

## Transcription

**Tosin Gbogi:** Thank you everyone for joining us on the third episode of the Green Room. My name is Tosin Gbogi and I am an Assistant Professor of English and African studies at Marquette University. It gives me great pleasure to be moderating this conversation on the intersection between poetry and environmental sustainability with a particular focus on Osundare's poetry. Indeed this event could not have been timelier given the particularly challenging times we now live in. Besides the many consequences of environmental degradation that we have seen in recent years, we have now a new virus in town which goes by the name COVID-19 and sometimes I wonder why it is COVID-19, It could be 20. Although small and invisible to the human eye, this virus takes the world as a theater and our new stages are the tragedy of epic proportions as the scale of its human disaster rises and the denials of its real magnitude continued, we are reminded that although humans are on this planet they are not the planet indeed we are not the planet. On this Earth, although other beings, other elements, other forces all of which have their destinies, their own Spirit, their own aspirations as well as anger.

Provoked they react often beyond our imagination and to our constellation, but who wouldn't after all, the Yoruba's say "Omo ale ni oma ri inu ti ko ba bi" that is only a bastard refuses to be angry in the face of provocation. We are extremely lucky to have as our guest today lead wire of African literature, Niyi Osundare. Niyi Osundare is an author of eighteen books of poetry, two books of selected poems four plays, a book of essays and several monographs academic papers, and features articles on literature language culture and politics. His Echo literary criticism and activism and its poetic activism now in its fourth decade have been the subject of several scholarly writings International attention. Drawing inspiration from many African cultures or shoulder is of gnarled oak Center both the human and non-human dimensions of our health, especially in the will that show they are codependent and intertwined fit. In his poetry therefore the moon does not only have its song but also in its own Madness, water does not only retain its memory of human wrongs, but also retaliates and the Earth does not only possess potent laughter, but also potent anger. cause non-hierarchical universal relations in which humans gbas gbas Trigger or can trigger Nature's gbas gbas (confusion) as he Osundare's poetry shot through with his own kind of Hope, which is best framed by thought forms as our Earth will not die and this city will not die. This program is put together by the Green Institute under the directorship of Dr. Adenike Akinsemolu, located in Ondo town in Nigeria. This institute has been at the center of many conversations around Environmental Sustainability in Nigeria in recent years. I am deeply grateful to the staff of this Institute for all their brilliant work and advocacy and for hosting this conversation. I'm also deeply grateful to Professor Osundare for honoring this invitation.

As I yield the screen now to professor Osundare, please remember to send in your life comments and questions or greetings for the poet as we continue with the conversation. Please join me in welcoming Our Guest to this conversation.

**Prof. Osundare:** Thank you very much Tosin for that characteristically brilliant introduction. I was going to say let me go home go back home. Thank you too soon. And thank you Dr. Adenike Akinsemolu for the initiative that I have seen all around the work you've been doing over there in Ondo. Our country doesn't always have a heavy reputation around the world. That it is important and rarely heartening to

see this kind of initiative coming from Nigeria and coming from Ondo too. What I will be doing will be a kind of filmed performance, filmed presentation because the moderator Tosin as had my work neatly cut out for me. So a point of meeting and our Point of Departure will be Earth. All the poems I'll be reading will centered on our Earth or closely related to it. Now, this is a topic that has engaged my creative energies in my creative imagination since I started writing. What earth is so important and I have not just deformed but also my comments and essays in different books, the latest of them being Caliban published by the University of Toulouse France. This was about two years ago where they had a conference. Lands, photos, and sorrows in Anglophone countries. What this whole huge book is about is the relationship between nature, the environment, literature, and other acts. I was privileged to have been invited to present the keynote address, which I looked at the pain as a digging instrument. So we have this year and there is also another one from my old university the University of Leeds in England moving forward. This is in general and this entire volume is dedicated to our Earth and nature with emphasis on the reckless use of nature, of the abuse of the environment, and the repercussions that the emphasis here is on catastrophes and the environment. And there is ISLE had co-founded and Co-edited by a friend of mine, Professor Scott Straub here in the U.S. Introducing primary studies in literature and the environment. I have had sole contribution too. This is just to let you know that this is functional poetry or poetry in situ with a kind of vision. I am happy that we're doing a lot about the environment and try to rescue the earth on which we live but I have tried to orchestrate it to some kind of symphony since it is claimed. There will be six parts, the first part will be dealing with poems relating to 'Oriki ile' that is Praise name for the Earth. The ravages kind of plunder down to the Earth next is consequences and then Earth more Oreos or members of the Salvation Army of the earth and the environment one or two points about that, the admonitions 1 or 2 words about what's been happening? And the last one will be the kind of quota or ethical conclusion. That will be at the end of the program the Preamble often people call me farmer born peasant bread. That is something I impose upon myself because I think that's those are the first few ways of the eye of the earth book I completed writing in 1985 was published that year. This is important in my background. My father was a farmer, It was when I got to the university that I found to put out about middle-class or upper-class and so on. We were peasant we were farmers and we respected the Earth because we knew that our whole being depended on it. My father used to tell me that you should be able to talk to a tree and hear the tree talk back to you. The kind of background I had reminded me of and still remind me of my experiences with indigenous peoples of the world beginning from here in the United States the Native Americans that we often have forgotten now. The land has been taken over brother the wall way one way or another and nobody seems to know nobody seems to remember that before this huge fish. We have around here. Some people inhabited this continent before they come here from Europeans. Then we go to Australia and New Zealand the Maori from there to the Pacific Papua, New Guinea.

