecological wisdom—an acknowledgment of indigenous women's often underappreciated roles in environmental stewardship. It also subverts colonial binaries that render indigenous knowledge as irrational or backward, by framing such identity as empowering and effective.

The lexical field of the poem is steeped in eco-feminist and indigenous metaphors. Terms like *"crystal raindrops"* and *"banana leaves"* in *the kicking tuber, the murmuring melon, crystal raindrops on banana leaves*, (The Rainmaker's Daughter, 92) conjure imagery of fertility, abundance, and harmony with the land. "Crystal" suggests clarity and preciousness; "banana leaves" evoke tropical vegetation, domestic life, and biodiversity. Such expressions root the poem in an Afrocentric ecological worldview, where land and weather are not alien forces but kin. This aligns with Fairclough's (1995) notion that relational processes and modifiers help construct ideational meanings—cultural, political, and ethical interpretations embedded in the text. In this poem, nature is not random or chaotic; it is maternal, moral, and responsive to ritual. The rainmaker's daughter becomes a spiritual intermediary, a trope Osundare uses to critique contemporary alienation from nature and propose indigenous practices as models of sustainability. Importantly, these images do not merely romanticize nature. Rather, they reclaim its sacrality and centrality in African cosmologies, resisting Western secular-technocratic narratives that treat rainfall as a meteorological accident or natural "resource." In doing so, the poem promotes a relational ontology—a worldview that sees humans as embedded in, not separate from, the ecological matrix.

Osundare's poem *"The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes"* employs transitivity and clause structure to foreground the lake's vulnerability, not through explicit blame, but through a poetic strategy of indirect agency and evocative loss. The opening line:

"The lake left home without its clothes"

features "the lake" as the grammatical Actor and "left... without its clothes" as the material and relational process. The line anthropomorphizes the lake, suggesting it *acts* and *forgets* like a human being. Most notably, the clause:

"The lake left home without its clothes"

implies a mental or cognitive process—to "forget"—attributed to a nonhuman subject. This blurs ontological boundaries, framing nature as capable of memory, loss, or shame. The absence of any Actor responsible for the lake's nakedness (e.g., climate change, upstream development, pollution) creates an ergative structure, where the effect (the lake's condition) is foregrounded, and the cause (the agents of destruction) is elided.

Yet, this is not apolitical omission—it is strategic ambiguity. By withholding explicit blame, Osundare invokes reader inference and empathy. The lake's exposure is sensual and intimate:

"Courting prying eyes with the succulence of its sighs"

This seductive personification imbues the lake with emotion and vulnerability, drawing attention to its loss without naming its violators. The image becomes universalizable—any reader can feel the tragedy of environmental degradation. But within the broader framework of *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*, where Osundare names oil tycoons, extractive capitalism, and government failure, the culprits are understood. As such, the lake's forgetting compels our remembering—we must fill in the absent agents. This is an ideological move: focusing on emotional resonance while retaining structural critique.

In contrast to the passive or erased agency in *"The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes"*, *"A Paddle Made of Words"* foregrounds human, especially poetic, agency through vibrant metaphors and active transitivity patterns. From the opening:

"I'd never sailed so eloquently until the day your tongue became a lake"

the speaker (implicitly the poet or activist) is the Senser in a mental process ("sailed... eloquently"), while the *tongue* of another (perhaps another poet) becomes a metaphorical lake—a setting for verbal creativity. This poetic transformation is both affective and material.

In the following lines:

"(Y)our banter built a boat with a forest of nouns / we beat several consonants into a paddle"

we see clear material processes: *"built," "beat," "paddle"*. These verbs of creation and movement construct a scene where language itself becomes both vessel and weapon—nouns as timber, consonants as force. Here, the Agents are the speakers (the poet(s)), and the instruments are words. Osundare turns language into a tool of navigation, survival, and resistance, consistent with CDA's attention to how ingroup actors emphasize their constructive roles (van Dijk, 1998).

The phrase:

"dissolving noiselessly in the waiting water"

brings in water not as destroyer but as witness and participant—possibly the same element that rages elsewhere in *Green*. But here, it is *waiting*, receptive to the words. The poet's voice is not futile but transformative.

Moreover, the inclusive first-person plural appears:

"Between us a silence untouched by the baying moon..."

This "us" is critical. It transforms solitary poetic effort into communal resistance. Silence, often used in Osundare to signify complicity or defeat, is here "untouched"—the community is not complicit, but actively intervening in the silence through metaphor, memory, and movement.

