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The poetics of African witchcraft: A study of Niyi Osundare's *The eye of the earth*

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Abstract

This study explores the poetics of witchcraft in African literature through an in-depth analysis of Niyi Osundare's The Eye of the Earth. It examines how Osundare reconfigures witchcraft from a traditional superstitious belief to a powerful ideological and ecological symbol that articulates Africa's spiritual worldview, environmental concerns, and socio-political realities. The research highlights how African cosmologies perceive the universe as composed of sacred spaces: trees, rocks, water bodies, inhabited by spirits that embody ancestral power, moral force, and natural forces. Osundare's poetry vividly depicts these landscapes, emphasizing their spiritual significance and the destructive impact of human greed and environmental degradation. The analysis reveals how witchcraft functions as a metaphor for hidden power, resistance, and cultural memory, challenging colonial stereotypes and affirming indigenous epistemologies. The poet's invocation of sacred trees like the Iroko and revered rocks underscores the importance of environmental stewardship rooted in spiritual reverence. Osundare's poetic questioning of ecological destruction underscores the interconnectedness of spirituality and ecology, urging a return to respecting nature as a living force. The study demonstrates that African poetry employs rich symbolic traditions to critique environmental exploitation and advocate for cultural resilience. The research underscores the vital role of witchcraft symbolism in articulating Africa's identity, spirituality, and environmental consciousness in contemporary literature.

Keywords: African literature, witchcraft, ecology, spirituality, cultural resistance

Introduction

The poetics of witchcraft in African literature represents a compelling nexus between the mystical and the socio-political. Witchcraft, as both a cultural belief and a literary trope, has pervaded the African imagination for centuries. It embodies an intricate web of fears, mysteries, and communal anxieties, often serving as a metaphor for deeper existential and societal issues. African poets have continued to draw from this wellspring of symbolic language, portraying witchcraft not merely as superstition but as a rich metaphorical and ideological device[2,3]. The present study explores how Niyi Osundare invokes and reshapes

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[2]C. Achebe, *The World of the Ogbanje* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., 1986)
[3]M. Ogundipe, *Re-creating ourselves: African women & critical transformations*(Africa World Press, 2007).

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the notion of witchcraft to articulate environmental, spiritual, and moral concerns in *The Eye of the Earth*.

In traditional African cosmologies, witchcraft is rarely interpreted in simplistic or binary terms. It is both feared and revered, blamed for misfortune yet also seen as a medium for understanding the complexities of life and death, justice and retribution[4]. As such, African poetry often locates witchcraft at the intersection of metaphysics and morality. Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* exemplifies this, using ecological imagery and metaphysical references to draw attention to environmental degradation while implicitly critiquing the modern world's "witch-like" exploitation of the earth[5]. Witchcraft here becomes an allegory for the silent, malevolent forces behind ecological destruction.

The poet demonstrates how witchcraft, as a poetic motif, functions on multiple levels: psychological, spiritual, and political. Herecontextualizes witchcraft through his cultural and poetic perspectives, thereby creating unique yet interconnected expressions of African modernity. *The Eye of the Earth* aligns with broader postcolonial concerns, including power dynamics, ecological justice, gender inequality, and the negotiation of tradition in contemporary society[6,7].These literary expression resists colonial dismissals of African spirituality as mere superstition, asserting instead a deeply rooted poetic consciousness.

This study is thus situated within a growing body of African literary criticism that seeks to re-engage indigenous belief systems as valid sources of philosophical and artistic expression. By examining how Osundare crafts witchcraft into poetic language, the research aims at uncovering the aesthetic and ideological dimensions of his work. Through close textual analysis and cultural contextualization, the study explores how witchcraft serves not only as a thematic concern but also as a critical tool for interpreting power, resistance, and identity in contemporary African poetry.