So on are then Africa indigenous people and the respect they show to the Earth. The difference between my experiences reading about these peoples and the experiences I had as a boy growing up in the rainforest area of Nigeria and what the immediate trigger for the eye of the Earth in the early 80s was The damage that I saw happening to that rainforest of my youth. Native Americans have a saying credited to them that i think should be globally credited to them and then globally accepted and used and I say this "We did not inherit this Earth from our ancestors we borrowed it from our children". (Tee

jeje Tee jeje) that is step gingerly gingerly upon the Earth. So part one (Oriki Ile) still part of the (Tee jeje) this little book of poems I remember the last paragraph in the short prefix I did for it, which I completed in November 1985,

Waters are dying, forests are fallen and there's an epidemic stocks a world where the rich are ruthless squander Earth wealth of the invention of increasingly accomplished millions of death while millions of people perish daily from avoidable Hunger.

Tomorrow bids us tread softly, wisely, justly less we trample the eye of the Earth. So Earth (ile) why shouldn't I start with a song that I used to hear when I was near young in Ikere Ekiti the western part of Nigeria?

### SONG

Alale lobaisa alaale

Ijogun jo ode o Alale lobaisa alaale

Ijo ote allele o Alale lobaisa alaale

Alale lobaisa alaale

Ramping basement and last year's roof firstly kindness and the last alluvial Joy. Breadbasket and compost bedrocks and rivers molds and mountains Silence of the Twilight sea and the Moon sometime milk of many moon fire of tropical earth spouse of the sky virgin of a thousand offspring (Ogere amoko yeri) (song). Still on our earth and its Oriki. The second poem is taken from one of my books of poetry Days of you know, those of us who know something about you that cosmology and culture, won't find it difficult to apprehend every day of the week is a character with its panoply of activities and lot of Consciousness around the days. So this book is about days I'm talking about this. We also have to talk about the day dedicated to our remembrance and celebration of some preservation of the Earth by the United Nations. That is April 22nd. Every year celebrate. It is celebrated in a short poem. In days Ayajo April 22nd and this is to be accompanied by the music of the Earth in any language of the World music that represents the Rhythm and the lyric of this Earth every day is Earth. And the earth is every day. This day is the day of the Bell and the gun of solemn Awakenings and the hurt which comes before they herb. Wounded trees bleed in the forest lynched leaks kanji, like rancid oceans poison sea foams at the edge of a thousand mouths. Could there forget the day the river caught fire and the mountain lay crushed like a mount of populist egg yellow rings Crimson deal, boiling Winters freezing summers perforated sky lynx, red tears into the basin of the new Rivers?

A tropical Madness of Bluffs the streets newborn babies surprised The Credo with bubbleheads heartless sighs have sowed the wind. Oh, see how we rip this toe. Where are the sick petal flowers birds with feathers of paradise? Clean like the breast of a mountain spring dust which speaks the language of the human skin. This they insist that we restore the frog to it, pond the dew to its grass then put his mind to its future.

Those are not always going that way. So we have ravages that are the plunder that our Earth has been through especially through the power of the so-called. Science people say it is science people say it is progress. But when you see the way our environment is being used, you know that it is neither scientific nor is it a progressive? Because I started lighting science comes from the Latin word Scientia one here on his knowledge. This is Earth with the knowledge that you don't have the kind of ecocide that we are having now. Ravages this section is dominated by The Amazon story that releases my recent experience when the Amazon forest went the whole region went a fire a couple of months ago and

The president of France (president Macron). Macron said the lungs of our planet are on fire that is a very powerful metaphor the lungs of our planet on fire. So is a section this with please what do they do for us now? I think the better way to start and read just a few lines of a poem have written in YORUBA? Those who understand should please hear me and understand me at the same time those who do not enjoy this sound.

The title is IGI DA and I owed the initiative here to great indigenous Yoruba poet (Akewi) Tubosun Oladapo, Lanrewaju Adepoju, Akinwumi Ishola, Adebayo Faleti and so many others who in their own words have shown us the beauty that comes from the lips of Yoruba speakers.

#### IGIDA

Atoto arere ijamba baba fitina

Ewa gbo ewa gbo eyin mutumuwa

Ejeka finu konu, kas se apero oro

Eje ka soko oro sawon alaake wobia

A ge teni ma ro tola

A so gbe di asale

A so ile ololi di ilu ongbe

E je ka woke ka woju ojo

Ka bi sanmo leere pe ibo ni oorun wa

Igi n tan ninu igbo

Agboniratan ti di nikan a n wan loke eepe

Iroko rogbodo a fi giga fio fio seso nibo lowa

Arabaribi oni gbongbo rigijiragagia nibo lore

Ogunwoganmoganse loke oko abusoroaja nibo ni wo re

Igi omo o fun wa nilekun ola ni bo lo gbe duro

A a gbaga

Igi ti wo

Eye ti folo

Let's go to the Amazon there is a book I'm working on which is the sequel to the eye of the earth as I had completed it until the Amazon started burning as I know how to do something about a couple of poems about this. So there is a whole body of poems for me a movement in that book. I'm reading one or two poems from their Amazon burning and again President Macron the lungs of the planet are on fire.

So in the background, there will be the music of some tremondic type somber but not hopeless

Act 1

Who's stuck provoked the fire people of the world can you see them fire region like a sleeping dragon on the roof of our planet? Dwellers of our precious Earth Can you hear the deathless remedy of willing leaves in The Inferno of the forests?

The Amazon who is burning the lungs of our planet are seared in smokes do not ask me who spark fathered this fire, but not ask whose greed provoked The Blaze do not ask whose brightness averted our gaze from this incendiary Graves. We have sold the sender this several seasons here now comes the darkness of our doom The Amazon is burning the lungs of our planet Seth a smokes tell it to the emperor's who fill in their Golden Palaces. while this Earth Burns and Bleeds in countless places everything how the stumble is the clearest signs, sorceries' Triumph science the hottest superstition Drown the voice of genuine reason they who know nothing must become the masters of everything. Amazon is burning the lungs of our planet our fields in spokes.

