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**Climate Change and Environmental Justice in Chantal Bilodeau's
Sila (2015) and Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* (2006): An Eco-
critical Study**

Abstract

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Eco-drama is a type of literature that discusses the connection between human beings and the natural world. Moreover, it is concerned with environmental issues such as environmental justice. Eco-drama discusses the environmental degradation and its relation to the deteriorating social conditions of the people in a certain region. This genre of literature challenges Man's oppression and exploitation of nature. The purpose of this paper is to apply the concept of environmental justice as advocated by the eco-critic Theresa J. May on two plays: Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila* (2015) and Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* (2006). The study intends to prove that both the people of the North (Arctic) and the people of the South (Africa) are subjected to environmental degradation. Man's hideous exploitation of the natural resources has tremendous environmental, social, and political consequences on the entire planet.

Keywords: Eco-criticism, Green Studies, Environmental Justice, Theresa J. May, Eco drama, *Sila*, *Hard Ground*



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التغير المناخي و العدالة البيئية كما يتضح في مسرحيتي سيلال شانثال
بيلودو(2015) و أرض وعرة ل أحمد يريما (2006) : دراسة في ضوء نظرية النقد
البيئي

مستخلص الدراسة

رشا فاروق محمود حمزة
مدرس الأدب الإنجليزي
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية - كلية الألسن
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الدراما البيئية هي نوع من الأدب الذي يناقش العلاقة بين البشر والعالم الطبيعي. علاوة على ذلك ، فهي تهتم بالقضايا البيئية مثل العدالة البيئية. تتناول الدراما البيئية التدهور البيئي وعلاقته بالظروف الاجتماعية المتدهورة للناس في منطقة معينة. يتحدى هذا النوع من الأدب اضطهاد الإنسان واستغلاله للطبيعة. تهدف الدراسة إلى إثبات أن سكان الشمال (القطب الشمالي) وسكان الجنوب (إفريقيا)، كلاهما، يتعرضون للتدهور البيئي. إن استغلال الإنسان البشع للموارد الطبيعية له عواقب بيئية واجتماعية وسياسية هائلة على الكوكب بأسره.

الكلمات الرئيسية: النقد البيئي ، الدراسات الخضراء ، العدالة البيئية ، تيريزا جي ماي ،
الدراما البيئية ، سيلال ، الأرض الواعرة

**Climate Change and Environmental Justice in Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila* (2015) and
Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* (2006): An Eco-critical Study**

Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to discuss the concept of environmental justice, and how it can be applied on, both, Bilodeau's *Sila* and Yerima's *Hard Ground*. The study also attempts to prove, through analyzing the two plays, the closely- connected relationship between these two plays and environmental justice. This concept of environmental justice is revealed by the eco-critic Theresa J. May. In her eco-critical concept, May denounces the exploitation of the resources of nature by Man. Additionally, she calls for environmental justice for all creatures, and investigates it in the literary texts, particularly, the texts that discuss climate change and its consequences.

Theoretical Framework

Eco-criticism attempts to find a meeting point between literature and the environment. It also studies the reactions and attitudes of human beings towards their ecology and the places they live in. In his book, *A New Approach to Literary Theory and Criticism*, Malik Batra, defines eco-criticism as:

Ecological environmental or green criticism reads a literary text which incorporates environmental concerns and issues. The eco-critics, in their attempt to bring environmental issues into focus, reread major literary works and pay a special attention to the representation of nature. (163)

The term Eco criticism was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: an Experiment in Eco criticism". Rueckert mentioned that the eco in eco-criticism is, "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology

has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in" (107). Then, Cheryll Glotfelty defined eco-criticism as: "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (26). The word ecology was first introduced by the German scientist Ernst Haeckel in 1866 (Love 37). The German word *Okologie* is derived from the Greek *oikos* (household) and *logos* (a word that reflects the expression of thought) and it refers to the expression of thought about household. This means that "Eco-criticism is the scientific field which studies the relationship between humans and their living and nonliving environment. This environment is connected to humans in an evolving and interactive way" (McColley 58). The study of nature and environment became popular in the late 1990s ; during that time writers became aware of the, "global nature of our most pressing ecological problems, the long-overdue concern with environmental justice and environmental racism, and the troubling realization of the degree to which terms such as 'nature' and 'environment' are socially constructed" (Mazel 17). Eco-criticism gained its huge popularity after the publication of *The Environmental Imagination* in 1995 by Lawrence Buell. In this book, Buell demanded from the readers to rethink their assumptions about nature and their relationship towards it. With the publication of *The Eco criticism Reader* in 1996 by Cheryll Glotfelty, critics became fully aware of eco-criticism and its goals (Mazel 10). Actually, many critics date the beginning of the field of eco-criticism with the publication of these two books.