Contextual framing

Although there are no empirical studies on witchcraft in Africa per say, extant scholarship from scholars who have examined African Traditional Religions and philosophy has shown that the place of witchcraft in African cosmology can never be overemphasized. Scholars such as Mbiti, Ayisi, Kirwen, Harries, and others, have regularly averred that witchcraft in the African traditional context is basically a worldview phenomenon[8,9,10,11,12]. For instance, Mbiti is of the

[4]J.S. Mbiti,*Introduction to African Religion*(Oxford: Heinemann, 1991).
[5]N. Osundare, *The Eye of the Earth*(Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books. 1996)
[6]D.I. Nwoga, Literature and Modern West African Culture. (Sweden: Nok Publishers, 1981
[7]S. Gikandi, "Postcolonial Literature and the African Condition," In The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies, ed. N. Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 85–102.
[8]O.E. Ayisi, An Introduction to the Study of African Culture. (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Educational Publishers, 1979)
[9]J. Harries, Witchcraft, Culture, and Theology in African Development. (Nigeria: African Nebula, 2010), 138–152.

opinion that "the spiritual world of African people is very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits, and the living-dead"[13]. Mbiti's stance here shows that Africans do not only believe in the celestial world, but also strongly assert that their destiny are conditioned by it. There is this consciousness that the sky, the sun, the moon, the star, the rain, among others are controlled by certain forces which are beyond their imagination. Mbiti's stance advances Parrinder's position that in the African cosmological view "everything in nature is living, or at least pre-living, and there is no such thing as absolutely dead matter"[14]. In general, in the African worldview there are a host of different spirits that exist in the universe[15].

Mbiti further argues that the awareness of the spirit world "affects their [Africans] outlook and experiences in life for better and for worse"[116]. Therefore, in this regard the outward manifestation of African symbols and practices express the underlining assumptions of life. This is why scholars like Mwalwa make such a strong affirmation concerning this reality by stating, "I am convinced that witch-craft is not imaginary, nor unreal. It is still a strong force in Africa" (cited in Manala)[17]. In his concluding remarks, Mbiti affirms this fact by arguing that "belief in the function and dangers of bad magic, sorcery and witchcraft is deeply rooted in African life, and in spite of modern education and religions like Christianity and Islam it is very difficult to eradicate this belief"[18]. Harries refers to this deeply held belief as the "DNA of life" among African people[19], which gives some indications that the phenomenon is deeply embedded in the belief systems of African culture. Most Africans need no special orientation to believe that witchcraft exists, which means that witchcraft cannot be separated from the life of an African.

Synopsis of Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the earth*

The Eye of the Earth[20] is a collection of poems by Niyi Osundare, published in 1986 by Heinemann Educational Books. The work was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the African poetry book category, and the Association of Nigerian Authors' Poetry Prize in its year of publication. The collection comprises nineteen poems that explore nature, culture, memory, and social justice. The anthology is divided into three sections, each reflecting a different aspect of the poet's relationship with his homeland.

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[10]C.M. Kirwen, African Cultural Knowledge: Themes and Embedded Beliefs. (Nairobi, Kenya: MIAS Books, 2005)
[11]J.M. Manala, Witchcraft and its Impact on Black African Christians: A Lacuna in the Ministry of the HervormdeKerk in SuidelikeAfrika. HTS Theological Studies 60, no. 4(2004), 1491–1511.
[12]Mbitii, "Introduction to African Religion"
[13]Ibid., 13
[14]G. Parrinder, *Religion in Africa*. (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1969)
[15]Ibid., 75
[16] Ibid., 14
[17]M.J. Manala, The Impact of Witchcraft on African Society," in African Perspectives on Witchcraft and Modernity, ed. GerrieterHaar (Africa World Press, 2007), 123.
[18]Ibid., 165
[19]Ibid., 144
[20]N. Osundare, *The Eye of the Earth*. (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books. 1996)

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The anthology begins with an introduction, where Osundare discusses his connection with the environment, particularly the forest, the rocks, and the rain, which he experienced growing up in his hometown, Ikere, a town in southwestern Nigeria. He also expresses concern for the degradation of the earth's resources due to human activities and natural erosion, and his hope for a sustainable environment. The first section contains three poems. In these poems, the poet recalls his childhood memories of the forest, where he witnessed the beauty and diversity of nature, as well as the destruction and exploitation of the land and the trees. He also reflects on the rocks of *Olosunta*, which he regards as both a physical and a mystical element in Ikere cosmology. He emphasizes the enduring forms of nature, which are monuments of time and place, and the economic value of the rocks. He also advocates for an egalitarian society and economic justice, and criticizes the greed and oppression of those who exploit the earth and its resources. He also praises the earth as a source of growth and productivity. He celebrates the yam and other crops like cobs, cotton, and beans, and recalls the time before colonization when Africa had its own identity and peace. He presents Africa's past as a defence against today's alienation, and ends the section with a question about why we are still hungry in the midst of plenty.