In this section of the book, you have trees talking like human beings. Yes, they are beings too. And if you listen very well, you will have we not only hear you understand their language have so many trees problem that I'm going to just give us the voice of one of them. It's called kapok in the Amazon now I have to do some bit of research. The Amazon in Brazil in Peru, Costa Rica then up to Malaysia Indonesia back to Africa Congo, you know and of course the western part of West Africa and the rainforest area of Africa the trees that grow Brothers and sisters. It's amazing. Also here is kapok is I think the cousin the Amazon cousin of the Iroko.

My name is Kapok. Giant of the Amazon they call me the father of the animals and they have never been wrong squirrels race up and down my back. The stills are stir from my gentle breath. Monkeys come in. They are restless dozens that Restless gymnast of forbidden Heights the slough too lazy to climb sometimes grunts. Its cheers from the humble parts 300 years old and still growing. My father saw many Mormons as also did my mother my brook has long mastered the art of Putting death beyond our gaze.

Above the Earth, in my reach Towards the Sky Taming, the Sounds frightening fire in the Basin of my lips season after season. Storms have come and gone some wired a furious with murder in their home but autressed and hard as iron. I know how to tame the wind the folds of the platfo rm. Slow which routes have learned to have become the caves and castles for troubled birds and beasts. Father, doctor, Fortress are the spirit of the world. I root the rain and directed the desert. I am that blog in the whole of the sky. I am a vital lobe of the lung of the planet. That is kapok telling us in case we do not know.

Had the tees talk back to they're not just passive recipients of the human beings. Mindless plunder they try to tell us in here. We talk separately attempts. Because themselves why human beings doing this to us look at the axe their big machetes their big chain saws. One of the trees themselves has got to know what he meant is due to one another they shouldn't be surprised what they do to our trees. Yeah, Trees talk, but it takes more than ordinary intelligence and sensitivity to hear and understand their language. Oh, all the trees are the end of that movement sing this song "We bleed when cut we are the trees of the Amazon. We are the trees in the world. We laugh we cry we whisper we shout when breed we brewed with this we have up to it.

We carry Planets and careful hands you tender burden historic Mission the loom and lack of your naked world. We robe it as in our green embrace. Hour by hour we lose our skin waste to walk at the s enseless blaze we came saw and the cannibal greed of the Rich and strong the spider monkey and the spectacled bear the butterflies and the fore crabs the eloquent parrot, the Seditious owl the cool canopy and the traveling roots. A Tree never falls alone in the forest a tree never falls alone. It takes our future with the crashing leaves the blind Gold Digger the Reckless farmer subjects. We are the trees of the Amazon. We are the trees of the world from the past flowers of the future will burn when ignited we bleed when cut we are the vital top of the lungs of the planet. Those are the tree stocking and of course, we know.

The rain forest of the world, I think control well over 70% of oxygen well scientists say so and I think it's reasonable to so forests are also healers and they are just in case we like this don't know they are telling us. We have not been listening and because we're going to be listening there are consequences.

There are a couple of poems. I have some interdisciplinary studies literature and the environment in the book edited by my friend Slovage. One of them is titled the desert that cometh.

That's from a bird high view I was in an airplane one day and I cast my gaze down through the Windows looking at the Sahara I saw by the time had finished flying over the Sahara do fly for about an hour or two over green vegetation now the green vegetation is disappearing the rain forest from the air is like an eyebrow now of the head of the Sahara.

The desert cometh

The desert

Marches towards the coast

Dust-faced  
Fire footed  
A millennia Fury in its gaze  
A swath of scorpions and its hand  
The sky: bear and frightened  
The only Cloud there is  
Is a caravan of particles  
And intimations of coming plagues  
Wilted wheat  
Unpunctual tubers  
The Sahel unleashes its hell  
The trees are in sad retreat  
Between deserts and Ocean  
A narrow strip of trembling green  
There is a fire Hole  
In the Sky.  
Earth is nothing more  
Than a cauldron of dry dreams.

The one is titled drying lake. If you were around the Lake Chad about 20 years ago 25 years ago. Go back there now. I'll see what the lake is shrinking otherwise dry. All the link elements are dried at the whole place is stinking because fishes

Thunder and so on one of the largest lakes in Africa are drying up before our very eyes. So the ignorant and callous politicians who say that climate change is a hoax who says that climate change is a hoax are a dangerous hoax themselves climate change is real and dangerously real for that matter.

So the drying lake is a poem for lake chad?

And then there's another one head in the sand. Those are people who say that climate change is just a hoax then I'd call that a strict with the head and they are in the Sun and because we know that it is very real.

Yes, let's go onto Earth warriors with all this happening human beings folding their hands and just watching know as often happens. There are human beings who think about the future and there are many of them Tangled mess. There are powerful opponents. Those ones will not inherit the future.

One of them as a name I call them Salvation Army of the Earth the Nigerian environmentalist and writer and a good friend of mine who was hiked by the Nigerian government not just kill but hiked by the Nigerian government on November 10, 1995. I think. Yeah, that was the government of the maximum ruler of Nigeria the military dictator Saani Abacha. Those of us who often say that has nothing to do with politics should really see what is happening in our world and then they know whether a tree should live or not whether the eyes and the arctic to continue to meet with the oceans swelling and coastal towns best swallowed up, whether we should allow this to continue depends upon who has power political power. This is where we all involved and we are all engaged with it. Ken Saro Wiwa that's to whom this poem is dedicated. It's a song. I saw ken Saro Wiwa shortly before he was killed. He had a copy of his book on this darkling plain. Yes, and it was his Sunday morning. I think he brought me a copy at my home on the campus of the University of Ibadan. I never knew that that would be the last person. I was going to see a short man usually ask. Can you see me humorous and brilliant, extremely active and a very fine writer. He died because he said the exfoliation the devastation of ogonni land and I will say the riverside area Delta area of Nigeria where the oil is coming from but this exfoliation to stop. I think the oil companies saw to that in collusion with the military dictators of Nigeria.

To Ken Saro Wiwa is not dead.

