IJEMD-SS, 4 (1) (2025) https://doi.org/ 10.54938/ijemdss.2025.04.1.443

International Journal of Emerging Multidisciplinaries:
Social Science

Research Paper
Journal Homepage: www.ojs.ijemd.com
ISSN (print): 2957-5311 ISSN (online): 2958-0277

Exploring Bodily Metaphor and Rhetorics of Dissent in Niyi Osundare's and Joe Ushie's Poetics

Azetu Azashi AGYO [1*]

1.English and Literary Studies, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria.

Abstract

The escalating climate crises and socio-economic instability in Africa underscore the urgent need for a reimagined relationship between humanity and the environment. The works of Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare, prominent figures in African ecopoetry, offer a compelling lens through which to explore this intersection. While existing studies have examined the use of environmental themes in African literature, there is a dearth of research focusing specifically on bodily metaphor, revolutionary temper, and the call for sustainable development in osundare and ushie's poetics. Previous analyses have primarily concentrated on traditional aesthetics or political power without fully exploring how bodily metaphors and revolutionary poetics are employed to critique environmental degradation and systemic oppression. This study addresses this gap by providing a nuanced analysis of how both poets deploy visceral imagery to advocate for environmental justice and systemic change. Grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory [21], ecocriticism [18] and postcolonial theory [21], said this study reveals how Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare use bodily metaphors and revolutionary poetics to critique environmental degradation and systemic oppression. Ushie's Hill Songs and Song of the Dead employ metaphors of parasitism and bodily violation to expose exploitative capitalist structures, while The Hills Will Rise Again presents a narrative of resilience against ecological and economic plunder. Similarly, Osundare's works, such as Our Earth Will Not Die and Ours to Plough, Not to Plunder, denounce industrial pollution and advocate for sustainable practices through urgent, revolutionary rhetoric. By engaging with African ecopoetry as a mode of literary activism, this study highlights how Ushie and Osundare's works contribute to contemporary discourses on sustainability, governance, and resistance. In an era of escalating climate crises and socio-economic instability, their poetry remains profoundly relevant, urging a reimagined relationship between humanity and the environment. Furthermore, by examining how these poets frame

Email addresses: agyo2016@fuwukari.edu.ng

environmental justice as an extension of political resistance, this research underscores the role of African ecopoetry in mobilizing social change and advocating for sustainable futures. The findings of this study contribute to existing scholarship by demonstrating the power of literature to inspire ecological consciousness and challenge systemic injustices, offering a nuanced understanding of how poetry can serve as a tool for environmental activism and political mobilization.

Keywords: Bodily metaphor; Conceptual metaphor; Joe Ushie; Niyi Osundare; Rhetoric of dissent; Postcolonial theory; Ecocriticism.

1. Introduction

Metaphor, as a linguistic and cognitive tool, has been a central focus in literary and linguistic studies. It serves as a bridge between abstract ideas and concrete experiences, enabling writers to convey complex themes in relatable terms. Among the various types of metaphors, *bodily metaphors*—those that use the human body as a source domain to conceptualize abstract ideas—have gained significant attention in recent scholarship [21]. In African literature, bodily metaphors often serve as a medium for expressing socio-political, cultural, and environmental concerns, reflecting the interconnectedness of human experiences and the natural world. Environmental degradation, socio-political injustice, and economic exploitation have long been central themes in African literature. Writers and poets, particularly in postcolonial Nigeria, have used literature as a medium to interrogate these crises, advocating for socio-political transformation and environmental sustainability. Among the most prominent voices in this discourse are Niyi Osundare and Joe Ushie, whose poetry embodies a fusion of revolutionary poetics, bodily metaphors, and ecological consciousness. Their works serve as both artistic expressions and political commentaries, critiquing the predatory governance, environmental destruction, and socio-economic inequalities that plague postcolonial Nigeria.

Niyi Osundare, a prominent member of the second generation Nigerian poets [7], who is also widely recognized as one of Nigeria's most influential poets, integrates ecocriticism and political activism into his poetry. His collection, *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), is regarded as a seminal text in African ecopoetry, addressing the commodification of nature, capitalist exploitation, and the urgent need for environmental preservation. Scholars such as [26] and [23] argue that Osundare's poetry functions as a call to action, urging humanity to resist destructive capitalist forces and adopt a more harmonious relationship with nature. His works align with the broader African literary tradition that critiques systemic oppression while advocating for social and ecological justice [12].