The second section includes seven poems. These poems explore the effects of rain, which the poet views as beneficial for the earth and its inhabitants. He notes the arrival of rain after a period of dryness, but comments that it is insufficient to restore the earth. He contrasts the past and the present, using the metaphor of the sky carrying a boil of distress, the dust in simmering kitchens, bedrooms, and factories, and the unnatural desert. He depicts a world after the exploitation and desecration of the earth, its resources, and its ecological balance, and shows the anger and disorder in nature, and the danger to man and nature. He presents contrasting situations, and describes the positive aspects of nature when it rains, and the negative aspects when there is drought. He concludes the section with a vision of a regenerated earth and a restored harmony between man and nature.

The third section contains nine poems. In these poems, the poet reflects on his identity and his connection with his homeland and its culture. He uses the term "memory" to describe his recollections of the forest of *Ubo Abusoro*, where he recalls the destruction of the land and the trees by timber merchants, and the celebration of the palm-wine tree, the birds, the beasts, the antelopes, the partridge, the weaver bird, the squirrel, the chameleon, the praying mantis, the termites, the snakes, and the monkeys. He also describes his encounter with the rocks of *Olosunta*, another aspect of metphysical nature, which he addresses as a wayfarer who has been long and far, and who is doing a homecoming of a kind, a journey back and forth into a receding past which still has a right to live. He also discusses the cosmic consciousness of the Ikere people, who worship and appease the rocks with rare gifts, thunderous drumming, and dancing. He also narrates his personal and poetic journey from his rural upbringing to his urban education, and his return to his roots as a farmer-born. The book addresses the challenges faced by Nigerians due to environmental degradation, pollution, industrial exploitation, and the societal changes that accompany every stage of the country's neocolonial development. The resilience and resistance of the people are highlighted, as well as their potential to create a

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new world. The book concludes with a call to return to the earth, the source of life and wisdom.

The poetics of witchcraft in Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the earth*

There is no how the story (past, present, or future) of Africa can be awesomely narrated without the place of witchcraft. This is because the belief in witchcraft is a significant aspect of African culture. The human world, which for the Africans consists of three cosmic spaces: the sky, the earth (intricately joined with the water space), and the underworld[21,22,23,24] is occupied at all three levels by various categories of spirit-beings. As Uwalaka[25]puts it, the physical world of the Africans is delicately balanced by the interpenetration of the visible and the invisible, the spiritual and material, the ocentricism and anthropocentricism, as well as the transcendent and the imminent.

In Africa, there are two major categories of spirits: the good and the bad. That is the benevolent and malevolent spirits. Africans believe in the reality of the spirit world. The ardent desire to engage with it for the purposes of human survival, health, fruitfulness and longevity represent the aspect of positive or good spirit. Not only are spirits real, but also, evil is hyperactive and much religious activity and energy goes into restraining sources of supernatural evil and their influence on human life. Idowu[26] affirms that spirits can be everywhere:

> Spirits, according to African belief, are ubiquitous; there is no area of the earth, no object or creature, which has not a spirit of its own or which cannot be inhabited by a spirit. Thus, there are spirits of trees, that is, spirits which inhabit trees. There are special trees which are considered sacred by Africans and these are believed to be special residences of spirits.

By manifesting in or inhabiting material objects, spirits generally become 'visible' and, as it were, localized. The inhabited objects become veritable shrines for the spirits. Through them, they become easily accessible to man. When a spirit makes itself visible to man, it can take up a variety of forms. Those who have reportedly seen spirits in the forest, Hackett[27] observes, 'describe them as immoderate in appearance, as either hideous or beautiful, and often

[21]Achebe, "The World of the Ogbanje" 51
[22]C. Ejizu, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Igbo Traditional Religion." In *The God in Retreat – Continuity and Change in African Religion*, ed. E. I. Metuh. (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 2002), 111-131.
[23]M. Ifesieh, *Religion at the Grassroots* (Studies in Igbo Religion). (Enugu: Forth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd, 1989).
[24]C.M.A. Nwoye, "Igbo Cultural and Religious Worldview: An Insider's Perspective." *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 3 (9) (2011): 304- 317.
[25]J. Uwalaka, The Policies and Methods of the Catholic Missionary Evangelization of Igboland, Nigeria 1885 -1930. (Unpublished MA Thesis) Universite Catholique de Louvain, Louvain, 1986).
[26]E. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*. (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1973).
[27]R,I,J, Hachett, *Art and Religion in Africa*. (London: CASSELL, 1998).