I saw ken Saro Wiwa the other night short and sharp like an angry song so many years still no respite. The wrath so rife the dispute so strong, the oil tycoons still pollute the land like a bunch of braggarts our days still dark our nights are Flare our Lives are ruled by fright and Fear The Creeks are blocked. The rivers are chocked. The fish are deadly crops are gone the same old fire satanic elestocked the same oil men with their greedy gone. They drill and drill and still they drill a prostrate Earth they spear no thought for coming years our Trampled land is tears and wears. The deltas Black Gold our yellow peril are plundered land is corrupted home. They scoop their billions without a sweat the polluted people are the rusted Crow. The story they are can is still the same except in places it's grossly worse. The Deltas dog shakes in its feeble frame there are just too strong for my humble verse.

The other Warrior is not in Nigeria and because she's not Nigerian she is also of the world and the young lady whose momentum and initiative of shaking the world (name) Swedish teenager the conscience of the world. I've been following her and this poem is the immediate trigger.

That is her address to the United Nations a couple of months ago when she asked them how dare you? "Ti agbe ba n se bi omode, omode a maa se bi agba". How dare you she asked. The derivative founder of her question rattled the group of a sleepy World. They are very compelling volcano urgent with Fearless fire in her mouth the tongue of speech and Sear.

Listen to the tree respect to the river Tame that greed which consumes our world give our Earth a chance to live. How dare you she asked from pole to pole that Thunder nettled powerful who lost every



sense of the reason behind her rage it need patient indignation it roaring Redemptive reproach? How dare you she asked the women of Green ham common nodded in grateful remembrance

Our universe of rocks to the Rhythm of her courage the Futures sways to the vastness of her vision. How dare you she asked?

The last poem will be read at the end of the conversation.

Just two short poems one, which people are familiar because it's been a reading list in Nigeria for a long time. Hours to plow not to plunder that's from the eye of the earth.

Ours to plow not to plunder  
The earth is ours to plough and plant  
the hoe is her barber  
the dibble her dimple  
Out with mattocks and matches  
bring calabash trays and rocking baskets  
let the sweat which swells earthroot  
relieve heavy heaps of their tuberous burdens  
let wheatfields raise their breadsome hands  
to the ripening sun  
let legumes clothe the naked bosom  
of shivering mounds  
let the pawpaw swell and swing  
it's headward breasts  
Let water spring  
from earth's unfathomable fount  
let gold rush  
from her deep unseeable mines  
hitch up a ladder to the dodging sky

let's put a sun in every night  
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 and not to maim  
The earth is ours to plough, not to plunder

I think that will be it for now the affirmative last poem I think I will Reserve want to learn the end of our discussion. I have monopolized This platform long enough now I yield my place.

**Tosin Gbogi:** Thank you very much for that. I don't think it's Green. I think its performance, right? So thank you.

**Prof. Osundare:** You're welcome.

**Tosin Gbogi:** I think we will start the conversation now and I would like to open the conversation with a question on place and childhood and by this. I mean that you know you of course grew up in Ikere Ekiti, and we find this in your poetry. I remember that I traveled through that place. I think 2016 sometimes down 16, I was looking for the for the Rocks which one is Olosunta

**Prof. Osundare:** They saw you (laughs)

**Tosin Gbogi:** very good one. In the eyes of the earth for example one finds references to Oke Ubo, Abusoro, to Oke Eniju to Oke to Ogbese Odo and to Oke Roku. We also see like just said I will hear Olosunta we see and hear Oranle and we hear Eshidale. Now my question then is this how did the Ikere of your childhood or the Nigeria of your childhood shape the way we think about the earth and the writing that you do, they are eco- poetic activism.

**Prof Osundare:** I also say that the happiest years of my life where the years I was born 1947 and 1966 when Nigeria experienced her first coup d'état. Particularly 1960- 1966 Understood conveniently on our necks at this time. There were problems but we know better somehow there was most sanity and then after that things began to really fall apart. I have seen a little bit of the world and I can compare coaches and I will say that an African culture is extremely strong and Yoruba is part of it. There is a depth to Yoruba culture and language and relationships between other cultures and other languages in the country and on the continent and now our planet. For example every citizen had its own organization through all of the different activities. The kind of songs that went with dancing. My father was a farmer I grew up on the farm another. We'll call it Ara oko. I just want to put it that way a very proud Ara oko indeed and then the region was respecting indigenous religion one of the problems. One of the causes

of a crisis in Africa today I think is the Takeover of our indigenous selves by Islam and Christianity Yoruba Culture, Yoruba cosmology are really rooted in the this plus That kind of plastic that has access to it happened that when this religion came. Oh, no. Oh, it's a weak now that has caused a lot of problem. All the artworks because in Africa culture and religion. The artists have to do is leave him each of the Orisa were thrown out because they were called Idols as our Idols a Catholic practice. Those idols were civilized. Respect for the forest disappeared as I saw him one of the invitations to this program. There were secret forests in those days the imbrue God intends for the furnace has its own some time researching now the forest what actually made the trees had its own identity. So I grew up with all the songs Egungun Festival, Osanyin Festival, and Osun of course. All this things contributed to the way I saw the world. I have never encountered anything more poetic than those. So when you talk about poetry you'd only go out is surrounded by it naming ceremony, Marriage ceremony, Ekun Iyawo there were all there Okay? Yeah. Yeah. Take another look at Wole Soyinka's Works another look at Chinua Achebe's works. A lot of what we do without the culture and of course without diminishing the impact of what has come from abroad in doing this and that not this instead of that. "Me loluwa wi" as the Yoruba say the sky is wide enough for a thousand birds to fly without clashing unless some are unnecessarily greedy. I think I'm stronger because I have added Western ways of doing things and so on to my own Yoruba ways of doing them. Now I have to substitute what's coming from our side they reached the Poetry of it. It is in our backyard which is bedroom. It's in the kitchen. It's in the song we sing to welcome the new moon, is the song when we see a beautiful flower.