The application of the concepts of the field of Eco-criticism on literature allows human beings to notice the harm they are causing to their environment. Moreover, studying Eco-criticism enables human beings to notice that almost every human has taken part in developing the contemporary ecological crises.

One of the main goals of eco-criticism is connected to the term 'environmental justice'. Environmental justice is a political movement which appeared in the 1980s. Environmental

justice is defined as a literary movement that is concerned with public policy issues of environmental racism. “Environmental justice challenges the mainstream definition of environment and nature based on wilderness/ preservation frame by foregrounding race and labor in its definition of what constitutes ‘nature’. It places people, especially diverse-racial communities and urban spaces, at the center of what constitutes environment and nature.” (Sze 163). Thus, this movement considers itself a more ideologically wide-ranging than any other one because, “it integrates social concerns around public health with traditional environmental issues and ecological concerns like air, land, and water” (Sze 164).

Additionally, the environmental justice movement tries to help those, “whose lives have been directly affected by the disproportionate incidence of contamination or habitat loss or lack of subsistence opportunities in their communities” (Gordon 29). Also, environmental justice writers and activists made connections between, “environmental exploitation and human exploitation, attempting to reveal, criticize, and transform relationship between human social practices and environmental issues. The central term in environmental justice discourse and practice has historically been racism” (Tarter 218). This encouraged T.V Reed to blame eco-critics for not studying questions concerning race and class. He argued that these issues must be, “at the heart of any discussion of the history and future of environmental thought and action” (145).

Henceforth, scholars who work to make social and environmental justice a reality aim at securing for all peoples, “the right to live unthreatened by the risk posed by environmental degradation and contamination, and to afford equal access to natural resources that sustain life and culture” (Adamson, 4). Therefore, “environmental justice movements call attention to the ways disparate distribution of wealth and power often leads to correlative social upheaval and the unequal distribution of environmental degradation and/or toxicity” (Adamson 5). Also, environmental justice writers deal with the environmental hazards that face the communities

of color, the indigenous, or the peoples who are not politically free. Consequently, they have created a literature that depicts the social, material, and spiritual devastation that result when, for example, hydroelectric projects destroy tribal lands and water, when poisonous and radioactive materials originating at local factories, mines, garbage incinerators, and agricultural areas threatened human health and life, or “when traditional farmers are unable to compete with corporate agribusiness executives” (Adamson 6).

Theresa J. May is a Professor of Literature at the University of Oregon and an environmental activist. In her critical works, May rejects the human behavior that destroys the environment. As May puts it:” Community –based environmental issues including environmental justice concerns have found theater as a viable tool through which to promote social change, open dialogue, or protest the status quo”(“Greening”93). By doing so, she confronts the great amount of justice the environment face.

As an eco-critic, May opposes human and natural resource exploitation and contemplates about the ethical plights caused by the environmental dreadful conditions and about how ethical values are reflected in literary texts with powerful ecological signals. Eco-criticism, as May explicates, “Like gender, postcolonial, or multicultural theories, must address injustices felt in the body – the body of experience, of community, of land” (“Indigenous” 149).

Whereas, Eco-criticism explains the relationship between human and non-human beings, environmental justice is concerned with the relationship between environment and social and racial inequalities. The industrial countries bury harmful wastes in the soils of the indigenous people; causing deterioration in their soil and their health as well. Established by the African American sociologist Robert D. Bullard (1946) in the 1980s, environmental justice movement endeavors to defend colored-people and ethnic minorities who are likely more subjected to environmental injustices and its dangers. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

describes environmental justice as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulation, and policies” (Bullard et al. 15). This definition suggests that, the minorities and racially oppressed groups should not be unjustly subjected to environmental ruination resulted from the polluting industries such as Uranium production and those that use dangerous materials.

Theresa J. May’s notion of eco-criticism, and the role drama plays in representing environmental plights, can be attributed to the renowned American ecologist, Barry Commoner (1917-2012). According to Joseph Chandra and Antony Samy in their book, *Classical to Contemporary Literary Theory: A Demystified Approach*, they state that:

Barry Commoner’s first law of ecology states: “Everything is connected to everything else”. One must, therefore, conclude that literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic air, but rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, and ideas interact. (137)

Likewise, Robert D. Bullard and Glenn S. Johnson point out that a “growing body of evidence reveals that people of color and low-income persons have borne greater environmental and health risks than the society at large in their neighborhood, workplace, and playgrounds” (555). Thus, environmental racism, is a type of environmental injustice, as explained by Bullard and Johnson, “refers to any environmental policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color” (559).

Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila*

Chantal Bilodeau is a French-Canadian Playwright, translator, and an environmental activist. She was born in Montreal, Quebec, but now residing in The United States of America, and writes in English. In the year 2009, she started thinking of the Arctic Circle Project. The project is an eight-play series; each play takes place in one of the eight countries that share part of the Arctic. The Arctic is in the far north of the earth, with the most freezing temperature. It overlooks the Arctic Ocean and the northern parts of eight countries: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Russian, and the United States of America (Alaska State). This northern region is the inhabitant place of few indigenous people, like the Inuit tribe. Additionally, it is the natural environment of some endangered creature species like the White Polar Bear. The greenhouse phenomenon and the climate change have profound effects on the living creatures living in the area, both humans and non-humans. The melt of ice, due to the rise of temperature and global warming, causes the drowning of the polar bears, and the immigration of the Salmon fish. This causes the impoverishment of the local fishermen.

Sila, written in the year 2015, is the first of eight plays written by Chantal Bilodeau to raise awareness for the environmental impact that human behavior has created in the Arctic. *Sila* represents the Canadian part of The Arctic Circle Project. Only to be followed by *Faraway* (2017), that takes place on the Norwegian part of Arctic. *Sila* is set in Iqaluit, a small city on remote Baffin Island Province. In the "Introduction" to the play, Megan Sandberg-Zakian, the director of *Sila* refers to the play as follows: "In this ambitious and critically important play about our changing climate, the [...] characters speak in three different languages, perform spoken-word poetry, travel silently across the arctic landscape, and explain the scientific and political realities of the region" (i). The title of the play is written in the language of the Inuit tribes' Language. "The word sila means the life-giving force of breath and producing a voice. It can also mean climate"(Sandberg-Zakian ii). The play introduces four main groups of

characters: The English-Canadian (Thomas), The French-Canadians (Jean and Raphaël), the indigenous people or the Inuit's (Leanna, Veronica, and Tulugaq). Additionally, the play presents a family of the White Polar Bear animals: (Mamma-Bear, Daughter-Bear). This is plus other minor characters both humans and non-humans. Moreover, Bilodeau portrays two off-stage characters: Samuel and Marie, who are essential in the development of the play's plot. Pfister explains that: "Even though Samuel and Marie are not fully represented, they strongly influence the plot. While the fate of Samuel foregrounds that Leanna is more involved with the fight for the preservation of Nunavut than her own family, Raphaël's pregnant girlfriend stands for hope and a new beginning"(164).

The main theme of Bilodeau's play is climate change and the search for environmental justice; for both humans and non-humans. In a parallel structure, the playwright highlights the devastating effects of the climate change and ice melting on two families: a family of humans (Leanna and Veronica), in addition to a family of the endangered white polar bear (Mother-Bear and Daughter-Bear). This is clear from the prologue of the play. Leanna, the Inuk environmental activist in her fifties, the main protagonist of the play, gives a key speech on the climate change and its devastating consequences on Nunavut, the land of the indigenous people:

I come from a land of barren landscapes and infinite skies. I come from a place of rugged mountains, imperial glaciers, and tundra-covered permafrost. I come from a place where North is where you stand and South, everywhere else. Where there are five seasons and no trees, where the days last twenty-four hours and the nights too. This place, I come from we call Nunavut. It means 'Our Land' in Inuktitut. It's where we, Inuit, have thrived for more than four thousand years. It's where we strive to realize our full potential. It's where we nurture our knowledge of who we are. But Nunavut, our land, is only as rich as it is cold. And today, most of it is melting. (12)

This monologue, which is given by Leanna at the beginning of the play, sets the real problem that the dramatist wants to tackle. She addresses an audience at a conference, where she wants to raise awareness for the ruin of the ecological sphere in the Arctic. The audience/ reader is dragged into her domain through the speech and, simultaneously, gets a sense of the real conditions of Nunavut. Leanna compares the ice masses to the skyscrapers and attributes magnificence to them. These skyscrapers are able to “proudly ride winds and currents”. Also, the crowds in Nunavut do not consist of humans, but of “air, sea, and land creatures”, creatures that are obviously non-human. Leanna describes the whole beautiful nature of her beloved mother land, Nunavut. This harmony is expressed through the description of nature in the scenes that focus around the Inuit community and the ones that center around the polar bears: “A brilliant and benevolent moon dominates the landscape.” (41) The Inuit, the native people of this area, still feel connected to the natural environment the way they have always practiced it, unlike the white Man whose, negligence of nature’s needs, has made him lose the connection with nature, endangering it with Man’s exploitative practices. Thus, the Inuit community and the protagonist Leanna recognize nature in its wide definition: “everyone and everything is part of it, and has to work together in order to survive and to live to their full potential” (12).

Nature is now being threatened by the intervention of Man. The Canadian government and the American government, plan to make a huge project, construct a bridge, and drill for petroleum in the region. They do not care much about the ecological balance in the environment, nor for the consequences of this project on the inhabitants. The release of the carbon dioxide gasses from factories causes the increase in temperature. This increase leads to the melting of the ice. This affects the ecological balance in the region. Many species of cold-water fish immigrates from the heat; this would eventually leave the fishermen in the area without jobs. The rising number of unemployment and deteriorating financial and social conditions would cause many young people to commit suicide. This is the case with Samuel.