Joe Ushie's poetry, particularly in collections such as *Hill Songs* (2000) and *Lamb at the Shrine* (2005), powerfully explores the intersection of environmental degradation, political corruption, and human suffering. Through visceral bodily metaphors and vivid imagery, Ushie depicts the afflictions of the marginalized and critiques the exploitative practices of political elites, aligning his work with the revolutionary traditions of African literature and echoing the thematic concerns of writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, and Tanure Ojaide. The poetic imagery of fractured bodies and predatory

governance in his work functions as a potent indictment of Nigeria's socio-political and ecological crises [1]. In *Hill Songs,* for instance, Ushie employs metaphors such as mosquitoes drilling and sucking peasant blood—symbolizing the exploitation of natural resources by the powerful—to highlight the relentless and destructive behavior of exploiters, and he uses the hills as a symbol of refuge and life, advocating for environmental consciousness and ethical responsibility [11] . His poetry is replete with concrete sensory details—"sunburnt hills," "rivers choked with weeds," "forests bleeding green"—which immerse readers in the natural world and underscore the urgency of environmental preservation. Moreover, Ushie's work draws from indigenous Bette-Bendi epistemology, portraying the inseparability of human and environmental values and offering an alternative ecocritical perspective that emphasizes mutual dependence between humans and the non-human world.

Despite a growing body of research on metaphor in African literature, there remains a paucity of scholarly attention to the intersection of bodily metaphors, revolutionary temper, and sustainable development in the poetry of Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare. Existing studies have primarily focused on thematic and stylistic analyses, often overlooking how the poets' use of bodily metaphors contributes to discourses on sustainability and social change. This gap necessitates a comprehensive analysis of how Ushie and Osundare's poetics engage with the urgent need for sustainable development in postcolonial Africa.

The aim of this study is to investigate bodily metaphor and rhetorics of dissent in the ecopoetics of Niyi Osundare and Joe Ushie. Specifically, the objectives are to analyze the use of bodily metaphors in their poetry and their role in expressing a revolutionary temper; to examine how these metaphors reflect the call for sustainable development; and to contribute to the growing body of scholarship on the intersection of literature, sustainability, and social change in African contexts.

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it deepens the understanding of metaphor as both a literary and cognitive tool in African poetry. Second, it highlights the role of literature in addressing contemporary global challenges such as environmental degradation and social inequality. Finally, it situates the works of Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare within the broader discourse on sustainable development, offering new insights into the relevance of African literature in global sustainability efforts.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative research design, employing textual analysis as the primary method of data collection and interpretation. Selected poems from Joe Ushie's and Niyi Osundare's collections—specifically *Hill Songs* and *Eye of the Earth*—will be analyzed for their use of bodily metaphors and thematic implications. The analysis is guided by the principles of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Ecocriticism, ensuring a robust interdisciplinary approach. The scope of the study is limited to selected poems from Ushie and Osundare's poetry collections, chosen for their rich use of bodily metaphors and engagement with themes of revolution and sustainability. The focus does not extend to their prose or other literary forms.

The theoretical framework draws on ecocriticism, postcolonial theory, and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as articulated by [21]. CMT posits that metaphors are not merely linguistic devices but are fundamental to human thought and understanding. This study redeploys CMT to explore how Ushie and

Osundare's bodily metaphors shape readers' perceptions of socio-political and environmental issues. Ecocriticism, as developed by scholars such as [18], provides a lens to analyze environmental themes, while postcolonial theory, particularly the writings of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, informs the analysis of political oppression and resistance. Revolutionary poetics, as articulated by [22] and [2] , offer insights into poetry's function as socio-political activism. Thus, the study examines how Osundare and Ushie's poetry engages with ecological and political discourses, positioning literature as a tool for resistance and advocacy. It specifically investigates the use of bodily metaphors to articulate socio-political oppression and environmental degradation, analyzes the revolutionary temperament in their poetry as a mode of resisting systemic injustice, and explores how their works contribute to the discourse on sustainable development and ecological preservation.

Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), introduced in 1980, revolutionized metaphor studies by asserting that metaphors "are not merely linguistic devices but fundamental to human thought" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 272). This paradigm shift redefined metaphors as cognitive tools that structure subconscious conceptual systems, exemplified by mappings such as ARGUMENT IS WAR, where language about arguments borrows systematically from the domain of war—evident in expressions like "I demolished his argument" or "I attacked every weak point in his argument" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 4). CMT posits that "concepts are metaphorically structured in a systematic way," with source domains (concrete experiences) mapped onto target domains (abstract concepts), facilitating understanding through experiential frameworks (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 52). For example, metaphorical representations of ailing bodies in poetry can map onto deteriorating ecosystems, aligning with CMT's emphasis on cross-domain mappings from the concrete (body) to the abstract (environmental crisis). This approach illuminates how poetic language shapes readers' ontological engagement with socio-ecological realities, as "metaphor is essential to human understanding and as a mechanism for creating new meaning and new realities in our lives," grounded in both physical and cultural experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 196).