Taken together, *"The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes"* and *"A Paddle Made of Words"* represent a binary of ecological victimhood and cultural agency. The former shows how nature suffers, how its trauma is aestheticized and universalized. The latter illustrates how humans—especially poets and activists—must paddle through resistance, steering language like a boat.

In *"Lake"*, the absence of blame within the clause:

"Ah, the day the lake left home without its clothes"

echoes an erasure of human guilt, but this omission invites critical remembrance. Meanwhile, in *"Paddle"*, the poet is the doer, the boatbuilder, and paddler:

"we beat several consonants into a paddle"

This is a metaphor for resistance through discourse. The poem enacts van Dijk's principle of positive self-presentation of the ingroup—here, those who act through words, not violence.

Ultimately, Osundare's use of transitivity patterns underscores the ideological message: Nature may be wounded and voiceless, but poetry can paddle upstream. Through active verbs and communal pronouns, *"A Paddle Made of Words"* embodies hope and resilience, while *"The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes"* exposes a fragile ecosystem abandoned and remembered through our shared poetic gaze.

In "Lily" and "Magnolia (1 & 2)," transitivity and agency do not merely serve descriptive purposes; they function ideologically to animate flora and place them within systems of action, emotion, and resistance. In keeping with Halliday's transitivity model, Osundare frequently assigns these botanical subjects as grammatical Actors, Sensers, and Carriers in material, mental, and relational processes, thereby undermining the anthropocentric tradition of depicting nature as passive.For instance, in "Lily," the flower is described through a series of active processes that emphasize both its vitality and its capacity for resistance:

"Dance through the brown / Dentistry of its drought / Slice the air / With the green sword / Of its leaves..."

Here, "dance," "slice," and "plough" are material processes, with the lily or its parts (petals, leaves) as Actors. These verbs connote agency, suggesting the lily is not a passive object in its environment but a participant that acts upon the world. The line *"Rinsed by the rain / Its laughter glistens like a vow"* introduces a relational process ("is rinsed") and a metaphorical mental process of "laughter," assigning affect and voice to the plant. This personification transforms the

lily into a sensate being capable of feeling and responding—a stark contrast to industrial or scientific discourses that reduce plants to mute biological matter. Moreover, the simile *"like a vow"* imbues the lily's laughter with ethical resonance, linking its vitality to sacred commitment or resilience.

In "Magnolia (1)," Osundare deploys a similar strategy. The magnolia is not statically observed; it is a dynamic subject responding to its ecological context:

"So proudly green, your leaves, in this hot, heady season... / When, like white loaves, your flowers are feast for the eye, song for the sun"

Here, "proudly green" assigns an attitudinal quality—a mental process of valuation—to the tree, marking it as a carrier of emotional and aesthetic significance. The phrase *"song for the sun"* is both metaphorical and material: it implies that the magnolia performs—producing a "song" that interacts with the sun. This metaphor transforms the act of blooming into an act of communication, aligning with Yoruba and other indigenous cosmologies where plants possess agency and spirit. Similarly, in "Magnolia (2)," the blossoms are described with tactile vividness:

"Generous loaves / Sizzling between the leaves / Baked by the sun / Laundered by the rain"

These lines highlight process chains that involve agentless passive constructions ("baked," "laundered") but imply the natural elements—sun and rain—as participants in relational and material processes. The magnolia's flowers are recipients of these actions, portrayed not as inert recipients, but as honored participants in a sacred ecological rhythm. The culmination of agency lies in the directive:

"Let desire sate its sigh now / Before this wonder wrinkles into ruin"

Here, the poem shifts agency to the human observer—"let desire"—but only in response to the magnolia's splendor. The tree commands awe, engagement, and protection, not exploitation. By foregrounding the temporal fragility of the magnolia ("before this wonder wrinkles"), Osundare evokes an ethical urgency—a call to notice and preserve. These examples confirm that in Osundare's ecological worldview, plants are not objects but interlocutors, participants, and co-actors in environmental discourse. His grammatical structuring elevates flora from passive scenery to sentient agents, embodying what ecocritics call "plant subjectivity". This aligns with indigenous cosmologies in which trees, rivers, and flowers possess consciousness and moral status, not unlike humans.