Samuel is a young teenager, who finished high school, and is looking for a job. Due to the fact that, the Baffin Island in the territory of Nunavut is a community based on fishing, is now living in a state of economic depression. There are few jobs, the unemployment rates are high. Samuel, Veronica's son and Leanna's grandson, could not stand those conditions; and resorted to drinking and drug abuse. Eventually, he killed himself, due to the unemployment resulting from the climate change. "Samuel got caught stealing gas yesterday. [...] He, and two of his friends. They were heading toward the pit at the end of the Road to Nowhere. I think they were gonna sniff it. [...] Mom, MY SON, YOUR GRANDSON, may be inhaling gasoline." (57). Samuel's final death results in Veronica becoming devastated and speechless.

Veronica is another victim of climate change. All through her life, she felt neglected and uncared for; her mother Leanna, the environmental activist is always busy with the ecological cause. Leanna travels the world and attend conferences to expose the devastating effects of global warming on Arctic.

VERONICA: I just can't get over the fact that you stood me up.

LEANNA: Was it like that this morning?

She tries unplugging and replugging the phone, turning it on and off, and so on.

VERONICA: I promised the students an exciting day with one of the most important leaders in their community and you didn't even show up! There's no excuse for that.

LEANNA: I'm about to be interviewed live for a CBC news program. By the way, do you know that since we filed the appeal, my speaking engagements have quadrupled? One of our neighbors must have a satellite phone.

VERONICA: Samuel got caught stealing gas yesterday.

LEANNA: Oh.

VERONICA: He and two of his friends. They were heading towards the pit at the end of the Road to Nowhere. I think they were gonna sniff it. (56).

This sense of being neglected and the bad economic conditions, attributed to Veronica's thinking of leaving Nunavut. Currently, Veronica is a high school teacher, who also performs poetry recital about the beauty of her land before the bad outcomes of industrialization:"

VERONICA: I've applied for a teaching position in Montreal" (58). Veronica considers the same Nunavut as a place where she is constantly reminded her that this piece of land is more important to her mother than she is; which is her justification for wanting to leave. "Cause between a father who drinks himself stupid every night and a grandmother who spends more time on jets than in her home, Samuel doesn't have much of a family." (29) Veronica is a word person. She works as a high school teacher, but also performs spoken-word poetry. After her son commits suicide, she suffers from a demise of words. What was so central in her life before and what permitted her to express herself is, after her son's death, does no longer exist.

Leanna, the protagonist of the play, is an Inuit climate change activist in her fifties who fights fiercely for the preservation of her homeland, and her family. Her daughter is Veronica, and her grandson is Samuel. Through her battle against materialistic attitude of the capitalist societies, and exploitation of the land, she often neglects her own family. Leanna, as being part of the Inuit community, The First Nation of this region, she still feels connected to the natural environment the way her ancestors have always observed it, unlike the white man who, through the neglect of nature's needs, has lost the special bond with it. Moreover, the white man endangered nature with his abusive manners. She denounces industrialized countries and particularly the U.S. for disrespecting not only the environment but also the people who inhabit this environment. This demonstrates that there is a connection between the Inuit community

and nature. It is not only nature and living creatures existing in it that are endangered; human communities also are on the verge of extinction, perhaps not as drastically as the non-human communities. Nevertheless humans also live in fear of losing their homes: “Our hunters can’t feed their families, Veronica. Our roads and houses are sinking, and our traditional knowledge is becoming obsolete.” (27). Therefore, Leanna spent her entire life defending the ecological cause. She attended conferences, talked to the media and the press to present the matter to the public opinion.

Leanna explains that “Nunavut, our land, is only as rich as it is cold. And today, most of it is melting.” (12) What is melting is not only the ice, but figuratively also the humans, by losing their living space. If we humans do not start to reclaim our humanity and ability to support “people we don’t know, people we will never meet, and people who are not yet even born, we will never value our species enough to make sure it survives.” (64) This is the most significant argument of the play: we have to appreciate nature as a whole and not conceive ourselves as isolated from everyone and everything, or we will not survive, a viewpoint that Eco criticism is endorsing: “The problem now, as most ecologists agree, is to find ways of keeping the human community from destroying the natural community, and with it the human community.” (Rueckert 107).

Leanna takes an action by demonstrating the U.S.’ attitude towards the environment, and files a petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to sue the U.S. for a violation of human rights: “You do realize that filing that petition [...] was the equivalent of Canada shitting on its own plate, right? [...] The U.S. is our biggest trade partner.” (21) Even though the coast guard officer, Thomas, too, comprehends that the U.S. has to take responsibility for being the biggest emitters of carbon dioxide, but he still considers the economic consequences of such an action as more important. He also tries to deny the consequences that the pollution has had and continues to have on the natural environment:”

THOMAS: The effects of seismic surveys on marine life have been studied for decades. There's no proof that they do any harm" (47).