Cheryl Glotfelty's foundational definition of ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" provides the basis for analyzing ecological themes in literature, while Clark's Anthropocene ecocriticism extends this by addressing literature's role in navigating "biospheric urgencies" and "more-than-human ontologies." By examining Osundare's depictions of environmental degradation, the research demonstrates how poetry fosters "eco-consciousness" [18] while confronting anthropogenic crises such as climate change. This earth-centered approach counters anthropocentrism by positioning nature as an active agent rather than a passive backdrop. Within African literary scholarship, ecocriticism has gained prominence since Byron Caminero-Santangelo's *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology* (2014), which focuses on the need for environmental justice and the cultivation of eco-consciousness in Nigeria. Nigerian scholars such as [14, 27, 5, 8, 6 and 19] have further explored eco-conscious Nigerian literature, addressing themes of ecological despoliation, resistance to oppression and neoliberalism, and the consequences of violence on both human and non-human agents. Egya's work, in particular, highlights the previously

marginalized status of the non-human in African ecological discourse. The current article builds on these critical engagements by privileging metaphorical rhetoric in its analysis.

Resistance Poetics and Decolonial epistemologies

The study also draws on Fanon's psycho-political analysis of colonial dehumanization and Said's critique of Orientalist discourse. Fanon's emphasis on "revolutionary action" to dismantle internalized oppression resonates in the poets' portrayals of resistance against neocolonial exploitation, while Said's framework of "othering" elucidates how environmental racism and resource extraction perpetuate colonial power dynamics. This dual lens reveals poetry's capacity to expose "the enduring legacies of colonialism" in ecological devastation while envisioning decolonial futures. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's and Chinua Achebe's theories of literary activism inform the examination of poetry as resistance, demonstrating how verse becomes "a tool for socio-political activism" (Ngũgĩ, 1986). This aligns with Clark's assertion that ecocriticism fosters "progressive, liberatory politics" through canonical reconfigurations. The poets' metaphorical strategies exemplify what Spivak terms "subaltern speech acts," disrupting dominant narratives through aesthetic innovation.

The study's theoretical integration yields three key contributions: first, it demonstrates how bodily metaphors reconceptualize environmental crises as visceral, immediate phenomena; second, it bridges cognitive linguistics (CMT) with postcolonial ecocriticism, addressing Clark's call for "novel vocabularies" in Anthropocene scholarship; third, it expands Glotfelty's Western-centric ecocriticism by centering African literary activism and indigenous ecological knowledge.

As Clark observes, ecocriticism's value lies in its "revisionist force" to reinterpret texts through environmental lenses. By applying this to Osundare and Ushie's works, the study advances scholarship on literature's role in sustainability discourse, particularly relevant given Nigeria's oil-related ecological crises. The framework's emphasis on "embodied metaphors" and "revolutionary poetics" offers methodological innovations for analyzing Global South literatures amidst climate breakdown. Future research could extend this model to examine sumbiocritical relationships (symbiosis-focused ecocriticism) in African oral traditions, further decentralizing Western theoretical paradigms.

Ecological Consciousness in African Literature

African literature has long served as a powerful medium for exploring the complex relationships between humans and the natural world. Through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism, this essay examines how contemporary African writers engage with environmental themes to reflect on colonial legacies, cultural identity, and social justice. Works by prominent authors such as Chinua Achebe, Frantz Fanon, Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare, and Joe Ushie, have highlighted the ways in which literature inspires environmental awareness, critique capitalist exploitation, and advocate for sustainable futures.

Ecocriticism, as applied to African literature, interrogates the interconnectedness of culture, colonialism, and the environment. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a seminal text in this regard. While not explicitly an ecocritical work, Achebe's depiction of ecological disasters—such as flooding and failed yam harvests—symbolizes the destabilization of indigenous environmental stewardship, framing colonialism as an ecological and cultural rupture [20]. This narrative underscores how colonialism disrupted the

symbiotic relationship between precolonial Igbo society and nature, highlighting the need for a decolonized understanding of environmental stewardship. This notion finds correlation in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* which expands environmental discourse by linking environmental exploitation to systemic colonial violence. Fanon argues that true liberation requires reimagining humanity's relationship with nature beyond Eurocentric paradigms. He posits that "each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity" [17]. This call for a *new humanism* underscores the necessity of integrating environmental justice into postcolonial nation-building, emphasising that ecological consciousness is integral to political liberation.