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with feet turned backwards'. Thus they appear in human form or the shape of the objects they inhabit.

It is within this argument that Osundare's (1986) *The Eye of the Earth* is situated[28]. Osundare's emphasis in all the poems in *The Eye of the Earth* is on the natural cum spiritual environments in relation to man's interaction with them. In protecting nature from the scaring treatment of man, Osundare introduces readers to African witchcraft, which is believed in Africa to be the forces behind nature. Many traditional African belief systems view the sun, moon, rain, land, rock, trees, and other natural elements as having spiritual significance, often associating them with ancestral spirits or deities, and believing they influence human life and environment. Osundare exemplifies this debate by referencing the *Iroko* tree in *Forest Echoes*. *Iroko* tree is a large hardwood tree that grows in the tropics of Africa, particularly on the west coast in countries like Ghana, Guinea, Angola, Nigeria, Benin and Mozambique. The strength, durability and rot resistance of *Iroko* timber give it a number of potential applications, ranging from construction, furniture and joinery to paneling, boat building and flooring.

In Africa, people worship trees and the forests because they believe the spirits of their ancestors live in them. All trees are thought to have souls of their own, and some are regarded as the dwelling-places of other powerful spirits which take up temporary abode in them'. Among traditional Africans, spirits are deeply thought to inhabit trees, rocks, hills and water bodies[29,30,31].The *Yoruba* people for instance, who originate from the South-Western Nigeria and the adjoining parts of Benin and Togo, believe that the *Iroko* tree is inhabited by a spirit called the *Iroko*-man. Anyone who stands face-to-face with the *Iroko*-man becomes insane and speedily dies, which is why the tree is so feared. Anyone who tries to cut down the *Iroko* tree will have terrible misfortune unless they say a prayer afterwards to protect themselves. There are spirits of all kinds that live at the core of the tree and their job is to keep the *Iroko* tree from descending below the earth's core. It is also claimed that the spirit of the *Iroko*-man can be heard in houses that use *Iroko* timber, as his spirit is trapped in the wood. This cultural belief is strongly portrayed in *Forest Echoes* as further delineated below:

Like a flock of green aladuura
In their noise-and-sand retreat
Behold, too, these preyers
In the cannibal calvary
Of the forest
The Iroko which swallows the shrub
The hyena which tramples the grass
Its legs nerveless with the gangrene

[28]Osundare, "The Eye of the Earth." 22
[29]Idowu, "African Traditional Religion"
[30]T. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*. (Ibadan: African University Press, 1987)
[31]H. Sawyerr, *God: Ancestor or Creator*. (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1970)

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Of senseless power…[32]

The spiritualists, known as *aládùúrà* in Nigerian cosmology usually consult the trees for healing and protection. They come to the trees with different sacrificial offerings such as hyena, fowl, and cockerel, to appease the spirits of the trees. In *Forest Echoes*, three trees were mentioned. The *Iroko* tree, *ayúnrè* tree, and palm tree. The poet opines that part of the damage done to the environment by the *agbégilódòs* (tree cutters) is the destruction of the spirits residing in the trees. In Yoruba celestial mechanics, the *Iroko* spirits are known as "*Olúwéré*". This is reflected in a Yoruba proverb that says "a child abuses an *Iroko* tree and keeps running, not knowing that *Olúwéré* does not strike instantly. The poet frowns at the cutting of African trees, because he believes that African witchcrafts, which are part of African identities are destroyed. And in doing this, the witchcrafts possess the power to strike back, which may cause retrogression for the community.

Iroko wears the crown of the forest,
Town's rafter, roof of the forest
Ironwood against the termites of time
Iroko wears the crown of the forest
Scourge of the sweating sawyer[33]

In the context of Yoruba mythology and the Iroko passage, the crown metaphor suggests the Iroko tree's status as a monarch or a king. This implies several things, such as authority and power, wisdom and knowledge, interconnectedness, Respect and Reverence. The crown metaphor confers authority and power on the Iroko tree, positioning it as a leader or a central figure in the Yoruba universe. This challenges the traditional Western view of nature as subordinate to human culture. In Yoruba culture, monarchs are often associated with wisdom, knowledge, and spiritual insight. The crown metaphor suggests that the Iroko tree possesses these qualities, offering a profound understanding of the natural world and its place within the cosmos. The Iroko tree's monarchical status implies its connection to the web of life, emphasizing its role as a keystone species, a hub of ecological relationships, and a source of spiritual and cultural significance. The crown metaphor demands respect and reverence for the Iroko tree, acknowledging its importance in Yoruba mythology and its role in maintaining balance and harmony within the ecosystem.