Leanna, all through the play, continues her fight for nature and for equal environmental justice for both the native people and the animals. Even when the tragedy of the death of her grandson, Samuel, sticks her life, this does not deter her from advocating the rights of her people and the animals in their environment. Leanna believes that the environment is a space where nature lives harmoniously with the living creatures. This harmony is expressed through the description of nature in the scenes that focus around the Inuit community and the ones that center around the polar bears: "A brilliant and benevolent moon dominates the landscape." (41).

Similar to the dilemma of the Inuit family, that was caused by the environmental injustice and the climate change; the animals in Nunavut also are threatened with their own demise. In a parallel structure Bilodeau presents the tragedy of a family of the endangered white polar bear. The family consists of The Mother Bear and her young cub, The Daughter Bear. Like the Inuit family, the climate change and the rise of temperature affect their ability to hunt their food. Hunting the seal is their means of surviving in Arctic. However, unfortunately, the greenhouse phenomenon caused the seal to immigrate, depriving them of their food. In their first appearance in the second scene of the play, the character of Mother Bear tries to teach her Cub, Daughter Bear how to catch the seal, as fishing is their only way of surviving.

DAUGHTER: But Anaana, what if I'm not a good hunter?

MAMA: It is my duty to make you a good hunter. (18)

Bilodeau's choice of the white bear as an example of the devastating effects of climate change is a correct one. Sarah Gibbon in her article elaborates on this point: "[p]olar bears have long been unwitting mascots for the effects of climate change, as animals that live only in Arctic regions; they're often the first to feel the impacts of warming temperatures and rising seas" (17). The Mother Bear advises her cub to hurry because the sun is in the sky, and it is becoming hot. Hot temperature not only causes the immigration of the Salmon fish, but also causes the ice to be thin. The thin ice is not able to stand the weight of the bears, thus, causing their drowning in the Arctic Ocean.

Unlike the white man, the animals are in a harmonious relationship with nature. They are like the Inuits hunt for survival, not for amusement. This is clear in the dialogue between the Mother Bear and the Daughter Bear:

MAMA: The only creatures who are lonely are the ones who forget about *sila*.

DAUGHTER: How do you mean, Anaana?

MAMA breathes.

See? That's *sila*. And with each breath, *sila* reminds us that we are never alone. Each and every one of us is connected to every other living creature. But *sila*'s gift is not ours to keep. We may use our breath while we roam the land but we must surrender it once we pass from the land. Creatures who are lonely are the ones who hold on to their breath as if it were theirs and theirs alone. (41)

The melting of the ice causes the drowning of the Daughter Bear in one of her haunting missions with her mother. In the play, Bilodeau, compares the loss of the Mother Bear with the loss of Veronica and Leanna of Samuel. Climate change destroys not only the lives of the animals, but the lives of humans, as well. "*VERONICA's eyes well up with tears ... and she*

finally allows herself to sob.”(95). The DAUGHTER is too heavy. The iceberg rolls over, throwing her back into the water.

DAUGHTER: Anaanaa! MAMA: Paniapik!

The DAUGHTER is nowhere to be found. MAMA lets out a series of long desperate wails.

MAMA: (softly) Paniapik... (59)

Additionally in the play there are other characters who suffer because of the environmental injustice and the climate change. Tulugaq is an old man in his sixties from the Inuit tribe. He used to be a fisherman and a hunter, but because of the climate change and the immigration of the Salmon fish and the melting of ice, he becomes unemployed. At this old age, Tulugaq, had to give up his beloved career and becomes a guide for the ecological scientist who visit the area. In *Sila*, Tulugaq represents the Inuit hunter who is acquainted with the gathering places of the animals, the perfect place and season to hunt them, and the seasons and the place in which one should not hunt. He believes that respecting nature and its animals comes before the financial gains. “I am a hunter. I know how to protect.” (50). He believes that hunting animals in the Inuit everyday life is to supply the tribe with the essential food for surviving, not for amusement. Consequently, the hunted animals know the necessity of their death, and thus bear their fateful end: “The killing of game is therefore not considered an act of violence by a human being towards an animal, but a meaningful act in which hunter and animal are connected partners.” (Laugrand 38). Currently, Tulugaq is working as Jean’s guide through the Arctic ice, but during his work with him and others, he reaches the conclusion that Qallunaaq, the white man, does not respect the land the same way the Inuit do:

TULUGAQ: We go back.

JEAN: (exasperated) You can feel what?

TULUGAQ : Storm.

JEAN : *Ben oui c'est ça.*

TULUGAQ: And ice is no good.

