

Nature in the Balance: The Commodification of the Environment in Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth*

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ABSTRACT

Niyi Osundare is one of a leading group of political and vociferous contemporary Nigerian poets. He uses art to interrogate the politics of the seasons. In Osundare's own words, poetry is "man meaning to man". Man, here, is non-gendered. Osundare maintains that poetry should have a political message for his people and their land for it to have meaning. Osundare's overriding concern in the collection, *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), is animated by eco-poetry, which he explores with what he has characterised as the "semantics of terrestiality", that is, words for the earth. Eco-poetry deals with environmental politics and the ecological implications of humankind's business on the planet. Eco-poetry takes as its focal point humankind taking responsibility for the altered state of the natural world. Armed with this poetic sensibility, Osundare unearths the commodification of socio-economic relations, leadership failure, environmental/ecological immiseration and endangered Nature mediated through (global) capitalism. Committed to saving Nigeria's environment, Osundare uses eco-poetry to advance this cause, as well as to decry environmental injustice and unbridled materialist pursuit adversely affecting Nature, biodiversity and the ecology. Thus, the intention of this paper is to investigate how *The Eye of the Earth* brings our attention to the precarious state of Nigeria's natural world as a result of capitalism.

Keywords: *Capitalism, Commodification of Relations, Eco-poetry, Nature, Nigeria, Osundare.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigerian environmental writers, including Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Odia Ofeimun, and Nnimmo Bassey, have articulated a way of re-imagining the (Nigerian) environment that melds socio-economic existence with environmentalism (Bodunde 1997: 88; Aiyejina 1988: 123; Shija 2008: 33; Nwagbara 2008: 235). They have called for a prioritisation of green discourse focused on better leadership and socio-economic relations, and on environmental sustainability (Nwagbara 2010: 17). In order to provide a face for the invisible but palpable presence of capitalism in the Nigerian environment, Osundare has turned to eco-poetry through *The Eye of the Earth*, which is an appendage to his aesthetic oeuvre. In all of Osundare's literary works to date, starting with *Songs of the Marketplace* (1983), he has given Nigerian political development a central place. But of all his works it is *The Eye of the Earth*

(1986), the Commonwealth Poetry Prize-winning volume that reverberates with environmental politics and its ancillary woes. Osundare is a prolific writer; he has written about a dozen poetry collections, several drama and a handful of books of criticism. His poetry collections include *The Songs of the Marketplace* (1983), *Village Voices* (1984), *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), *Moonsongs* (1984), *Waiting Laughers* (1990), *Midlife* (1993), *Songs of the Season* (1999), *Horses of Memory* (1999) and *The Word is an Egg* (2000).

In *The Eye of the Earth*, Osundare's second volume of poetry, his main concern is a reconstruction of Nigeria's natural world, which faces despoliation and commodification, including a call to save the earth from inept practice that inheres in (global) capitalism. Osundare's underlying aesthetic preoccupation in *The Eye of the Earth* is predicated on a commitment to reveal the historicist-materialist underpinning of global capitalism (Bodunde 1997: 82). It is also an ideo-aesthetic commitment to "community-based resistance to the predations of neo-liberal capitalist globalisation" (Shantz 2007: 122). A sketch of Niyi Osundare's preoccupation in the volume is presented below.

- Emphasis on human responsibilities and actions to save Nature
- Aesthetics of reconciling humanity with Nature
- A critique of capitalists' commodification of Nature and the environment
- The dynamics of eco-poetry or ecocriticism in reclaiming Nature
- The impacts of global capitalism.

Given the urgency of the above landscape, Niyi Osundare and a handful of Nigerian eco-poets have declared themselves chroniclers of the changing environmental times, an artistic engagement to save the environment from the shackles of global capitalism as well as commodification. Our endangered earth is animated by "different capitalist strategies employed by multinational oil firms ... and the corporate greed of the Nigerian government in their failure to formulate pragmatic environmental policies..." (Okuyade 2011: 79). This is what Olaoluwa (2009: 185) considers to be "environmental neglect". Similarly, Okonta & Douglas (2003) tag this operation the act of "killing the goose" (56) that lays Nigeria's golden eggs, a metonym for crude oil.