The line "Ironwood against the termites of time" is a skilled example of the deployment of consonance and meter to convey the idea of resistance. The repeated "t" and "m" sounds in "termites of time" create a musical quality, with the "t" sound particularly prominent. This creates a sense of tension and resistance, as if the termites are trying to break down the Ironwood. The "m" sound in "termites" and "time" also creates a sense of murmur or murkiness, which contrasts with the solidity of the Ironwood. This contrast highlights the termites' relentless, insidious attack. The line has a strong, consistent meter, with a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables (e.g., Iron-WOOD against the

[32]Osundare, "The Eye of the Earth." 9
[33]Ibid., 5

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TER-mi-TES of TIME). This creates a sense of forward momentum, emphasizing the idea of resistance and endurance. The use of iambic tetrameter (four beats per line, with an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable) creates a sense of rhythmic regularity, which underscores the Ironwood's steady, unyielding presence. The combination of consonance and meter creates an emotional resonance that conveys the idea of resistance. The line feels like a powerful, insistent declaration, as if the Ironwood is saying, "I will not be defeated by the forces of time and decay!" The lamentable deforestation of the spiritual environment and the degradation of the ecosystem is documented further in the following:

A forest of a million trees, this,
A forest of milling trees
…wounded, though by time's axe
And the greedy edges of agbegilodo's matchet
A stump here, a stump there
Like a finger missing from a crowded hand…[34]

Tree felling has its deleterious effects on the physical and spiritual environment. The absence of trees lays bare the forests, endangers wild life, destroys farmlands and terribly alters the entire landscape. It is a popular belief that spirits live in the forest too, and that they perch on trees in the midnight. That is why Africans knock the door of the *Iroko* tree three times before entering the *Iroko* tree. There is a spirit at the entrance of *Iroko* Tree, according to Mbiti[35]. One needs to seek permission and show some respect before that spirit allows you to enter the tree.In fact the tree is a portal to another realms and African fore fathers are aware of this[36].

In another poem, '*"The Rocks Rose to Meet Me"* by Osundare, the magnificent and resplendent *Olósuntà* rock in *Ìkéré Èkìtì,* southwest Nigeria, the birthplace of the poet is revered for its mythical properties and presumed capacity to provide a safe haven for the townspeople in the event of attacks by adversaries. The poet advises against the demolition of the rock not only because it adds to the beauty of the environment but, more importantly, because the physical and spiritual benefits that the townspeople derive from its existence will be lost, permanently and irretrievably.

Olósuntà spoke first
The eloquent one
Whose mouth is the talking house of ivory
Olósuntà spoke first
The lofty one whose eyes are
Balls of the winking sun
Olósuntà spoke first
The riddling one whose belly is wrestling ground
For god and gold[37]

[34]Ibid., 174
[35]Mbiti, "Introduction to African Religion"
[36]Hachett," Art and Religion in Africa."
[37]Osundare, "The Eye of the Earth." 13

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In the excerpt above, the repetition of "*Olósuntà*" at both the beginning and end creates a framing device, emphasizing *Olósuntà*'s role and perhaps underscoring its importance or authority. The repetition makes the line more memorable, highlighting the significance of *Olósuntà*'s speech or action as foundational. The word "eloquent" suggests fluency, persuasive power, and artistic expression. It indicates that *Olósuntà* is not just a speaker but a master of speech, implying wisdom, diplomacy, or artistry. The phrase serves as a descriptive title, elevating *Olósuntà*'s status and personality, hinting at qualities of intelligence and charisma. The metaphoric expression "Whose mouth is the talking house of ivory" is heartwarming. Ivory traditionally symbolizes purity, rarity, and value. Referring to the mouth as a "house of ivory" suggests that *Olósuntà*'s speech is precious, pure, and possibly elegant or refined. "Talking house" personifies the mouth, giving it agency and character, implying that *Olósuntà*'s speech is expansive, architectural, and significant like a house that embodies communication. The phrase evokes an image of a sacred structure, emphasizing the power and beauty of *Olósuntà*'s words. It also suggests that *Olósuntà*'s speech is contained within something valuable and enduring ("ivory"), symbolizing wisdom or truth.