**Tosin Gbogi:** Thank you very much for that response, In your recent work you moved towards a new kind of the color value called differential Aesthetics and I was thinking because in that paper you were talking about art and politics and how Western understanding of Aesthetics would you know mean that you know, you don't combine both, you know, I kind of think that you also find It is selected poems in 2002 selected poems. So I was so this kind of material that you put in your poetry, some critics consider this essentialism. How do you balance the how do you respond to that?

**Prof. Osundare:** Thank you Very much, yes differential Aesthetics Yeah This is an idea, It's not just theory it is a principle that rules my Enterprise even my creative Consciousness, differential. A Chinese poet writes differently from an American poet, An Indian poet writes differently from an Australian we are all writing poetry but from different cultural and social and political background. Yes German Harwich (name), also said let the thousand flowers bloom, but what I say with many of the so-called critics and theories especially in the western part of the world is let my flower bloom and takes over the whole earth. You should concur one little Village in France, some little village in America. I would say well now I have a little that covers all literature written everywhere every time in the world. That is ignorance it is first cousin of stupidity no critics African writers are always had for this problem with the critics especially Western critics. Socrates Aristotle, Plato those of course a great writers, those are a Great Fairy. Those are great thinkers. I'm happy that I know them. I know their Works. There are correspondences. I mean look at the ancient Hebrew culture and ancient Yoruba cultural, there are similarities because we are just human beings so problems arise when you compose your own theoretical and aesthetic judgment or what coming from other places.

Just one example, And I stand to be corrected Yoruba doesn't have and doesn't rely on any rhyming pattern which must come terminally in the poem a ABAB CD then it is not poem. Who told you that. What about what I called system rhythm mechanism. Yoruba is music, Igbo is music, Edo, Urhobo. Music is Africa. Go to the Congo they are doing music and poetry which birth appreciated those forms of music different types of different aesthetically and emotionally from this so I'm saying that yes let a thousand flowers bloom. Write enough poetry but have enough intelligence, have enough humility to know that not everybody in the world should create a poem or so do this sculpture or should do the painting that will match your own expectations and your own prejudices. Yes, differential aesthetics. In Yoruba you don't say "Mo fe ka ewi but you say Mo fe kewi" I want to chant poetry, I want to sing poetry, I want to perform poetry. This is very important aspect call system rhythmicity. The music in it, how do we rarely handle it?

**Tosin Gbogi:** Thank you very much for that wonderful. I would like to bring in Dr. Chigbo Anyaduba who is an assistant professor in the University of Winnipeg.

**Dr. Anyaduba:** Thank you very much Tosin and thank you Professor.

**Prof. Osundare:** You're welcome.

**Dr. Anyaduba:** I particularly want to thank you for the incredible work you have been doing especially for the art. Some of your poems that I have been privileged to read have inspired me a lot so quickly regarding the subject of poetry and environment. I thought that one of the things your poems have done for me is to connect me much more to the world that I live in especially to the so-called natural environment or natural world. And even when some of these poems maybe morning humans that Devastation of the environment or cautioning against urination of the Earth or prophesying Doom against violence to the natural world. I see you manage to feel that sense of being included with awareness. So I need to go Consciousness, you know about environment. And I found it very fascinating the way yourself classified your work today into four movements, you know from paying homage to the Earth to morning the violence. Don't read the Earth and then to kind of the S retaliation or the consequences as you put it of human violence on the earth and then to admonition, you know, I'm still expecting the last poem. The first question concerns the General matter about writing and And we know that the people responsible especially for the destruction of the earth are not usually the ones who suffer the consequences at least the immediate consequences at the moment, right the Niger Delta in Nigeria to distill it has specifically the victims of the despoliation going on. They are the ones who have suffered from Earth's retaliation, right? So my question is Why does Earth not discriminates in its retaliation why do victims of the kinds of capitalist destruction of the environment still by represented as victims when he retaliates, you know your Katrina poems as an example in this regard, right? And my second question is a more General one, in all the years that you've been writing I think over 40-50 years. Now you'd be in writing all these cautionary walks, you know cautioning against environmental pollution in Nigeria. And in other parts of the world at the same time, the more you seem to write the more intensified the human violence against the world has Been I remember the you know, the roots have become worse and we harvest more corpses from Nigerian Roots more trees have been murdered and Iroko trees of my childhood that were the wonder of my childhood before it disappeared now, I grew up

in Anambra states, right? So in all these years you still continue to write and lament these outcomes. How could your lines your poems still carry, beautiful Melodies and metaphors that Inspire fancy and some form of musical pleasure in the face of this continuous destruction than witness right? What kept you going in all these years? What did you think changed or give you an inkling of a difference, To make you unwavering in your continued advocacy for and environmental justice.

**Prof. Osundare:** Thank you very much doctor Anyaduba. I really appreciate it. It is a pity we are pressed for time the questions you have asked and also your comments could inspire a whole book and I really appreciate this. Why does Earth not to discriminate in its wrought? Yes. Because nature is ruled by its own logic is like the question I ask all the time when I see the wickedness that is being visited on people all over the world and the kind of really astonishing sufferings that we go through occasionally you ask how can God allow this to happen to his/her children.

That question we ask all the time but at the same time People say “Orun n yabo kii se wahala enikan” that is when the sky is going to fall that is not the responsibility of only one person. In fact haven't finished the irony terrible irony about this is those who desolate the Earth those who plunder the Earth are in the position because of the wealth they have acquired, the loot they have scooped. They are in a position to protect themselves against the ravages and the consequences. So this are the illogicalities are facing. It is usually the homeless and the poor people who suffer, I must tell you that I have no answer to that because Katrina nearly killed my wife and me here everything we had on, you know was destroyed and also created two most terrible sinners in the world, you know, so what we should be doing is asking questions. Why should a few people do this and put the rest of us in Jeopardy? It is important for us to talk. It is important for us to work. That's what that 16 years old Swedish girl is asking us to do, no, we're not going to allow you to do this to us. Finally. Remember one or two statement is about we are just been doing this for so long and remember and one of my discussions with Chinua Achebe about three years before he died. We talked about this too. You know, I was teaching the novelist as teacher in our hopes and impediment and I asked Prof. and he laughed and he said we have been doing this for so long. What are we going to do? We cannot stop and there it “Ti ina o ba tan laso eje ki n tan leekanna” that is as long as there are lice in the hems of your garment there must be blood stains on your fingernails with the we have those fingernails, So we have to keep at it. Resilience this is it, In fact, one of the poems I was going to read this because I was pressed for time is titled stubborn hope and I have stolen that phrase from Dennis Brutus the great anti apartheid South African poet. I think one of his collections stubborn hope yes, our hope has to be stubborn. There is no giving up because we didn't inherit to this Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.