Thus, some Nigerian poets like "... Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide, and Femi Osofisan ranged on the side of the underprivileged and tended to concern themselves more with socio-economic issues..." (Ojaide 2009: 13). This is why Osundare in *The Eye of the Earth* "seizes upon Nature" (Anyokwu 2008: 103) to offer part of this engagement. Basically, Nature commodification that is justified on the demands of global capitalism is what *The Eye of the Earth* addresses. Osundare's sobering revelation in the excerpt below (taken from the preface of the volume) offers a panoramic view of humanity's endangered 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. (1986: xvi)

Without being overwhelmed by the above backdrop, Osundare in all his artistic enterprise envisions hope and light at the end of the tunnel. He is an optimist as well as a humanist (in Ogoanah 2003: 5).

In the poem "Our Earth Will Not Die", which is the last poem in the collection under review, Osundare re-affirms this:

Our earth will see again
eyes washed by a new rain
the westering sun will rise again
resplendent like a new coin.
The wind, unwound, will play its tune
trees twittering, grasses dancing;
hillsides will rock with blooming harvests
the plains bating their eyes of grass and grace.
The sea will drink its heart's content
when a jubilant thunder flings open the skygate
and a new rain tumbles down
in drums of joy.
Our earth will see again
this earth, OUR EARTH. (51)

From the perspective of envisioning a clean environment and respect for Nature in Nigeria (the Niger delta), Osundare considers the malaise ravaging Nigeria's natural world to be "avoidable" (as the above lines suggest) if global capitalism is resisted through a commitment to redefining socio-economic relations and commodification of Nature. This will make possible "a new rain" (51) – a metonym for change – environmental renewal and environmentally friendly politics. For Osundare, there is hope of renaissance if Nigeria's political history and leadership is interrogated through environmental aesthetics that decries capitalist project:

Now in the 21st century, no end in sight to Africa's errant leadership ... The effects of all this for Africa in its entirety are grave... But a proper understanding of history will put our present anomy in clearer or more bearable perspective... It is only hope that can empower our spirit. Hope in Niyi Osundare's works is sacred. (Charles 2007: 62–3)

Thus, hope in this instance is mediated through engagement with the ecological, political, historical and materialist underpinnings of capitalism wrought on

Nigeria's environment and its people. This is the hallmark of *The Eye of the Earth*.

Environmental writing or green discourse unpacks the state of Nature following humanity's business on the planet (Clark and Foster 2004; Ojomo 2011; Ojaide 2009; Olaoluwa 2009). From Rachel Carlson's *Silent Spring* to Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, and from Lawrence Buell's *Writing for an Endangered World* to *The End of Nature* by Bill McKibben, the debate has been on the consequences of the interface between Nature and people's activities on the planet. Nature is in this respect a victim of human cultural agent. The cultural agent referred here is (global) capitalism, a cultural agent that commodifies relations by sustaining the rhetoric of core-periphery paradigm. The shift from the preservation of Nature to capitalism in the wake of frontier global capitalism is fundamentally ensconced in different modes of humanity's relation to earth. Ernst Fisher highlights the malignant nature of capitalism:

capitalism turned everything into a commodity. With a hitherto unimaginable increase in production and productivity, extending the new order dynamically to all parts of the globe and all areas human existence, capitalism dissolved the old world into a cloud of whirling molecules, destroyed all direct relationships between producer and consumer and flung all products onto an anonymous market to be bought or sold. (Fischer 1924: 50)

The corporeality of this practice finds resonance in an ever more globalised state of oppression and dominance characterised by movement of resources from the periphery to the centre as well as destruction of the natural world of the periphery nations.