In another critical stance, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* further illuminates how African writers employ spatial and environmental metaphors rooted in lived experiences to challenge Western abstractions of nature. Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphor is a "fundamental mechanism of mind" shaping perceptions of physical and social experience (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 3). This insight highlights the role of language in shaping ecological consciousness and underscores the importance of indigenous epistemologies in redefining environmentalism

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind* posits language as the bedrock of cultural and environmental identity. By rejecting colonial languages, African writers reclaim indigenous epistemologies that encode sustainable environmental practices (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986, p. 4). This linguistic decolonization is crucial for reimagining ecological relationships that are rooted in African cultural traditions rather than imposed Western models. Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues & Home Songs* exemplifies this approach in his adoption of Urhobo oral traditions to critique oil-induced ecological trauma in Nigeria's Niger Delta. Ojaide's poetry juxtaposes precolonial *green* landscapes with post-industrial dystopias, arguing that ecological dereliction perpetuates collective trauma [24]. His work demonstrates how literature can serve as a platform for environmental advocacy and cultural revival.

Similarly, Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* employs Yoruba proverbs and nature imagery to critique deforestation and urbanization. Osundare's poetry positions environmental stewardship as a cultural imperative, blending environmental advocacy with cultural revival. His use of imagery such as "The sky carries a boil of anguish / Let it burst... the seeds noiseless in the dormitory of the soil" (Osundare 1986, p. 28)—underscores the interconnectedness of human and environmental well-being which is captured in the poet's use of bodily metaphors.

Literature as Activism

Joe Ushie's poetry bridges environmental and social critique by linking ecological degradation to political corruption and violence. In *Lambs at the Shrine* and *Eclipse in Rwanda*, Ushie employs ecological metaphors to amplify calls for systemic change. His work exemplifies what Romanus Aboh terms "modality as a discourse strategy," where ecological metaphors serve as tools for political mobilization (Aboh 2015, p. 184). Ushie's poetry, such as *Badagry Chains*, links modern governance to colonial violence, condemning political exploitation through powerful imagery (Ushie 2005, p. 26).

Contemporary Nigerian literature, as surveyed in various analyses, reveals a trend toward "eco-protest literature. Writers like Ojaide and Osundare expose how multinational oil companies and negligent governance exacerbate environmental crises, positioning literature as a platform for grassroots mobilization. These narratives align with Fanon's vision of liberation, where ecological consciousness

fuels collective struggle against neocolonial exploitation. Consequently, it therefore suffices to say that, African literature emerges as a dynamic site for negotiating ecological sovereignty, decolonization, and social transformation. Through a conscious redeployment of indigenous knowledge systems and critiquing neocolonial extractivism, writers like Achebe, Osundare, Ojaide, and Ushie redefine environmentalism as both a cultural imperative and a political act. Their works challenge readers to envision liberation as inseparable from the revitalization of human-nature relationships. As the world grapples with climate change and environmental degradation, African literature offers a powerful lens through which to explore these issues, advocating for a future where ecological consciousness is integral to social justice and cultural identity.

The interplay between poetry, environmental sustainability, and revolutionary discourse is a defining feature of contemporary Nigerian literature, particularly in the works of Niyi Osundare and Joe Ushie. Both poets engage with the socio-political and environmental crises that plague Nigeria, using their poetry as a platform for resistance, advocacy, and environmental consciousness. Osundare, widely regarded as a leading figure in modern Nigerian poetry, has employed ecopoetics as a means of critiquing environmental degradation and capitalist exploitation. Ushie, on the other hand, extends this discourse by employing poetry as a form of political activism against environmental and socio-economic injustices.

Niyi Osundare's Biographical Background and Literary Contributions

Niyi Osundare, born on March 12, 1947, in Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria, is one of the most celebrated poets of the modern African literary tradition. His prolific career, spanning over four decades, includes works such as *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983), *Village Voices* (1984), and *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), which won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. A scholar and activist, Osundare obtained his PhD from the University of York, Toronto, before becoming a professor of English at the University of Ibadan in 1989. Osundare's poetry has been instrumental in shaping eco-literature in Nigeria. As [23] observes, Nigerian environmental poets like Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Odia Ofeimun, and Nnimmo Bassey have reshaped ecological discourse, integrating socio-economic issues with environmental sustainability (110). Their works demand a prioritization of "green discourse" that critiques poor leadership and the exploitative forces of global capitalism [23].