**Dr. Anyaduba:** Thank you very much.

**Tosin Gbogi:** Excellent Thank you very much doctor Anyaduba. So we have some comments coming in. I would like to take the first comment that I have here, which is from Professor Adeleke Adeeko. Thank you for joining us sir. His question is: How do you manage loyalty to the Earth as someone sympathetic to the farm or coup and the water that might erode it after all you are a partisan of Osun. That's the first question.

**Prof. Osundare:** Osun is also part of the earth that's the liquid Spirit. Fluid, water is what we are talking about. There can be no River without water and that's it. I don't see any contradiction at all but I see what you mean. I tried to see it in Katrina's poems poetry and the ambivalence of water. If you don't believe this ask Alapandagi that's the Yoruba name for Tilapia. When you say Alapandagi, swimming in the lake is so graceful and so on. And the next moment when you see Alapandagi in the kitchen and in the bucket of water it is the same water. So too late Alapandagi saw the ambivalence of water. One of the choices is about nature is its ambivalence and I think this is why nature features very much in literature particularly tragedy. I look at classical tragedy or the kind of stories that we have in Africa. It is the same teeth Dog uses for caressing its young that it can use to bite in when it want to correct it. This complexity is important. So earth and water, Osun and Ile. I hope you know that water has borrowed its bed and trough from the land. The two know how to treat each other. The course of the river is another analog for the spam of human life. Very young when it takes the truth from the mountain usually and really young when it's the middle cause and then slow when is about to enter a lake or the sea. That is why it is the land that controls it but it also has a way of publishing it's on his own and what I was away because you're always knows how to make the Earth acts. It's like Ekolo (Earthworm) making you wonder how the Earthworm without a hand manages to carve its way even through the hardest earth.

**Tosin Gbogi:** Thank you very much for that. Now I will like to bring another person in person of Tolu Odebunmi. Tolu Odebunmi is a doctoral candidate in the rhetoric Theory and culture at Michigan Technology University.

**Tolu Odebunmi:** Good evening, sir, and it is amazing here. I'm happy to be a part of this program and it's nice to hear of your continuous activism, but I was really only wondering because we talk how you've been writing for over four decades now and I'm wondering I know your personal experience with Katrina about your friend and Ken Saro Wiwa because I also did a little bit of climate change stuff. I do a little bit of climate change rhetoric. So I'm very familiar with what goes on in the Niger Delta Ogonni land and order but I'm wondering what the turning point was for you? So it is true that you know, you've always been writing you have that stubborn hope. Or was that is turning points in your activism system for the climate? You know, what did something happened up in that really Shook you that rapid change all the way you write or it just took something in you that was different from you know, your experience in the 40 years over 40 years. You've been writing and you know, you've had this connection with the Earth and you feel you know, I must do the issue though because I know now there is a lot of activism social movement, but yours are Been like before social media and all of that. So I'm just wondering in all of these so you've seen different stages and different things that are going in the last, 40 years. So I'm just wondering if there was something that happened that changed your reaction and your writing and something like that.

**Prof. Osundare:** Thank you very much Tolu good to see you again. Very briefly I will say that it has always been there. In my subconscious from water for what I said earlier on my upbringing and so on. So on the forest of the river the festival's people interconnectedness all these things whether they were their residual as it were almost passive. I talk to people turning point. I think that must have been when I came back from Canada 1979 and i went home and I discover that most of the trees very near my father's from the cut down and the best had disappeared. I have always been very close to Nature.

We're right on the so on but that was when I knew somebody has to do something about this was actually when the conception of the eye of the Earth began. So I had to go home the couple of times to really soak myself in the rainforest. That's from Ibadan to Ikere Ekiti. Now by the time you came back to Ikere Ekiti and universally one who discovered that you had lost the instant innately of it. I remember going to the botanical garden of the University of Ibadan very early in the morning with the dews still falling that was how forest ecos began. The dew was falling on me, we call it participant observation. I was asking how we can really survive. This is it throughout my writing nature has been there. I gave a lecture at the University of Ibadan about a year ago why every writer should be a climate warrior. We need nature. I've never seen any great writing that hasn't dependent one way or another on nature little part of it or another what will happen to Poetry when all the trees in the world have disappeared, when all the water is polluted. So it is even in our own interest to preserve nature not only that to tend it.

**Tosin Odebunmi:** Thank you, sir.

**Prof. Osundare:** You're welcome

**Tosin Gbogi:** Thank you very much again for joining us today. We have another question from Dr. Nathan Suhr-Sytsma and the question is how do you understand the distinctive contribution of poets or other writers as compared with activists or Policy-makers when it comes to climate crisis?

Prof. Osundare: the distinctive contribution of poets or other writers as compared with activism policymakers when it comes to climate crisis. If I understand this - I'm thankful for this. I don't see first there shouldn't be any contribution because it depends on this policy makers are. There are policy makers out their ignorance or greed or callousness or lack of empathy will tell you that climate change does not exist. They are policy makers too but most of the writers I know are not likely to join these policy-makers. What I'm looking forward to and I think it's happening all way or another is a situation which writers, sculptures, musicians and so on achieve a kind of synergy in their effort with what Policymakers right-thinking Progressive policy makers are doing and I don't think it is impossible. President Macron of France was the first to see oh the lungs of the planet are on fire and those terrible fires broke out in the Amazon and the president of France is a policymaker no doubt. It is the coming together of these two groups that I think I'm looking for and it's should be possible for our worlds to achieve this because both groups needs some resolution to this for our own survival.