In Nigeria, the oil politics of the multinational corporations in partnership with the political elite have left "ecological footprints" that imperil her environment; this has also plunged Nigeria's natural world and leadership into disquiet (Ojokorotu 2008). It is against this background that

both the socio-economic concerns and visions of future social relations have undergone tremendous development in the ... neo-liberal capitalism globalism. Recent social and artistic movements emerging through opposition to capitalist globalisation have emphasised the convergence of local and global concerns ... themes include pressing concerns for the natural environment and local communities. (Shantz 2007: 123)

Here lies the fervour of Osundare's eco-poetic commitment. One of Nigeria's eco-poets – in fact the most prolific of all – Tanure Ojaide (Dara 2009: 12) notes that what informed eco-poetry in Nigeria is what he defined as "senseless destruction of our original neighbours, the trees and animals" (Ojaide 1995: 16).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is predicated on the commodification of the natural world through the practice of global capitalism, which has necessitated eco-poetry. Thus, the imbalance in development between core and periphery nations hinges on the rhetoric of globalisation, which comes in deferent shades such as globalisation, international co-operation, foreign aids and transnational dealings to hide the true imports of its devastating effects on the environment and people of developing countries. One of the areas that the commodification of relations has serious devastating consequences to the periphery nations is the environment and the natural worlds. This is the case in Nigeria – particularly the Niger delta, where the multinationals in cahoots with the political class have wreaked havoc on the ecology, biodiversity, hydrocarbons, marine life and environment of the people all in the name of international business, oil exploration and global capitalism (Ojatorotu 2008).

The term commodification originated from the word: commodity. Commodification suggests that every human dealings or relationship is largely couched in socio-economic as well as materialist gains. Thus, the quest for economic power and hegemony is the underlying factor in all human relationship as Marxist dialectics instructs. Thus,

in this regard, commodification is the act of measuring the worth of a person or an object in terms of its monetary or social value. It can also be defined as the act of relating to objects or persons in terms of their financial and social worth and benefit. (Azumara 2010: 16)

For the eco-poets, the activities of individuals on the planet is essentially premised on the commodification of relations or life (both human and non-human), which is linked dialectically and inextricably to an exploitative relationship. Consequently, various forms of resistance dialectics, particularly the much talked about environmentalism, eco-poetry and ecocriticism stem from an ideological provenance to resist the dogma of commodification of relations mediated through globalisation or capitalism

In his *Environmental Justice and Communities of Colour* (1993), Robert Bullard suggests that most of the resistance movement to save the earth as well as to resist ecological devastation has emerged under the rubric of the de-commodification of relations. Jeffrey Shantz asserted that the commodification of relations that crushes Nature as well as robbing the people of their natural inheritance is an ideological veneer applied by the powerful (the core nations) for economic, political, ideological and social control. In this sense, the commodification of Nature has become

an ideological cover for those members of “humanity” who, in asserting positions of privilege, have constructed not only Nature but fellow humans – typically the poor, blacks ... - as mere resources to be exploited. Significantly, it is precisely among these inferiorised positions

that the impacts of ecological destruction are most severely experienced.
(Shantz 2003: 149)

It is to this end that Nigerian poets “are turning to cultural expressions opposed to the processes and effects of capitalist globalisation” (Shantz 2007: 121) as well as environmental plunder.