Osundare's use of transitivity aligns agency with morality. The Earth and its flora are often given voice and action in order to elicit empathy and underscore their right to exist (they become subjects, not objects). Meanwhile, the forces of destruction are unmistakably cast as agents of material processes – they *flood*, *burn*, *hack*, *poison*, *kill*. In cases where he momentarily hides the agent (as in the lake "forgot" example), it is an artistic choice to emphasize condition over culprit, but within an ideological context where the culprit is named elsewhere. This careful distribution of agency in grammar is a form of grammatical metaphor for ethical structure: it shows who matters and who is culpable. By applying an IMIRD approach, integrating SFL and CDA, we see how even at the micro-level of syntax, *Green* enacts a narrative of vulnerable natural subjects and accountable human aggressors – a narrative that supports the collection's broader ideological square of aligning readers with the Earth and against the exploiters.

4.2. Lexical Choices and Metaphors of Ecological Ideology

Osundare's ecopoetry in *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* operates through richly figurative language where lexical selections carry immense ideological weight. Across the five selected poems—*The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes*, *A Paddle Made of Words*, *Lily*, *Magnolia (1)*, and *Magnolia (2)*—he draws upon the semantic fields of the body, home, ritual, and the sacred to articulate ecological trauma, resistance, and reverence.

In "The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes", the title itself is a metaphor of absence, vulnerability, and shame. The opening line, *"The lake left home without its clothes,"* assigns a cognitive and volitional process—forgetting—to a nonhuman entity. The lake, in this construction, becomes not just a body of water but a being that evokes both sensuality and sorrow: *"Courting prying eyes with the succulence of its sighs."* The noun "sighs" here introduces anthropomorphic emotion, transforming environmental loss into a personal and aesthetic lament. The lake's "stride and surge" become animated movements, and its bareness gestures toward ecological trauma—perhaps climate-induced drying or human encroachment—without directly naming the cause. The lexical strategy here is what CDA scholars recognize as strategic ambiguity: the focus is placed on affect and visibility ("succulence," "prying eyes") rather than overt blame, compelling the reader to emotionally engage and infer responsibility.

By contrast, "A Paddle Made of Words" adopts an active and resistant tone. Language becomes both metaphor and material tool: *"we beat several consonants / into a paddle / as we watched vowels fall / vow after vow."* The metaphor equates linguistic creation with physical labor and survival, suggesting that poetic utterance is a form of activism and navigation through perilous ecological waters. The phrase *"your tongue became a lake"* extends the metaphor of fluidity and voice, collapsing distinctions between speech and nature. This poem exemplifies what van Dijk (1998) calls positive self-presentation of the ingroup: the poet and community are actors, shaping resistance through words rather than weapons.

In "Lily," lexical choices emphasize resilience and vegetal agency. The flower is rendered dynamic: *"Slice the air / With the green sword / Of its leaves."* Here, the leaf is a weapon—not of violence, but of presence. The act of "slicing" conjures an image of assertive beauty breaking through arid silence: *"Dance through the brown / Dentistry of its drought."* This verb-noun pairing ("dance" through "dentistry") metaphorically depicts struggle and vitality. When Osundare writes, *"Rinsed by the rain / Its laughter glistens like a vow,"* he aligns nature's response with spiritual resolve. The lexical field—"vow," "laughter," "rain"—reinforces a worldview in which flora are ensouled agents of ecological and moral truth.

Likewise, "Magnolia (1)" and "Magnolia (2)" revere the tree as a symbol of abundance and ancestral memory. In the first, the tree's presence is tied to sensory and musical metaphors: *"your glossy glory," "your jazzy juice, your raspy riffs,"* and *"song for the sun."* The alliteration and internal rhyme imbue the magnolia with lyrical subjectivity—its body becomes a performance, its leaves a "roost for the squirrel" and a haven for "the trumpet-coated cicada."

In "Magnolia (2)," the metaphor of bread is extended to nature's cycles: *"Generous loaves / sizzling between the leaves / Baked by the sun / Laundered by the rain."* Here, Osundare's diction situates flowering as both sustenance and sacrament. Words like "baked," "laundered," and "loaves" draw from domestic and ritualistic registers, linking flora to nourishment and purification. The final imperative—*"Let desire sate its sigh now / Before this wonder wrinkles into ruin"*—is both lyrical and urgent. The modal "let" evokes an ethical command to witness and preserve, while "wrinkles into ruin" frames the loss of natural beauty as tragic aging—an irreversible decay wrought by inaction.