JEAN: This ice is perfectly fine. (*jumping up and down*) See? I can't believe how hard it is to get anything done around here. I'm going to get the drill. (72)

Jean is anxious to continue his mission. He does not pay any attention to the signs, nature is sending, neither pays any respect to the land. Contrary to this, The Inuit, feel special bond with the land. They believe that they are part of it, the same as the animals which are part of it, as well.

Tulugaq explains to Jean that *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*, the Inuit traditional knowledge, is [o]ld learning about living in peace with people, animals, nature.” (52) He compares the Inuit *qaujimajatuqangit* and the *Qallunaat* learning, the learning of the white man. Whereas, the Inuit learn from their traditional narratives; sometimes illogical tales, the white man only depends on rigid calculations, which are logical but without any passion.

Jean, the climate scientist and the university professor, is another victim of the climate change. He is a Québécois white man in his forties. Jean used to be an environmental activist. His works indicate the bad effects of industrialization on nature and all the species. He used to advocate this theory in the media and the conferences, he attended. This infuriated the capitalists to the extent that they used to threaten him and his family. Unfortunately, this resulted in the loss of his un born son, and the ruin of his marriage.

JEAN: It is hard. After my son – (*pause*) It took a long time. It takes a long time. We lost him shortly after I gave a keynote. It was in Houston Texas – hot as hell. Some blogger didn't like

my views about a possible carbon tax and posted me and my wife's email address online. We started receiving death threats.

LEANNA: That must have been very hard. (95)

Currently, Jean is living in the United State, and he is in a scientific mission to check the thickness of the ice in Nunavut. Jean admires the splendor of nature, and the beauty of its animals.: "Extraordinary animals. They can weigh up to fifteen hundred pounds and travel on ice so thin it wouldn't support a man" (12). Due to his principles, he refuses to participate in the capitalist project in Nunavut; it will endanger the ecological balance of the environment.

THOMAS: Jean, they don't need any old scientist who's gonna setup his fancy instruments and three years later hand them a pile of data the size of a phone book. They need YOU.

JEAN: One of the last remaining sheets of multi-year ice is predicted to break away from the coast this summer. (12)

At the end of the play, Jean join forces with Leanna in their everlasting fight against global warming and the climate change. They try to protect and preserve the nature and the all the threatened creatures in the Arctic Region.

Contrary to the character, that are most affected by human's atrocities against nature and climate change, is the character of Thomas. He is a Coast Guard Officer for Marine Communication. Thomas is an English –Canadian character that values money and economic gains over nature. He tries to convince Jean to join the company that is going to drill the land, looking for Oil: "Somebody's gonna drill, Jean. If it's not us, it'll be the Americans, the Chinese, the Arabs, whoever the fuck, but somebody's gonna drill. There's too much money at stake" (12). He does not care at all about how this going to affect the thickness of the ice. Consequently, this would lead to the drowning of some endangered species. In Thomas' point

of view these are savage and barbaric creatures that deserve to be killed: “I’m telling you, one comes within a hundred feet, endangered or not, I’m shooting it down” (12). Thomas, also criticizes Leanna for defending the land against industrialization. He is not satisfied with her petition against the projects of U.S. in Arctic: ““You do realize that filing that petition [...] was the equivalent of Canada shitting on its own plate, right? [...] The U.S. is our biggest trade partner.” (21). He represents the white man’s capitalist appreciation of financial gains over ecological balance. At the end of the play, Thomas will no longer be responsible for the building of the deep sea port in Arctic. The characters in the *Sila* try to regain their harmony with nature, and Leanna and Jean still fighting for achieving environmental justice for both humans and animals. Actually, the end of the play, as Theresa May explains that in *Indigenous Theater in Global Times* : “exercises the power of story to effect ecological healing” (149). The interwoven of the human and non-human domains, generates hope of an environmental equality.

Ahmed Yerima’s *Hard Ground* (2006)

The catastrophic consequences of climate change and Man’s violence against nature are not only restricted to the northern part of The Earth. Africa, the black continent is also a victim of the pollution, resulting from industrialization and Man’s drill for Petroleum. *Hard Ground* the Nigerian playwright Ahmed Yerima discusses the outcomes of the search for Oil on both the ecology of the Niger Delta region and the conditions of its inhabitants. The crisis of the Niger Delta is one of the most important problems in Nigeria. The drill for Oil and the armed conflicts, resulting from the unfair distribution of Oil revenues, have helped in escalating the problems of the already impoverished region. The finding, drilling for and taking advantage of the recently- found petroleum in the region have affected agriculture, fishing in addition to the everyday conditions of the people. The leakage of the crude Oil from the pipe lines, and its spillage into lands, farms, and water, poses a great threat to the natural environment in the

region.” Oil spillage often results in contamination of surface water with hydrocarbons and trace metals, as measured using atomic spectrometry.”(Uwasomba 4), additionally, this would cause the contamination of food with heavy metals, and also causing the infertility of the soil. These deplorable conditions of the people led to violence and vandalism. The exploitation of Delta Niger’s natural resources and its destructive effects was the source of inspiration for Yerima’s play.