Osundare's seminal work, *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), stands as a monumental text in African eco-poetry. [12] asserts that Osundare's preoccupation in this volume is the "reconstruction of Nigeria's natural world," a world under siege from capitalist forces that prioritize profit over ecological well-being (94). The volume critiques the commercialization of nature, the destruction of traditional agrarian practices, and the environmental consequences of industrialization. [28] vividly encapsulates this crisis in the preface to *The Eye of the Earth*: "Waters are dying, forests are falling. A desert epidemic stalks a world where the rich and ruthless squander earth's wealth on the invention of increasingly accomplished weapons of death, while millions of people perish daily from avoidable hunger" (p. xiii). These lines mirror the environmental havoc caused by unchecked capitalist greed, which, as [26] notes, is fueled by multinational corporations and the complicity of the Nigerian government (214). In response to this devastation, Osundare positions poetry as a form of ecological resistance, a literary tool for reawakening human responsibility toward nature.

One of Osundare's most effective poetic devices is the use of bodily metaphors to depict environmental destruction. He personifies nature as a wounded, exploited body, reinforcing the interconnectedness

between human existence and ecological health. [12] emphasizes that Osundare's poetry frames environmental degradation as a direct attack on life itself, thus making ecological discourse inseparable from human survival (126). In *Our Earth Will Not Die*, Osundare reaffirms this connection: Our earth will see again eyes washed by a new rain The westering sun will rise again resplendent like a new coin (49). This vision of renewal, symbolized by the "new rain," serves as a metonym for change—one that envisions a future where environmental justice is realized through collective action (Nwagbara 2012, 102). Osundare thus combines pessimism and hope, suggesting that while the earth has been ravaged, its resilience offers humanity a chance for redemption.

Joe Ushie's Biographical Background and Literary Contributions

Joe Ushie, another prominent Nigerian poet, has dedicated much of his work to addressing ecological degradation and political corruption. His poetry, particularly in *Hill Songs*, critiques the reckless exploitation of Nigeria's environment. As [11] observes, Ushie's poetry is a "relentless interrogation of power," exposing the greed and incompetence of Nigeria's ruling elite (77). Ushie's concern with nature and leadership is evident in Bassey's study, The Hills and the Vales: Images of Leadership in the Poetry of Joe Ushie, where he notes that: "... the poet consistently refers to the hills as a place of refuge, a symbol of attainment, and the source of life" (13). This observation highlights Ushie's dual engagement with environmental preservation and the moral responsibilities of leadership. His poetry is not only a lamentation of environmental decay but also a call for sustainable governance. [1] describes Ushie as an "erudite, prolific, yet polemical poet" whose writing embodies a fierce determination to liberate his people from oppressive socio-political structures (182). His poetry critiques the plundering of natural resources, advocating for a political and ecological revolution.

Aboh further asserts that Ushie's *Lamb at the Shrine* functions as a literary record of contemporary Nigerian struggles, using "poetry as a potent form of rebuke and purification" (Aboh 2014, 193). Ushie distinguishes between poets who defend the state's excesses and those who use poetry to challenge societal ills, aligning himself with the latter (Aboh 2015, 47). [10] examines Ushie's *Hill Songs* from an eco-critical perspective, highlighting his use of "place as a discursive tool" that allows him to mediate between spirituality, functionality, and ecological preservation (215). Aliyu argues that Ushie's work is both an aesthetic and political intervention, serving as a plea for responsible environmental stewardship. Ushie's poetry, like Osundare's, does not merely reflect the state of environmental degradation but seeks to incite communal consciousness. His work aligns with what [15] calls the "poet as righter," a literary figure whose duty is to awaken society to injustice and push for change." (309).

Osundare and Ushie stand as leading voices in the fight against environmental degradation and political oppression in Nigeria. Their poetry, deeply rooted in eco-activism, serves as both a critique of capitalist exploitation and a call for sustainable development. While Osundare employs bodily metaphors to personify the suffering earth, Ushie utilizes landscape symbolism to expose the devastation inflicted by political and economic greed. Both poets align with the broader discourse of eco-criticism, situating their works within global movements for environmental justice. Their poetry does not simply diagnose Nigeria's ecological crises; it also offers a path toward renewal and resistance. As Africa continues to grapple with environmental and socio-political challenges, the works of Osundare and Ushie remain crucial in shaping conversations around sustainability, justice, and poetic revolution.

Existing scholarship on Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare's poetry has primarily focused on its stylistic and thematic elements. For instance, [25] highlights Ushie's use of imagery and symbolism to address socio-political issues, while [16] examines the feminist undertones in his works. However, these studies have not adequately explored the role of bodily metaphors in Ushie's poetics or their connection to sustainable development. In the broader context of African literature, scholars such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) and [2] have emphasized the role of literature in addressing societal challenges. Recent studies, such as those by [13] and [29], have also explored the intersection of literature and environmental sustainability. This study offers a new front by examining selected poems of Niyi Osundare and Joe Ushie to underscore bodily metaphor, revolutionary rhetoric, and the role of poetry in building sustainable Development offering a unique perspective on Ushie and Osundare's poetry and its relevance to contemporary global discourses.