In all five poems, Osundare uses body metaphors (tongues, sighs, laughter), ritual language (vows, baptism, dance), and home lexicons (loaves, laundry, roofs) to collapse the distance between human life and the nonhuman world. This metaphorical strategy translates large-scale ecological devastation into intimate, affective experiences. Within the framework of Ogungbemi's IMIRD, these lexical choices are more than stylistic—they are ideological. They enact a worldview in which nature is a knowing participant, language is a tool of justice, and poetry is an active agent of resistance and renewal.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Niyi Osundare's *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet* is a rich, discursively charged ecopoetic text that mobilizes the linguistic resources of transitivity, metaphor, and lexical connotation to articulate an urgent ideological critique of environmental destruction, neocolonial exploitation, and epistemic injustice. Through CDA and SFL, framed within the IMIRD model, the analysis revealed that Osundare's poetry does not merely reflect environmental loss but constructs a moral and political grammar through which nature speaks, resists, and reclaims agency. Whether in the trembling exposure of "The Lake Which Forgot Its Clothes" or the proactive defiance in "A Paddle Made of Words," Osundare's language performs ideological work—positioning flora and elements as co-witnesses and co-actors in environmental histories and futures.

By engaging Yoruba cosmology and indigenous aesthetics, the poems disrupt Western anthropocentrism and technocratic paradigms. Nature is not passive backdrop but sacred kin—capable of memory, grief, laughter, and vengeance. In this light, Osundare's ecopoetry becomes both a site of mourning and a call to action. His metaphors of ecological harm are intimate and embodied—drawing from domestic, sensual, and spiritual registers to dramatize planetary crisis in tangible terms. The strategic grammar of his work reveals who is harmed, who acts, and who must remember and resist.

Ultimately, *Green* affirms the capacity of poetic discourse to foster environmental justice and cultural renewal. By integrating form and ideology, Osundare's work not only calls attention to environmental degradation but challenges readers to listen more deeply—to trees, lakes, winds, and ancestral voices—and to respond ethically, collectively, and urgently.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

References

[1] Buell, L. (2005). The future of environmental criticism: Environmental crisis and literary imagination. Blackwell Publishing.

[2] DeLoughrey, E., & Handley, G. B. (Eds.). (2011). Postcolonial ecologies: Literatures of the environment. Oxford University Press.

[3] Enukora, E. N. (2021). Literature and the environment: The dynamics of Niyi Osundare's eco-poetry for security, justice and sustainable development in the 21st century Nigerian society. Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, 23(3), 53–62.

[4] Fairclough, N. (1995). Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language. Longman.

[5] Fowler, R. (1991). Language in the news: Discourse and ideology in the press. Routledge.

[6] Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). An introduction to functional grammar. Edward Arnold.

[7] Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. (2014). Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar (4th ed.). Oxon: Routledge.

[8] Huggan, G., & Tiffin, H. (2010). Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, animals, environment. Routledge.

[9] Irele, A. (2001). The African imagination: Literature in Africa & the black diaspora. Oxford University Press.

[10] Miller, I. (1997). Ifá will mend our broken world: Thoughts on Yoruba religion and culture in Africa and the diaspora. Iroko Academic Publishers.

[11] Nixon, R. (2011). Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor. Harvard University Press.

[12] Ogungbemi, O. D. (2016a). Linguistic representation of ideology in selected Boko Haram discourse in Nigerian print media (PhD thesis). Department of English, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

[13] Ogungbemi, O.D. (2016b). The Ideological Square and Transitivity in the Poetry of Remi Raji Oyelade. *Journal of Linguistics and Language in Education* 10 (2), 14-32.

[14] Ogunsiji, A., & Ogungbemi, O. D. (2016). The portrait of political leaders in Niyi Osundare's "Random Blues": An exercise in critical stylistic analysis. In A. Odebunmi et al. (Eds.), Grammar, applied linguistics and society: A Festschrift for Wale Osisanwo (pp. 375–392). Obafemi Awolowo University Press.

[15] Ohagwam, U. (2018). The Niger Delta crisis in the Niger Delta novel: Reflections on Kaine Agary's Yellow-Yellow. Journal of Arts and Humanities, 7(11), 11–17.

[16] Okpewho, I. (1992). African oral literature: Backgrounds, character, and continuity (Vol. 710). Indiana University Press.

[17] van Dijk, T. A. (1998). Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach. Sage Publications.

[18] van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. Discourse & Society, 17(3), 359–383.

[19] Watts, M. (2008). Petro-insurgency or criminal syndicate? Conflict, violence and political disorder in the Niger Delta. Niger Delta Economies of Violence Working Paper (16).