

## The Woman of the Environment: An Eco-critical Analysis of Onyemelukwe's *Beyond the Boiling Point*

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigates the crusades against environmental degradation and advocacy for protection of the natural environment, using prose as the major instrument. The paper is premised on the fact that ecological or environmental challenges are core to the major global issues in the 21st Century. The degradation of the environment worsens economic, social-political and cultural dysfunction that plagues communities and nations especially in Africa. Existing works on the environmental degradation, depletion of the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect especially written by geographers and climatologists reveal yawning gaps in the paucity of literary component for the appraisal of an obviously cogent humanistic issue. The present study explores Onyemelukwe's novel, *Beyond the Boiling Point* as a contribution in the corpus of environment-conscious writings applying eco-criticism framework. Using bibliographic evidences and archival data, the present study analyzes the novelist's lament on the ruins of war and other environmental hazards on the ecosystem which worsens 'the greenhouse effect.' The novelist pinpoints 'terrible atrocities perpetuated during the World War II' and the 'shelling, ferreting, rocketing and mortar bombardment' during the Wbenian war as leading to harvests of pollution and unbridled urbanization. The study is an analysis of the theme of degradation of the environment and how this contributes to challenges confronting contemporary day society.



**Keywords:** environment, ecosystem, eco-criticism, greenhouse effect, war, urbanisation

## **Introduction**

The natural environment has been degraded by the exploitative activities of man with the attendant negligence. Fatal consequences of earth warming, air and sea pollution and the destruction of aquatic lives, deforestations and desertification; chemical explosives, environmental pollution and destruction of the ecosystems are all the menace ravaging man in his environment in this 21st Century (Stewart Aitchison, 2010, Bernard DeVoto, 2005, and Rutherford Platt, 1994). These problems in contrast to the beauty of the natural environment like seas, hills, mountains and forests which remain sources for literary creativity deserve critical attention. These are the highpoints of the novel analysed in this study, Onyemelukwe's *Beyond the Boiling Point*.

The environment now occupies an important spot on the catalogue of global concerns. It has far outpaced such other grim issues as HIV /AIDS, COVID-19 pandemics, threats of nuclear war, stem cell research and terrorism. The environment has become the major control parameter for human operations in industry, scientific research, exploration, manufacturing, governance and daily living. Almost every human endeavour is assessed to the extent that it has "green" value. Car manufacturers struggle to produce marketable environment-friendly hybrid models, industries are now obligated to cut down on operations and products which emit dangerous gases into the atmosphere. Governments create ministries of environment, and societies are socialized to live lives which do not threaten the environment. This has in most cases, not yielded the desired result. And where they yield at all, the results are too minute compared with the huge budgets of the establishments and programmes gulp. The present study is to present how communities may, having exposed the causes of degradation, avoid the predicaments of the present situation.

## **Background and Plot Summary of the Novel**

A text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities (W. Iser).

*Beyond the Boiling point* (Onyemeluekwe: 2015) is a fictional and narrative representation of the devastating effects of war, the complexities of human desire, and the human longing for redemption in the immense panorama of contingency, meaninglessness and thwarted desire that is human history and culture. Written in the great story-telling tradition of Chaucer, Homer, Tolstoy and Edgar Allan Poe, *Beyond the Boiling Point* offers an almost postmodernist mélange of conflicting yet harmoniously integrated narrative modes – from the simple frame story in which a character or, sometimes, the omniscient narrator, tells a series of short tales and extended narrations that are linked together by journey and quest motifs, or by never-settled conflict.

This narrative of conflict between tribes, and dependent and independent individualism, consists of twenty-five chapters, and a structure of Prologue-Epilogue, beloved of modernist novels. For one, it is an African-oriented novel that offers far more compelling representations of indigenous African normativities and political crises. This makes it better than the usually condescending image of African life-ways that one encounters in many Western narrative depictions of the continent and its people. And the narrative sequences within which the story is told are set within an admirable pattern of chaptalization interspersed with stanza-like structures found in some chapters. For another, the novel has condensed fictional episodes, each more or less consisting of a single time-sequence (the linear flow of time), a single emotional episode (the dramatic voice of the narrator), and a host of other characters, all of whom are involved with single and emotional responses to the political and psychological crises in the fictional setting, Wbenia, in the novel.

*Beyond the Boiling Point* captures the linear narration of Ezinne, a sixteen-year-old girl who hails from Vubcha tribe in Wbenia. She witnesses war in Wbenia first hand. Schools are closed down; chaos of war erupts and soldiers



invade her village; forcing her to flee along with her family members. They live as refugees in the refugee camp for about three years. The war eventually ends; leaving the nation in ruins. The war is fought between the federal troops of Wbenia and those of the Vubchan secessionist forces following the latter's declaration of seceding from the federation. The war shakes the nation and attracts international involvement on the two sides while a wide spectrum of citizens suffers its effect. The author tries to narrate the trauma and its effect on the populace in general and show that even as there is war going on, Wbenia will not disintegrate.

The novel begins with the narrative of the social crises in Wbenia; the abduction of 320 Zengui school girls in postwar Wbenia and how it leaves a deep pain on the inside of the narrator. The postwar Wbenia is not just experiencing this social trauma but other socio-political and environmental problems follow. At the beginning of the social crises, the narrator is sent for, to come back home from the school, on Friday, 18th February, 1967. On getting to Kalia, her tribe, she discovers subterfuge in the land. Ironically, the call is to arrange for her marriage in proxy; in the early days of war in Wbenia. 'The war situation in our country has deteriorated'(15). Everything is in a shambles; people are running helter-skelter. Towns and villages are in huge ruins. Nwadike, the barber loses his barbing salon and others' property is in ruins. In the heat of the war, such communities as Enuani, Obodoenwe and others are plundered. 'Dangers loomed about and remained unpredictable' (35). Wars bring about physical destructions and losses for both Wbenia and Vubcha. Such destructions include the razing down of some structures and taking the lives of the people. Many people, especially the people of Vubcha are dying of hunger as some priests and other religious leaders hoard some relief materials brought to the Vubchan people as foreign aids. This leads to the abject hunger and consequent death of the people, including the soldiers and innocent civilians.