2. Exploring Bodily Metaphor, Revolutionary Temper, and a Poetic Call for Sustainable Development in Joe Ushie and Niyi Osundare's Poetics

In *Hill Songs*, Joe Ushie employs the image of the mosquito as a powerful metaphor for exploitation, vividly portraying the parasitic tendencies of the wealthy elite—described as "scavengers and parasites"—who relentlessly extract resources from the land, leaving devastation in their wake. The persona laments:

Every night you drill on my land
You pike in my peasant earth
And you leave with wells of my peasant blood
Indifferent to the wails and weals you plant *(p.13)*

This depiction of an unyielding oppressor likened to the African mosquito underscores a ceaseless cycle of environmental and economic exploitation. The metaphor of "drilling" into the earth mirrors the relentless extraction of natural resources, draining both the land and its people of sustenance. The oppressor is not an occasional visitor but a persistent force, perpetually preying on the land without remorse:

Every night you sound your
In the hollow of my ear
Demanding a graft;
Well or weary, pay I must,
Sometimes you land as I nurse
The wounds of your last raid
Sometimes you perch when
My hearth has long lain fallow *(p.13).*

Here, the poet constructs a hauntingly familiar image of the relentless capitalist forces that plunder natural resources without consideration for environmental sustainability or the suffering of the people. The description of the "nagging horn" in "different colors, in different cloaks" suggests that this exploitation assumes various forms, adapting and evolving, yet always serving the same destructive ends. The persona's despair reaches its peak when he bemoans the exploiters fleeing "far far from here" after looting the land. This evokes the reality of global economic powers extracting Africa's wealth while remaining detached from its consequent hardship. Yet, Ushie's poetry is not merely a lament—it is a revolutionary call to arms. The persona warns the exploiters:

Beware, African tyrant of the dark
The night which shields you
And blinds me, last but for a while as
Soon my sun shall beam from the hills *(p.14).*

This serves as both a metaphorical and political statement. The "night" symbolizes ignorance and unchecked greed, while the rising "sun" represents enlightenment, resistance, and a possible revolution against environmental destruction and economic injustice. Ushie frames the battle for environmental preservation as a fight against tyranny, reinforcing the necessity for sustainable development.

The Cry of Nature and the Silence of Man

Similarly, in *Song of the Dead*, the earth itself is personified as a grieving victim, lamenting humanity's apathy towards its suffering:

Before I died
You could have wept
To the world my blight;
But you did nothing;
And now you shake the hills
With echoes of your wails *(p.38).*

The tone here is accusatory, confronting humanity's hypocrisy—mourning environmental destruction only after the damage is irreversible. The poet critiques human inaction in the face of ecological degradation, warning that remorse cannot restore what has been lost. The lines:

Before I died
You could have penned
To the world my plight;
But you did nothing;
And now you stir a flood
With nib in grief *(p.38).*

This ironic reversal of priorities condemns performative activism, where concern for the environment is expressed only when the consequences become unbearable. The metaphor of "stirring a flood with nib in grief" suggests that words and lamentations alone cannot undo the destruction inflicted upon nature. The critique intensifies with a commentary on misplaced values:
Before I died
You could have clad
My body from cold and shame;
But you did nothing;
And now you dress
My dust in silk *(p.38).*

Here, Ushie challenges materialistic priorities—humanity neglects nature in its time of need but lavishes meaningless adornments upon its remains. This critique extends beyond environmental concerns to broader societal hypocrisy, where action is deferred until it is too late.

The Earth's Resilience and the Demand for Sustainable Practices

In *The Hills Will Rise Again*, Ushie presents a narrative of resilience, warning of nature's inevitable response to human exploitation:

Violence, after Pressure
Carved earth's hunchbacks,
Says the wizard of earth's form *(p.51).*

These lines capture the violent consequences of unsustainable practices such as mining and deforestation. The phrase "carved earth's hunchbacks" alludes to the irreversible scars left on the environment by exploitative activities. The "wizard of earth's form" serves as a prophetic figure, warning against humanity's destructive tendencies. The poet continues:

For too long now have the hills
Stood in silence as man
Skins the hills
Defiles the valleys
Brushes his teeth with man's femur
Dresses himself in man's sweat
And bears the weight of man *(p.51).*

The hills, a metaphor for the environment, have endured prolonged abuse, witnessing human greed and destruction. The phrase "skins the hills" vividly describes deforestation and land degradation, while "defiles the valleys" suggests pollution and ecological desecration. The grotesque image of "brushing teeth with man's femur" starkly critiques exploitation—not only of nature but of human labor and life itself. The earth has become a silent, suffering witness to humanity's excesses, bearing its weight without resistance.