The poet assigns human attributes to the *Olósuntà* rock to emphasise the spiritual significance of the rock to the people of the society where it is domiciled. He avers that the rock speaks eloquently, sees with the eyes of the rock as ball of the winking sun. The poet further speaks of the belly of the rock as a wrestling ground. The implication of this is that the rock serves more than a physical shield to the people. It is like the *Rock of Ages*, described in the ancient and classical hymn by Augustus Toplady[38]. The rock, in Augustus Toplady's hymn alludes to the biblical concept of God as a steadfast and unwavering source of strength and refuge. It is a reference to God as seen in [39]Deuteronomy 32 and Isaiah 26:4. Osundare's *Olósuntà* rock possesses powerful attributes that are very similar to Toplady's rock. The imagery of 'eyes', 'belly', and 'mouth' is metaphoric, in the sense that it is describing the spiritual characteristics of the rock.

[52]Osundare further notes that ''the rocks…occupy a central place in the cosmic consciousness of the *Ikere* people of Nigeria. It must be stressed that these rocks are dramatize as a creative material essence, as lasting monuments of time and space''. He adds that the mineral deposits said to reside in the precincts of the rocks should be mined and its proceeds spread to meet the needs of all and not of the overfed cabal which mindlessly extorts and oppresses the people all the time. This is why he says:

…the gold let us dig,
Not for the gilded craniums
Of hollow chieftains
(..who deem this earth their sprawling throne)…[40]

[38]A. Toplady, *Rock of Ages*. (New York: The Lovell Co., 1776)
[39]The Bible. New International Version: *Deutronomy 32 &Isaiaih 26*.
[40]Osundare, "The Eye of the Earth." 14

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The phrase "let us dig" suggests a collective call to action, implying a desire or instruction to seek something valuable beneath the surface. "Gold" symbolizes wealth, value, purity, or something precious. The act of digging for gold indicates a pursuit of genuine worth, perhaps beyond superficial appearances. Digging evokes effort, labour, and discovery, suggesting that true riches require work and exploration. The coloured words "Not for the gilded craniums" set up a negation, emphasizing that the pursuit is not for superficial or hollow things.

In ‘’*They too are the Earth*’’, Osundare problematizes the uncanny insularity of a privileged few who are bent on ruining the entire spirituality of the environment for the masses of the people for filthy lucre. The poet points out that in spite of their aloofness and pretensions to the obverse, they too are part of humanity who render the physical and spiritual environment unfriendly and unlivable. They foul the air and pollute the water for all. Relevant stanzas of the poem say it all:

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? (p 35)
Who lynched the lakes. Who?
Who slaughtered the seas. Who?
Whoever mauled the mountains. Whoever?
Our earth will not die…[41]

The expression "Are they of this earth" is a rhetorical question, asking whether those responsible for environmental destruction are truly connected to or part of the natural world. It suggests a disconnect or betrayal of natural kinship. The word "Fritter" implies wasting or destroying something gradually and carelessly. The word connotes trivialization and negligence towards nature. Also, the lexical choice, "Harry" is an archaic term, meaning to plunder, disturb, or harass. It intensifies the violence inflicted on the hills, suggesting aggressive and relentless destruction.

By asking "Who lynched the lakes?” the poet is implicitly referencing the disruption of this balance between humanity and nature, suggesting that actions taken by individuals or societies can disturb these spiritual realms. This poem invites readers to grapple with complex emotions related to the loss and the ongoing struggle against disenchantment with the natural and spiritual world. It prods at the intersections of spiritual belief and environmental stewardship, urging a return to respecting the natural world as alive and vital. Ultimately, the work serves as both a lament and a call to reflection on how humanity interacts with the elements that form the bedrock of cultural identity and spiritual beliefs. The poet conveys a sense of bewilderment and helplessness. It reflects the speaker's anguish over the destruction of these vital elements of nature and, by extension, a loss of connection to heritage and spirituality. The questioning tone suggests a search for accountability and

[41]Ibid., 50

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responsibility for these acts, which can be seen as both literal and metaphorical loss.