Ahmed Parker Yerima is a prominent Nigerian academic and playwright whose play *Hard Ground*, is quite significant. It demonstrates the hardships and sufferings of the characters as they fight for survival. This struggle is a result of their interaction as human beings with their environment which they strive to manipulate and control. Human survival, therefore, becomes a problem because some of the inhabitants are seen to be exploiting nature beyond its limit. They are accused of not being able to evaluate the cost of what they have been doing without realizing the long term repercussions on their environment. *Hard Ground* is based on a real incident that happened in the year 1989. The Indigenous militia of the Niger Delta region kidnapped and murdered 30 workers of the Shell multinational company. Shell had been mining in the area for more than twenty years, refusing to make any amendments for the people in the region. They were also displeased with the environmental degradation, the oil spillage, gas burning. So, they demanded to negotiate with Shell officials but they ignored them. The government, from its part sent the anti-riot police to deal with them. Consequently, this led to the on-going struggle in Niger Delta.

The setting of the play is in an African village, in the year 1994, ten years before the real actions take place. The Delta Niger rural village is a peaceful one where both man and nature cohere in love and harmony. There are no problems or disputes. There is plenty of food, fish and fresh water. The trees are plentiful and beautiful; grasses abound; and the fauna, which includes lions, leopards, hyenas, elephants and antelopes, thrive in this environment which can

be described as an eco-haven. This ecological paradise becomes a hell when man begins to manipulate nature for his selfish interest and personal gain bringing about environmental pollution and degradation. Thus, in the play, the setting reinforces the central conflict between people and their environment by showing both its beauty and its potential destructiveness.

Unlike any conventional play, *Hard Ground* is divided into five parts. The division between the parts is initiated by the change of lighting or the entrance or exit of one of the characters. Concerning the plot and the conflict in the play, the play is mainly concerned with Nimi, the protagonist and his family. The conflict in the play is between Nimi, from one hand, and his Baba, Mama, and Uncle, on the other hand. Additionally, there is the on-going struggle between The Federal Government and the local militants. Unfortunately, each character in the play is searching for its own personal gains; nobody cares about the environment and the ecological system of the region. The Multi-national companies that are drilling for crude Oil and The Nigerian Federal Government are mainly concerned with the economical profits of Petroleum. The warlords (The Uncle, Baba, disguised as The Don) are mainly concerned with fuelling the armed struggle to sell the weapons. Nimi, representing the indigenous people of the area, who witness the destruction of their environment, they demand to have their own part of the Oil revenues. No one cares about the pollution resulting from exploding the petroleum pipelines. Nobody pays any attention to the heavy metals that contaminated the soil, making it infertile. This causes the shortage of food supplies and male nutrition of the children.

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The ruin of the Niger-Delta environment have caused family dysfunctional relationships as it is apparent in the play; the closeness and the ties among the members of the same family does not exist. Mama claims that her son, Nimi, is not able to fulfill his role as a son to her because she has lost him to the militancy. The Youth in the Niger Delta region join the armed groups that perform organized heavy arm attacks against the government soldiers, and the multinational oil companies. The alleged goal of these militias is to obtain compensations from the federal government and oil companies. However, if the compensations are actually paid, unfortunately, this does not mean providing amendments for the indigenous inhabitants of the region to improve their livelihood that has been severely damaged due to petroleum exploration:

Mama: I need to know what happened to my son when I lost him. At what point did my voice become noise to his ears, and wise counseling of his uncles and big oil chiefs become wise sayings and music to his ears. When? Heen? At what point? ... (17)

Compensation money goes directly to the pockets of the warlords. Multinational oil companies bribe these leaders with financial gains, job opportunities and contracts. These warlords then allow the conducts of the companies to keep on abusing the environment and adding to the poverty of the indigenous people. Environmental ruin has also led to a deterioration of the father figure within the family. The main jobs in the Niger–Delta are fishing and farming. Petroleum pollution and environmental deterioration have bad effects on these particular occupations. The Petroleum leakage destroys marine life causing fishermen to be unable to find their livelihood. Additionally, due to the contamination of the soil, farmers cannot plant their crops. Thus, destroying the occupation they inherited from their ancestors. The fathers in the Niger-Delta lose their value and appreciation in their households because they are capable of feeding their families. Nimi does not appreciate his father, Baba, because he is not able to effectively fulfill his duty of safeguarding and feeding his family. Nimi vows that he will never be like his father:”Nimi: Mama, I do not want to be like my father, ever! He is seen as a coward back home. I have had to live out the shame. Son of a coward they would whisper...” (30). Despite the fact that he does not have a permanent job, Baba abandons his home and spends the little amount of money he has on Amatu, his mistress. This is an indication of his recklessness. This irresponsible act may originate from his psychological issues, resulting from his state of alienation in the community. Baba also performs the role of the character of the Don. The Don is a warlord who recruits young boys and girls in the struggle. He makes them kill their fellow neighbors in the region. Nimi explains to Mama:’ The Don is the head of everything, the supreme commander, the one who knows what the children need for the future. A man of God, Mama. A man sent as our messiah. The Don is god in our part of the country”(14). The Don is also one of the major reasons of destruction in the Niger-Delta. This is clear in the fact that his actions do not improve the life conditions of his people, but actually accelerated their suffering. The Don is not different from the Federal government and