**Tosin Gbogi:** Thank you very much for that response again. The question from Olanike Olaleru and the question in the poem water never forget in city without people, why did you present Nature as a violated woman, seething for revenge?

**Prof. Osundare:** That is an interesting question, most of the time water is always perceived in feminine terms. That place in Ikere were I was born Odo Oja Ile asa, Osun is not far from the family house and it crosses the way to my father's farm so we're surrounded by Osun. Osun is worshipped for seven days every year and it is a woman's or it is women's Festival. They designed the kind of drum, they composed the songs, and the Chief priestess of course is a woman. Those seven days, men look in from the periphery. So, and the name in Osogbo is Iyalosun, in Ikere too it is also called Iyalosun too but she is also called Eyekayire and it means the mother we respect. So I have always seen water maybe because

of disability this software. When water is angry and it breaks into a flood then you see the power of anger. So the feminine principle there. When it comes to the God of iron (Ogun), Ogun is unrepentantly masculine you can ask Wole Soyinka.

**Tosin Gbogi:** All right, moving toward the end of this one will be on the time but we will do for three more minutes and then we will be rounded up. There is another person with me in the studio today, which is Gabriel Bambose. He is a Doctoral candidate in the comparative literature program at Rutgers University and he also has a few questions for you and your poetry and its relationship to equal critical activity.

**Gabriel Bambose:** thank you so much Prof. and I want to say thank you for giving us the miracle of the world. Okay, from one of your poem filled with the plenitude of the earth irrespective of it's a constant destruction. Because of time I'm just going to ask one quick question many questions have been asked today. My question is tied to my appreciation of your works. I'm intrigued by how much with care you combine what I would like to call the Ecology of the world with the Ecology of the earth. So I wonder what motivates this ethics of care what I would like to call ecologic literacy. It is tied to the second question as well, Maybe I would like to say this is the question is for me of eco-futurity ecology. So I would just like to ask do you see maybe it is also tied to the question of the contribution of poets to the problem of climate crisis and policymakers vice versa. But I'm going to try that concerned the question of eco-futurity. Do you see the future of the world in the earth and the future of the Earth in the world? So what question on ecology of the world you know, what's prompted what Futurity do you see me in that for me wonderful combination.

**Prof. Osundare:** Thank you. Wonderful combination. Are you recording two years and it should be kind of Cooperative cooperation too because they are in the kind of symbiotic relationship with each other. Where will the world be without ecological Justice where will the earth be without ecological? The word Earth and world are often used interchangeably depending upon what existence your plane you are in. Yeah. I hope you remember that famous Yoruba name (Ayelaagbe) that is we live in this world, but we also live on this Earth. So that's the way I see the relationship between the two the Earth is our home. As I said in the eye of the earth that is temporary basement. That is when we are all strong. And we're working on the weather is the basement beneath our feet and lasting roof. We are six feet under; the earth is on top of us as a roof. So the two really go together the way I see it. I like the poem Eco-Echo. It was the other to Echo futurism. There's a lot of future for this because the future of what about is tied up with the future of humanity. The way things are going if we are not careful. We are going to disappear; in fact some towns are already disappearing in Indonesia present one or two islands are being abandoned in a resident the middle of the ocean because those are is raising. When Katrina did its power to us. I remember the first email I received from Professor Wole Soyinka at last when people knew where we were because for about the week nobody knew whether for one evacuation place to another and he said Niyi, Eku ewu o that is congratulations on Surviving this terrible havoc, and he said just yesterday I was driving past the what is it called now Ahmadu Bello way Victoria island and I looked to the right and I said my God, it's just a matter of time before we have our own Katrina, you know, you know, Ahmadu Bello Way which we borrowed from the Atlantic ocean. But you see that many of the buildings have been there is a slight bit of rainfall the ocean is there. The ocean is there many of the



houses are buffeted. So the future is in our hands and I think fear is driving Most of the reasonable not unfortunately power is in the hands of extremely unreasonable And ignorant people in the world people who are listening about their bank account. Oh don't know that you have to be alive to spend money, you know but there are also others who are saying No, this Earth is our home we have to defend it. So our future depends on it on this Earth believe me.

The eye of the earth is the title. The one I am working on is almost complete takes the dialog to the sky that hole in the sky, you know, which is getting wider and wider every day. This Earth is our home. How can we continue to live on it? And what about our children?

**Prof. Osundare:** Thank you much. So the Green Queen in no other person of Dr. Adenike she will come on the screen.

**Dr. Akinsemolu:** Hi Professor Niyi, How you doing, sir?

**Prof. Osundare:** Hello. Nice to meet you at last.

**Dr. Akinsemolu:** Thank you for we're so glad that you're here. I am not asking a question I just want to make a comment. One of the quotes that struck me was when you said that when the sky says I am going to fall that it is not the responsibility of only one person and I think you're making reference to the hurricane Katrina. I wanted to add that when I was a student in 200 Level. I was one of those people that volunteered with the Clinton Global initiative to go to the regions that were affected in those days and try to help them build and clean, you know, I just wanted to support your efforts towards Katrina that kind of work where you talked about how it affected your family. Yes. I like the I just like individually we can all do something for environment no matter how little it is and I think that's what your poetry is doing because your poetry is explicatory of nature, I think remarkably is an understatement especially what you said about trees, the trees are talking, that is resounding and that speaks to me because the trees are the primary producers of the earth and without plants, especially there's no food, right? There is no oxygen for sure. So I love your work I just Thank you so much for joining us at The Institute it's being a pleasure it's an honor. And I look forward to having conversations with you beyond the Green Room. I look forward to mentorship. I look forward to just listening to you, you know, speak the words of nature to us, to remind us of what we need to do that we don't need to wait for the government that we are the change that we seek in our community and the action should start now. Thank you so much.