For Osundare, this matter of opposition inheres in eco-poetry, his ideological mandate in the volume. It is with regard to committed literature for environmental conservation and societal emancipation that one of the staunch group members of Nigerian realist writers, Femi Osofisan, has averred that committed literature (eco-poetry) is about presenting the ugly

state of our society, on unmasking the class forces at play within it, revealing the material sources of exploitation and injustices, demonstrating how the masses could liberate themselves... (in Ushie 2005: 20)

This same view is further shared by Charles Bodunde:

From the evidence of *The Eye of the Earth*, we must stress that Osundare’s criticism of the capitalist formation and his pursuit of alternative social practice which should differ significantly from the existing decadent structure is consistent with the ideological position he shares with progressive ideologue-artists. (1997: 100)

3. NATURE IN THE BALANCE: REFRACTING THE COMMODIFICATION OF NATURE

In most of the poems in the collection, Osundare speaks poignantly about the wanton destruction of our natural neighbours, the flora, fauna, and rivers, by capitalist practice. Osundare maintains that capitalism has

Lynched
the lakes
Slaughtered
the seas
Mauled
the mountains
But our earth will not die
Here
there
everywhere
a lake is killed by the arsenic urine
from the bladder of profit factories
a poison stream staggers down the hills

coughing chaos in the sickly sea
the wailing whale, belly up like a frying fish,
crests the chilling swansong of parting waters.
("Our Earth Will Not Die", 50)

With the power of graphology, Osundare brings to the fore the salencies of power versus weakness that capitalism makes possible. This is evident in the visual effects of the way the above lines were arranged to depict polarity: might and weakness. The verbs "lynched", "slaughtered" and "mauled" are artistically employed to signify strength – they are doing words of action and power that make "the lakes", "the seas" and "the mountains", which represent Nature prostrate. These verbs that signify might make a natural bequest (the Nigerian natural world) "stagger down the hill" – making it comatose.

In another poem, "They Too Are the Earth", Osundare brings to light the emasculation of the natives by capitalism leading to further class stratification:

They too are the earth
the swansongs of beggars sprawled out
in brimming gutters
they are the earth
under snakeskin shoes and Mercedes tyres

They too are the earth
the sweat and grime of
millions hewing wood and hurling water
they are the earth
muddy every pore like naked moles. (45)

The essence of the above versification crystallises in reference to two classes of people, the haves and the have-nots in Marxist parlance. The have-nots are the "beggars", who are being crushed under the jackboots of those in "snakeskin shoes and Mercedes tyres"; they are the people whose environment is being brutalised. The imageries of "snakeskin", "Mercedes" and "brimming gutters" depict this polarity. In another poem: "Dawncall", Osundare's poet-persona invites us to a more gripping situation to which the earth is being subjected:

Come with me at dawn
when a matchless darkness couples earth and sky
and the world is one starless bed of frigid sweat
come with me when trees listen earlessly to the accent
of the waking wind
head-deep in the indigo of night... (39)

Images such as "matchless darkness", "starless bed of frigid sweat" and "night" suggest that the earth is really in the balance; the "dawn" rather opens the

floodgate of warmth and the starry sky is still buried in the rubble of an “indigo night”. In addition, phrases such as “trees listen earlessly” and “head-deep in the indigo of night” signify humanity’s hope of the appearance of “waking wind”, a synecdoche for a green world.

Osundare’s poetic enterprise passes through a filter: speaking for those on the fringe of the society as well as conscientising people about the perils that lie ahead if our earth is not protected from capitalist oppression. In affirming that he is actually a chronicler of people’s social experience, Osundare avers:

And so when you have a country and a continent and a world where ...
politics is being used to entrench poverty and enrich a few, then problems
are bound to rise. Poetry has become a tool for setting things right ...
Genuine poetry raises political songs; political songs directly or
indirectly. It tells kings about the corpses which line their way to the
throne. It tells the rich about the skulls in their cupboards. (100)

In his dedication page of *The Eye of the Earth*, Osundare refers to politically committed poetry as “genuine poetry” that should be “dedicated to our earth and all who struggle to see it neither wastes nor wants” (1996: viii). It is in this manner of representation that we can appreciate our past that, which has been pirated and pillaged by people’s selfish activities for essentially economic, material and political gains. One of the poems, “Excursion”, corroborates this:

Past bush paths tarred by tireless treading
Past rocky outcrops rubbed smooth by stubborn heels
Past dandelions roaring silently at my wandering feet
Past elephant grass fluted tusklessly by the wind.