A Revolutionary Call for Environmental Justice

Both Ushie and Osundare use their poetry to challenge the reckless exploitation of natural resources and the resulting socio-economic injustices. Through powerful bodily metaphors—the mosquito, the parasite, the looter—they expose the capitalist structures that drain both the land and its people. Their poetics go beyond lamentation; they serve as revolutionary calls to action, urging society to embrace sustainable development and resist environmental tyranny. Ushie's warning, "Soon my sun shall beam from the hills," serves as an urgent reminder that environmental justice is inevitable. Nature, though wounded, will reclaim itself. The hills will rise again—but whether humanity will rise with them or fall beneath their weight depends on the choices made today. Thus, Joe Ushie's poetry is not only a critique of exploitation but also a roadmap toward sustainability, balance, and a reimagined future where humans coexist harmoniously with nature.

Similarly, Niyi Osundare's *Our Earth Will Not Die* serves as a powerful indictment of environmental destruction, using visceral imagery and urgent poetic rhythms to highlight humanity's reckless exploitation of nature. Osundare masterfully balances despair with defiance, recognizing the gravity of ecological degradation while asserting the resilience of the earth. His poetry does not merely lament loss;

it calls for sustainable action, urging humanity to awaken to its responsibility as stewards of the environment. The poem's stark opening lines immediately convey the violence inflicted upon nature:

Lynched

The lakes

Slaughtered

The seas

Mauled

The mountains

But our earth will not die

Here

There

Everywhere *(p. 48).*

The use of brutal, bodily metaphors—"lynched," "slaughtered," and "mauled"—illustrates the savagery of environmental destruction. These words evoke images of violence, likening nature's suffering to human atrocities. The lakes, seas, and mountains—symbols of life and stability—become victims of human greed. Yet, amidst this carnage, the poet asserts, *"*But our earth will not die," infusing the poem with an unwavering sense of resistance. This declaration is not mere optimism but a revolutionary pronouncement that the earth, despite its wounds, possesses the power to endure and regenerate. The refrain *"*Here, There, Everywhere*"* reinforces the universality of this struggle, reminding us that environmental degradation is not localized but a global crisis demanding collective responsibility. Osundare deepens this critique in subsequent lines, exposing the industrial poisoning of natural ecosystems:

A lake is killed by the arsenic urine
From the bladder of profit factories
A poisoned stream staggers down the hills
Coughing chaos in the sickly sea
The wailing whale, belly up like a frying fish,
Crests the chilling swansongs of parting waters
But our earth will not die *(p. 48).*

The metaphor of "arsenic urine from the bladder of profit factories" is a scathing condemnation of corporate greed, presenting industries as biological entities expelling poison into the earth's veins. The polluted stream, depicted as "staggering" and "coughing chaos," embodies nature's suffering—its sickness a direct consequence of industrial pollution. The "wailing whale, belly up like a frying fish" is a haunting image of marine life perishing under the weight of human recklessness, its death song marking the degradation of oceans. However, Osundare's defiant refrain remains, insisting that despite these atrocities, the earth possesses resilience. This juxtaposition of destruction and endurance underscores the

necessity for action: while nature may heal, its survival depends on human intervention. The poem's subsequent lines reinforce the irreversible impact of ecological destruction:

Fishes have died in waters. Fishes
Birds have died in the trees. Birds
Rabbits have died in their burrows. Rabbits
But our earth will not die *(p. 49).*

Here, repetition intensifies the sense of loss, emphasizing the scale of biodiversity collapse. Each line lists a different species, reinforcing the interconnectedness of ecosystems—when one species perishes, the chain of life is disrupted. The deaths of fish, birds, and rabbits symbolize not just environmental decline but the disintegration of natural harmony. Yet, the refrain *"*But our earth will not die (p.49)" remains an insistent echo, an assertion that nature, despite the brutality inflicted upon it, possesses a regenerative spirit. This is not passive optimism but a revolutionary stance: the earth will resist, but humanity must make the choice to sustain it.

Through visceral imagery, revolutionary rhetoric, and unwavering ecological consciousness, Osundare's poetry serves as both an elegy and a manifesto. Like Ushie, he exposes the brutal realities of environmental degradation while insisting that resistance is possible. In fact, the eco-poetry of both writers reflects the revolutionary and dissident undertones of writers like Ngugi wa Thiongo and Ahmed Fouad [9]. However, Osundare's refrain—"But our earth will not die"—is more than a hopeful statement; it is a challenge to humanity to rise to its responsibility. His poetic activism underscores the urgency of sustainable development, advocating for policies that prioritize ecological preservation over capitalist greed. His work calls upon readers to recognize their role as custodians of the earth, urging them to adopt sustainable practices, demand environmental justice, and resist the exploitation that threatens both nature and humanity. In the end, Osundare's message is clear: if we are to survive, we must cease to plunder and learn, once again, to plough.