**Prof. Osundare:** I should be the one thanking you for this great initiative. As I said the other time about the Green Room. Oh my God, this is coming from Nigeria coming from Ondo. It makes a lot of difference. Yes, the world won't change unless we change it I believe and the point you made you know, really Rhymes in very well with what is happening all over the world now because our what is going through some kind of a reappraisal, you know about the vertical arrangement of Power the racial disadvantage of some people and so on and so forth, the equal Issue also falls squarely within this orbit. So I thank you for this initiative, just very interesting episode. Tosin and I were talking about a Village called Iyanfoworogi shortly before this program and I said I love driving from Ibadan to Ikere Ekiti

and of course you have to pass through Ife and Akure. It is an agrarian society and there is a name of a village called Iyanfoworogi. They have enough for one of the best one of the names of villages that

That inspired the poems the eye of the earth. So it's a way of linking your initiative with what is happening naturally around the Ondo area there. Please be strong and give my regards to all your stuff. Yes. I know what it means to initiate this kind of project from Nigeria with all the logistical issues. The future is here.

**Dr. Akinsemolu:** Yes, yes. The future is here. Yeah, definitely I agree with you sir and we will keep telling the story, we will keep sharing your stories and putting them into action them into action. Thank you . Thank you so much for having us sir.

**Prof. Osundare:** Thank you. Ko ni re yin o (You will not be tired)

**Tosin Gbogi:** Thank you again. We have one more question after this question, you read the very last poem and we make it a wrap.

**James Yeku:** Thank you Prof. your free-verse poem, "Not My Business" went viral online partly because it spoke to the Nigeria moment. How do we continue to mobilize the literary to check power?

**Prof. Osundare:** Hello James, How are you? Yes, I was actually going to say that that's coming from James is a kind of rhetorical question because he has been doing it since I met him at the University of Ibadan. Yeah, it depends upon what we really want to do with this literature. This point Tosin was making the other time about this thing I am working on called differentiate aesthetic. That's why it's usually difficult to erect some kind of universal rule for literature all over the world. Let's take a point the form and shape that a poem takes depend upon the function that point is performing and the function depends upon the origin of that work, if I were a well Fed we're protected western poet maybe be I wouldn't need to write a poem about Hunger. Fine, it's not your fault. Then please have enough imaginative sympathy to know that not everybody has your own kind of comfort. In Yoruba "Ebi n pa mi ko se n fi fe wi" that is I am starving cannot be said in a whisper. There are certain times you have to shout the world to hear. The world always pretends to be deaf and you have to make sure that the world hears you. There is the second kind of Aesthetics that deals with that too. There is also a certain type of aesthetics that deals with hoax. In Yoruba you say things without appearing as though you said it. The role right now is to perform after this, nobody can say oh, I never knew or I never heard and I think this has been the function of literature on and on. I have been watching certain things on television on my screen and enjoying them and the past one week or so. I think the call them foundation these are songs based on current American happenings or in the most popular of them is vote put him away. The Romans are practiced it the British practiced it, and when I am about to sit down and write an essay on a poem or on the work. The first thing is what the purpose is and as a student of Stylistics I also know that you are an analysis will be futile if you don't match context with texting.

Many people because we live in the era of text so when we talk about text that's reality. We also have to talk about contextuality. We also have to talk about contextuality for this simple before for our analysis to be around and rarely full. So yes, we make literature.

This one has always happened in African literature. Take all Wole Soyinka has been through talking about Chinua Achebe, Ken Saro Wiwa. Ken Saro Wiwa was not killed because he committed a crime. His works and the way he was trying to arouse cautiousness contributed to righteousness contributed to that. The military government in Nigeria didn't just go but they were driven away. There were many of the poems many people we're doing and that was the time I took poetry to the newspapers. There are certain aspects of change you achieve through nuance and through whisper and there are others you have to achieve by shouting. There is the Aesthetics of shouting too I'm not say that all poems out there you have to put heart there, speak to the feelings of the people to the heart of the people before it goes to their head and so on but people write differently because they feel differently because they are little privileged differently and I want to put into reality down because of the color of their skin too from what we are seeing the world. They were stopped and frisked so many times because it is likely to come out on the side of the work that you do, so I think I'm done. I'm going to leave it like that.

**Tosin Gbogi:** Thank you very much. So I want to thank everyone who took time to join us in every part of the world. Thank you very much. Thank you for creating time to make this conversation very lively, thank you for sending your questions. And I want to thank professor Osundare very much for creating time to have this very important conversation and for accepting to do this reading. So he will read the last poem for act and then we make it a wrap. Thank you.

**Prof. Osundare:** With all that has been happening I thought you had forgotten that. It should be about a minute and a half and I called decoder. It's the last poem in the eye of the earth actually it is supposed to be performed with musical accompanying.

SONG

Ema pe ko se A se (2ce)

Ode roko ode peran A se

Ode peran Okete A se

Ibi a re wa kete A se

Aisan a re wa kete A se

Our Earth will not die.

Leached the lakes

Slaughtered the seas

Mold the mountains

But our earth will not die  
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 frying fish,  
crests the chilling swansong of parting waters.

But our earth will not die  
And the rain  
the rain falls, acid, on balding forests  
their branches amputated by the septic daggers  
of tainted clouds

Weeping willows drip mercury tears  
in the eye of sobbing terrains  
a nuclear sun rises like a funeral ball  
reducing man and meadow to dust and dirt.

But our earth will not die  
Fishes have died in the waters. Fishes.  
Birds have died in the trees. Birds.  
Rabbits have died in their burrows. Rabbits.

But our earth will not die.  
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 batting 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

Tosin Gbogi: Thank you very much. This is the end of program are very grateful for everyone who joined in the conversation. As everyone goes in their individual lives please be kind to the earth.