Past the depleted copper of harvested cornfields
Past the leafy grove of ripening yams
Past the groundnut’s leguminous lilt
in the orchestra of swinging furrows
Past the bean which has a thousand kids
with antinomy in each eye... (41)

It is this “antinomy in each eye” of Nigeria’s environment particularly the Niger delta, where the multinationals’ presence has robbed the natives of “the legacies of grandmothers” (Okoro 2007: 1), their natural world, clean environment, flora and fauna, which stem from a “... huge paradox that dogs the history of the region, that is, the paradox of sitting on oil and yet remaining impoverished” (Olaoluwa 2009:176). This is the spectre of capitalism – which follows the shadow of imperial domination and the commodification of human relations.

In most of the poems in *The Eye of the Earth* such as “What the Earth Said”, “Eyeful Glances” and the longest of all of the poems, “Forest Echoes”, there is a reference to good, pristine Nature that has come under heavy attack by

capitalism mediated “...through the dunes/of hazy shadows” (23). This antinomy or the “paradox of plenty” (Karl 1997), considered to be a “resource curse thesis” (1993) by Richard Auty is outlined here:

And every toemark on the footpath
every fingerprint on every bark
the ropy climbers flung breathlessly
from tree to tree
the hunting sound and silence
of this sweet and sour forest
dig deep channels to the sea of memory.

And the outcome:

will it be flow or flood...

And now

Memory,

loud whisper of yester-voices

confluence of unbroken rivers,

lower your horse of remembrance

Let me dismount. (“Forest Echoes”, 4–12)

The above mnemonic snapshots invite us to a vision of a de-commodified Nature and human environment; it also invites us to a song of environmental conservation and eco-poetic melody, which “Ours to Plough, Not to Plunder” adumbrates:

The earth is ours to plough and plant
the hoe is her barber
the dibble her dimple

Out with mattocks and matchets
bring calabash, tray and rocking baskets
let the sweat which swells earthroot
relieve heavy heaps of their tuberous burdens..

Our earth is an unopened grainhouse,
a bustling barn in some far, uncharted jungle
a distant gem in a rough unhappy dust
This earth is

ours to work not to waste

ours to man not to maim

This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder. (48–9)

It is within the parameters of forging an environmentally friendly national and global politics as exemplified in the above lines, which respects the protection of

the environment as well as its materials and the people that Osundare poeticises “a careless match, harmattan rage” (25). This poetic vision will, Osundare believes, challenge “looters of state” (25). The Lines suggest a form of protest against environmental injustice and socio-economic domination. This approach would engender green discourse, which the above poem considers to be “a green desire, perfumed memory” (3), capable of reinforcing the argument for saving the earth.

4. TOWARDS A POETICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: DE-COMMODIFYING NATURE

Ethics is a normative investigation into the principles and rules governing humankind’s conducts as to how these principles relate to justice, good and evil. Ethics has a lot to do with the environment. In this case, it questions people’s relationship to their surroundings; person’s thorough understanding of their responsibilities to the natural world; and their obligation to biotic wholesomeness (Pojman 1997: 2; Ojomo 2011: 103). What underpins the clamour for environmental ethics in Nigeria is the urgency of impending ecological disaster ravaging our world. The significance of this reality echoes in texts and discourses that address the conservation of man’s natural world and environment. Niyi Osundare’s *The Eye of the Earth* (1986) is one of the texts in this mould. This pattern of re-imagining the earth has provoked movements that articulate the ethical dimensions of human activities on the planet. In literature particularly, this has come to represent eco-criticism, eco-poetry, environmental literature and earth-centred poetics, among other emerging movements. The rationale for this groundswell of movements to save the earth is strongly precipitated by the aftermath of our business on the planet that imperils the earth. Vice-president Al Gore’s sobering statement in his notable work, *Earth in the Balance: Forging a New Common Purpose* (1992) is instructive of the dangers that frontier capitalist operation brings to our world today. He warns: “Unless we find a way to dramatically change our civilisation and our way of thinking about the relationship between humankind and the earth, our children will inherit a wasteland” (1992: 220).