"Lakes" as mentioned in *Our Earth Will Not Die***,** are commonly regarded as sources of life, fertility, and purification in various African traditions. For instance. Many African cultures hold the belief that lakes harbor spirits, often referred to as the "lake spirits" or "water spirits," who govern the wellbeing of the water. These spirits are often invoked in rituals designed to ensure abundant fish populations or to protect against misfortunes. In some traditions, certain lakes are considered to be the abodes of ancestors or mythical figures, making them important sites for observed rituals, offerings, and communal gatherings. The interaction with these entities is not just governed by fear or reverence; it is also about recognizing the lake as a life-giving force that requires respect and care. The "sea" as referenced by the poet holds a particularly prominent place in coastal and island cultures across Africa, serving as a source of food, trade, and cultural exchange. For communities along the coastline, the ocean is often seen as an extension of their identity, a provider of sustenance, and a pathway to other worlds.

The beliefs surrounding the sea include associations with creation myths and ancestral stories, and it is frequently viewed as a gateway to the spirit world. Many coastal tribes harbor beliefs in mermaids and other entities that dwell beneath the waves. These beings can be seen as protectors of the sea's resources but also as tricksters who may lead unwary fishermen astray. Rituals to honour the ocean often aim to appease these spirits and ask for protection, hoping to avert disasters like capsizing or poor fishing yields. The "mountains", as echoed by the poet, and often regarded as sacred sites, have been revered in many African cultures throughout history. They are viewed as patrons of protection, strength, and endurance, drawing worshippers to their peaks for spiritual journeys and communing with the divine. The poet, Osundare, strikingly mentions a particular mountain known as *Òkè Ubó Àbùsorò.*

This is *ÒkèUbóÀbùsorò*
The distant forest which shames the lazy leg
Where the *Oro* tree hawks lofty fruit
For the blue children of a hungry sky
Where pampered yams break heaps bounds
And the plantain leans earthwards…[42]

The belief in spirits and witches inhabiting lakes, seas, and mountains reflects broader themes in African cosmologies, where the material and spiritual worlds are interlinked. Spiritual entities are considered to have agency and direct influence over everyday life, with their presence or absence capable of affecting health, prosperity, and harmony within communities. Witches, in particular, are often associated with natural landscapes that embody mystical qualities. It is believed that they may draw power from these places, using their abilities for good or ill.

[42]Ibid., 4

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Osundare's use of Yoruba cosmological imagery in the lines above and in the earlier lines constructs an ecopoetic discourse that differs from Western environmental poetry in several ways. The lines draw on a rich cultural heritage of mythological and cosmological concepts that are deeply rooted in Yoruba cosmology, such as the idea of a complex web of relationships between humans, nature, and the divine. This approach contrasts with Western environmental poetry, which often emphasizes the need for humans to dominate and control nature in order to protect it. Instead, Osundare suggests a more reciprocal and dialogical relationship between humans and nature, where the two are seen as interdependent and mutually transformative. By drawing on Yoruba cosmological imagery, *The Eye of the Earth* can be seen as a form of "ecological resistance", which challenges dominant Western discourses of environmentalism that prioritize human control over nature.

Conclusion

In light of the close readings of *The Eye of the Earth*, it is evident that Niyi Osundare's poetic project intricately weaves the motif of witchcraft into a multifaceted critique of contemporary societal and environmental issues. By reimagining witchcraft beyond its traditional superstitions, Osundare elevates it to a potent allegory for the unseen, malevolent forces, both spiritual and ecological, that threaten the integrity of the earth and community life. His poetic language employs vivid ecological imagery, metaphysical references, and cultural symbolism to expose the destructive patterns of modern exploitation and to advocate for moral and spiritual awakening.

Osundare's work resists colonial dismissals of African spirituality, positioning indigenous cosmologies as vital sources of philosophical insight and resistance. Through his explicit portrayal of witchcraft, he underscores its relevance as a metaphor for societal complicity in environmental degradation and social injustice. His poetry not only critiques these forces but also mobilizes a collective consciousness rooted in African cultural traditions, asserting that genuine progress entails engaging with these spiritual and moral dimensions. Ultimately, Osundare's poetic project demonstrates that witchcraft, when reinterpreted through a contemporary lens, serves as a vital tool for resistance, cultural affirmation, and ecological awareness.

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