Environmental Erosion and the Call for Sustainable Practices

Osundare's *Forest Echoes* mourns the loss of agricultural biodiversity, underscoring the depletion of natural resources through unsustainable farming and deforestation. The persona nostalgically recalls a time when the land flourished: "Where are the yams that broke the heaps? /Where are the plantains that leaned earthwards / With the joy of heavy harvest?" (4). The rhetorical questions lament the disappearance of once-abundant harvests, highlighting the consequences of industrial farming, monoculture, and soil degradation. The reference to crops like yams, pumpkins, and plantains evokes traditional agricultural practices that respected the land's natural rhythms. By asking *"*Where are they*?"* Osundare does not just mourn their loss—he challenges modern practices that prioritize short-term gains over sustainability. The poem becomes an urgent plea to restore ecological balance through responsible farming methods that honor biodiversity. Similarly, in *Ours to Plough, Not to Plunder,* Osundare presents the earth as both a resource and a living entity requiring careful stewardship:

The earth is ours to plough and plant
The hoe is her barber
The dibble her dimple
This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder (47).

The lines convey a harmonious vision of agriculture where humans work with the land rather than exploit it. The metaphor of the hoe as a "barber" suggests that cultivation should be an act of care, shaping the land rather than stripping it bare. The repetition of the poem's final line—"This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder"—reinforces the necessity of sustainable practices. Osundare argues that human survival is tied to environmental responsibility, urging a shift from reckless consumption to mindful preservation.

In *What the Earth Said*, Osundare takes a more explicitly political stance, addressing environmental exploitation as a symptom of economic and political greed: "Native executhieves hold fort for alien wolves/ Factory lords roll in slothful excess/ Lives snuffed out like candles in the storm." Here, the term "executhieves" is a biting critique of corrupt officials who facilitate environmental exploitation for foreign interests ("alien wolves"). The phrase "factory lords roll in slothful excess"(47) condemns industrialists who hoard wealth while the environment suffers. The final line—"Lives snuffed out like candles in the storm"—captures the human toll of ecological destruction, linking environmental degradation with social injustice. Osundare portrays environmental activism not just as a conservation effort but as a fight against economic oppression. This perhaps explains why in *They Too Are the Earth*, Osundare reinforces the ethical dimensions of ecological responsibility:

Are they of this earth
Who litter the forest and harry the hills?
Are they of this earth
Who live that earth may die? (43)

The accusatory tone questions whether those who exploit nature truly belong to it, challenging the destructive mindset that views the earth as expendable. The final lines reinforce the inextricable link between human survival and environmental health: "Build the nature to survive /Destroy it and never live."(43) This stark ultimatum encapsulates Osundare's central message: humanity's fate is bound to that of the environment. To plunder the earth is to jeopardize our own existence.

3. Conclusion

The poetry of Niyi Osundare and Joe Ushie represents a compelling intersection between literature, environmental advocacy, and socio-political resistance. Through their masterful use of bodily metaphors, ecocritical discourse, and revolutionary poetics, both poets highlight the urgent need for environmental sustainability in Nigeria and beyond. Osundare, with his groundbreaking collection *The Eye of the Earth*, critiques the commodification of nature and the devastating effects of global capitalism, while Ushie, in works such as *Hill Songs*, exposes the ecological degradation wrought by corrupt leadership and economic exploitation. Scholars have extensively analyzed the depth of their poetic engagement, emphasizing the role of their works in awakening ecological consciousness and mobilizing action against environmental injustice [23, 26, 12]. Their poetry does not merely lament environmental destruction but serves as a clarion call for change, urging humanity to recognize its responsibility as custodians of the earth. As seen in Osundare's *Our Earth Will Not Die*, hope remains at the heart of this poetic vision—a belief in the possibility of renewal if only society can resist the forces of ecological devastation. It suffices that, the works of Osundare and Ushie reinforce the power of literature as an instrument of activism, challenging exploitative practices while advocating for a sustainable future. Their poetry remains a crucial part of the

global conversation on environmental justice, standing as a testament to the enduring role of African literature in shaping socio-political consciousness. As environmental crises continue to escalate, their poetic voices remain more relevant than ever, reminding us that the survival of both nature and humanity depends on collective resistance, sustainable leadership, and a renewed ethical commitment to preserving the earth.

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