Osundare’s eco-poetic sensibility is anchored in this movement to save our earth. As has been noted,

... the environment crisis is one of the most pressing and timely concerns of our planet in the turn of the 21st century. As a global phenomenon, no society is immune totally against the threats and dangers, which the environmental crisis poses to our humanity... But with respect to the African experience, a vast area of land rich in natural resources of all categories, flora and fauna of immense diversities, the dimension of the global environmental crisis in the continent has a peculiar character. (Ojomo 2011: 102)

The writings of earlier Nigerian writers such as Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, and J. P. Clark-Bekederemo were essentially in praise of nature, but never considered the consequences of our business on the planet (Ushie 2005: 13). It is to this end that Samuel Asien in his piece, “Literature as History: Crisis, Violence and Strategies of Commitment in Nigerian Writing” declared that

... we can conveniently affirm that there was no serious discussion of the social responsibility of the writer in Nigerian society before 1965. For many Nigerian writers before that date, social/political commitment in so far as it related to literature was generally suspect... (1978: 33)

In more recent times, Nigerian writers have used literature to interrogate the goings-on in the Nigerian environment that pose a threat to our environment, Nature and society at large. An essential facet of this interrogation is eco-poetry.

Contemporary Nigerian writings such as *Delta Blues & Home Songs* (1986) by Tanure Ojaide, *Dark through the Delta* (2004) by Uche Umez, *Polluted Landscape* (2002) by Uzoechi Nwagbara, and *Intercepted: Poems* (1998) by Nnimmo Bassey sensitise Nigerians to the moral, ethical and environmental implications of Nature commodification. Niyi Osundare’s eco-poetic project of de-commodifying Nature (the earth) in the volume under review finds anchorage in environmental ethics, which the martyred Nigerian eco-activist, Ken Saro-wiwa considered to be part of the arsenal to fight Nigeria’s “ecological war”. Osundare’s preoccupation here is informed by a consciousness fully overawed by the desire to question the ethical basis of capitalism’s impact on Nigeria’s environment. In this, Osundare celebrates Nature and imagines a return to pristine values to save Nigeria’s ecology and environment. It is a clarion call to break away from deforestation. It is enlightening to capture this penchant here:

The Eye of the Earth is very special, fashioned on his perception of man in nature. The image of the poet is more than an interpreter of a complex and rich tradition of his people who share a collective philosophy. He celebrates the work nature of his people with special emphasis on their reverence for nature, defending the traditional myth on which the community lives together resisting collision. The volume is seen as one of the fiercest indictments of the modern economic culture of the people and alien destructive forces. It takes a pictorial account of aggression on man and the earth... (Alu 2008: 70)

Thus, it could be gleaned from this that the craft of *The Eye of the Earth* resonates with environmental ethics and with the protection of the people against the spectre of capitalism.

In “They Too Are the Earth”, Osundare challenges the imperialists and their partners, the Nigerian political class:

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Are they of this earth
who fritter the forest and harry the hills
are they of this earth
who live that earth may die
are they? (45)

The above lines are imbued with questions that have no answers. They are rhetorically employed to depict an intention to challenge the order. The aesthetics of preserving Nature as well as curbing the “mobility of capital” (Brennan 1997: 6) finds continuation in another poem, “But Sometimes When It Rains”:

But sometimes when it rains
And an angry thunder raps earth’s ears
With its hands of fire
Sometimes when it rains
And a heartless storm beheads the poor man’s house
Like some long-convicted felon.