the multinational oil companies, who are mainly concerned with personal gains. Baba attempts to find a resolution for his family by deciding to visit Nimi in their home, impersonating the character of the Don. Baba's family is in a dire need for the struggle termination to begin a curing process. Mama requires knowing the reason behind her brother's violent murder, and Nimi wants to know why his beloved Pikibo and his unborn son were slayed and why he, Nimi, was accused of being a traitor.

Unfortunately, the killing of the Don/ Baba would not change anything in the Niger Delta raging war. This proves that oil pollution and environmental degradation does not only have destructive effects on the people, financially, socially, psychologically, morally, but it also damages families. The consequences of the environmental ruination leaves an open wound in the heart of nature and the indigenous people. The play demonstrates the corruption in the region. The government officials would rather keep the people in a state of extreme poverty, rather than giving them the money what was originally theirs. An example of this is the character of Chief Tomfort.

Tonye: it was the way you handled the removal of Chief Tomfort that amazed us all. He was a middleman who enriched himself rather than taking care of his people. As long as people like him were the power brokers, there was no future for the youth. (35)

The character of Nemi, the protagonist of Yerima's play is like the character of Samuel in Bilodeau's play. They are both young men from indigenous background. They are both victims of the deteriorating conditions of their natural environment. The Climate change and the industrial pollution in Arctic mad the fish to immigrate. For a community that is basically dependent on hunting and fishing, the current circumstances cause unemployment among youth. Due to these deplorable economic conditions, Samuel resorted to drug addiction and eventually committed suicide. Similarly, Nimi lives in a community that is deeply polluted

because of the mining for Oil. The spillage of petroleum causes the infertility of the soil. For a community that is totally depending on farming, this has devastating consequences. This led to unemployment and malnutrition for the people. Nimi, just like other boys and girls from his tribe joined the militia. They attacked the petroleum multinational companies and the Federal Government, to gain compensations for their ruined environment. Nimi ended up leaving school and education and being a murderer.

Conclusion

As a prominent figure in environmental activism and eco-drama, Chantal Bilodeau, defies human exploitation of nature and exposes the hazardous effects of industrialization and climate change on the aboriginal people and the environment. In her innovative eco-drama *Sila*, Bilodeau, employs the amalgamation between human and non-human characters; she portrays the characters of Mama Bear and Daughter Bear. Bilodeau displays the close relationship between the indigenous people and their land and environment. She provokes issues of environmental justice and exhibits diverse settings, different human and non-human beings that are closely linked together by environmental degradation throughout the course of the play. In *Sila*, people from different racial groups are correlated through the hazardous impacts of climate change. In *Hard Ground* by Ahmed Yerima, the ecological discourse is closely connected to the political agenda. Yerima addresses issues of environmental justice and their effects on the oppressed indigenous people of the Niger Delta. For Yerima, the environmental degradation and the unfair distribution of the Petroleum revenues are closely interrelated.

In a world of incomparable ecological turmoil, literary critical discourses, especially those of drama, intend to explore man's relationship to the natural world as well as the consequences of ecological collapse on indigenous people and minority communities. As an environmentalist and a professor of literature, Theresa J. May attempts to contribute to

environmental problems and defies human and natural resource exploitation by Man. She tackles environmental justice issues and their moral implications reflected in literary texts. May emphasizes the role of the drama in exposing environmental degradation and its harmful effects particularly on indigenous people. Ecological drama or, as May's calls it, "green dramaturgy" encourages the reader/audience to "reconstitute the world, to re-conceive our notions of community in such a way that the very boundaries between nature and culture, self and other, begin to dissolve" ("Greening" 100). In both *Sila* and *Hard Ground*, man's harmonious relationship to environment is damaged and the indigenous life is disturbed by Man's exploitation the Aboriginal land; human and non-human worlds are drastically damaged. At the end of both plays, through the gathering of all the groups, the two playwrights attempt to create an ecological reconciliation; conveying the message that environmental degradation can only be confronted by the efforts of all human beings.

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