Sometimes when it rains
You wonder who sent the skies weeping

Sometimes when it rains... (36)

Broadly speaking, Osundare, in the brief extract above, envisions the return of a pristine period when humanity harvested bountifully before the advent of the capitalists’ fierce capitalist practice. The aesthetics of return to pristine period is taken further in the lines below:

Here where yam wore the crown
in the reign of swollen roots
amid a retinue of vines and royal leaves;
between insistent sky and yielding earth.
The sun mellowed planting pageants
Into harvest march,
A fiery pestle in his ripening hand.
This is *Iyanfoworogi*
where a tempting yam sauntered
out of the selling tray
and the marketplace became a mob
of instant suitors... (“Harvestcall”, 18)

The fictional space *Iyanfoworogi* has been modelled on a real social space, a market in southern part of Nigeria. It boasts of a busy market, where the poet-persona draws his nostalgia. Here, the poet-persona envisions a return to the

season when this market bristled with the beautiful bounties of nature. In Iyanfoworogi, *efuru*, the king of yam was bought and sold; it also “provoked mouthful clamour” from buyers and sellers as they busied themselves to satiate “the rugged anger of hunger” (18).

Osundare’s call and emphasis on re-emergence of past values and their restoration, when the flora and fauna had peace and sprung earth’s riches bountifully are also revealed in “Earth”:

Temporary basement
And lasting roof
First clayey cloyness
And last alluvial joy
Breakfast
And compost bed
Rocks and rivers
Muds and mountains
Silence of the twilight sea
Echoes of the noonsome tide
Milk of mellowing moon
Fire of tropical hearth
Spouse of the roving sky
Virgin of a thousand offspring. (1)

The Eye of the Earth is not simply a re-affirmation of the Worthsworthian “pretty scenery”, a foregrounding of Keitheatan “mere nature poetry” or a morbid longing for the past, it is actually a dedication to interdependence and equal relationship between humanity and nature, including an appeal for ecological equanimity:

With these green guests around
Who says that drought was here?

And anthills throw open their million gates
and winged termites swarm the warm welcome
of compassionate twilights
and butterflies court the fragrant company
of fledgling flowers
and milling moths paste wet lips
on the translucent ears of listening windows
and the copper face of the gathering lake
and weaverbirds pick up the chorus
in the leafening heights...
Soon crispy mushrooms will break
the fast of venturing soles

With these green guests around
who still says that drought was here?
("Who Says that Drought was Here?", 35)

The lines resist the belief that

nature is reintroduced to us as 'environment', a realm of capitalist profit and personal indulgence. Environment, Nature's 'brand name', becomes little more than a stockpile of 'resources', reconstructed as warehouse of riches existing solely for the gratification of ceaseless multiplying human wants. (Shantz 2003: 145)

The rhetoric for the resurgence of green culture as well as interdependence and environmental quiet addressed in the above lines portray the quest for a harmonious relationship with our environment, hitherto made a victim of people's insatiable materialist and political ends. As Osundare maintains, the return of "these green guests", the "anthills" and the taking over of "venturing soles" – capitalist operators by "crispy mushrooms" suggest a return to a pristine Nature before the advent of capitalism. This return, as Osundare indicates, will usher in a new era of hope, justice and fairness in our land.

5. CONCLUSION

In his poetry's content, language and craft, Osundare has demonstrated in *The Eye of the Earth* a commitment to collective labour relations to earth as well as its resources. Also, from the evidence articulated in the volume and predicated on eco-poetry, Osundare envisions a de-commodification of Nature as well as a re-articulation of socio-economic relation that is predicated upon eco-poetry. Osundare's contention in this regard is that our beleaguered natural world is precipitated by capitalism. Hence, Osundare's criticism of capitalist formation as well as its ancillary practices which culminates in alternative political and environmental system is a call for environmentally friendly politics that will bring environmental sustainability and better leadership in Nigeria. Thus, *The Eye of the Earth* is a poetic work devoted to reclamation of our earth that has been laid waste by capitalist practice; it also inheres in the quest for an alternative order for better leadership in Nigeria.

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