Fortunately, 'on a blissful morning in the year 1970, at 7 am, it was announced that the war had come to an end. No winner! No vanquished!'(193). Even as the announcement is made, the Wbenia soldiers still gather all the males of Vubcha and kill them off. On the return of the refugees, they discovered that the post-war Obodoenwe and the rest of the

communities are something else. For Obodoenwe, ‘it was like a bulldozer was used to reduce all the houses to rubble’ (208). But in the midst of all this chaos, the narrator is well convinced that ‘Wbenia will never disintegrate’ (208). This forms one of the thematic focuses of the novel.

### **The Novel as a Work of Literature**

What especially recommends *Beyond the Boiling Point* to the modern reader, indeed the post-enlightenment reader, is the narrative handling of characterization. The narrative adopts the well-nigh modernist perspective for which a character, stands for, and thus indicates, a /the representation of humans or entities and their action. The novel succeeds, in its own unique way, then, in articulating the signs (words or symbols) that ‘stand’ for something else (other things) in the narration and setting. For instance, ‘flower’ in ‘Where have all the flowers gone’ (160) represent ‘young girls’.

Now is the time to pause and draw the full implications of the fact that *Beyond the Boiling Point* is a fictional work, a work of literature, not a sociological or documentary text. As fiction, the events depicted in the novel are not real, may never have happened, and is, thus, only a *symbolic* representation of an imaginary idea, the metaphorical representation of a certain historical experience, the experience of war. To the author herself, ‘Fiction is a reflection of our socioeconomic and political realities’ (16). Yet this novel conveys Onyemelukwe’s representations of this experience within a community or communities, but which now has powerful symbolic significance for Nigeria. This point needs to be emphasized because the narrative representations of *Beyond the Boiling Point* are not “real”, or a matter of fact, they are only one imaginative interpretation of, or in fact, a metaphorical, even allegorical, “play” on, a specific experience within a specific community, and, therefore, need not be generalized for the whole country or for those communities that now form the Nigerian entity. In this sense, then, the author of *Beyond the Boiling Point* has written only a scriptable story; now it is the turn of the reader to compose his *risible* text. For as Barthes (1981) has written, ‘The work is held in the hand, the text in language’. This novel or book, then, is the work held in the hand of the writer, the real author; the text, this or any critical comment about the novel, is held in the language of appreciation, interpretation, and critique (and criticism).



As Derrida (1976) writes, ‘the writer writes in a language and in logic whose proper system, laws and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely’. This is where, in my view, the reader of this novel has to do some deconstructive interpretive work: where does the ‘boiling point’ (the uni-linear eschatology of war and secession), the theme of the novel, rest, as it was, in the end? In the stigmatizing praxis of a political cosmology in which there is no Winner, no Vanquish (Wbenia versus Vubcha)? Perhaps the real author, Onyemelukwe, may have set out to vindicate the Vubchan way of life, with all its pristine supposed cosmogony. Yet the (largely omniscient) narrator presents (or re-presents) the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Wbenian Armed Forces as being a just and fair man who is a conscientious Christian to be proud of. He is riddled with internal and performative chords of humanity. Surely, the real author (Onyemelukwe) and the (unnamed) narrator (or narrators) of the novel must have different intentions, if we may call them so: one wants to vindicate the Vubchan way of life that calls for secession; the other - the Wbenian forces. In other words, despite the real author (Onyemelukwe) and the (omniscient) narrator, both worlds are shown as having their own internal consistency, their own normativity, their own justification and rationality. For example, how could the Commandant pass an order for the Vubchan male folks to be separated and killed even while there was no such order? And who would not accept rational solution to the Commandant’s thoughtless action? But this, in any case, is how narrative form works: it offers a resolution of sorts but not necessarily a convincing and engaging closure. And as if to emphasize just this point, this interpretation, the novel ends with the expression: ‘No Winner, no Vanquished.’

### **The Environment and the Future of the Environment**

The issue of environmental hazards is not new. The earliest urban civilizations created severe environmental damage. The accumulation of agricultural surpluses necessary to build cities, construct pyramids and temples, equip armies, provide regalia for priestly rulers and maintain bureaucracies led to over-farming, soil erosion and the destruction of natural habitats. Irrigation, in ancient Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley, led to over-salinization as the evaporation of large bodies of water left to toxic salt on formerly fertile land in a ‘Satanic mockery of snow’ (Goudie, 113). Massive

deforestation for over-enthusiastic farming practices resulted in widespread soil erosion. Environmental devastation is all encompassing in areas such as habitat destruction and species extinction, air and water pollution, ground water depletion, contamination, and chemical risks.

### **Eco-criticism as theoretical framework**

Eco-criticism is a systematic approach to literary criticism from an interdisciplinary perspective which focuses on the environment as its central concern. Eco-criticism as a theory shows that all things are related within the environment. This conforms to the first law of ecology which states that everything is connected to everything else. Eco-criticism is expressed with the following terms: Eco-literary criticism, literature of the environment, green literature, eco-poetics, literature of the environment etc. Dobie (2002) shows that:

Eco-criticism differs from other critical approaches. For example, its social purposes establish it as a direct contrast to formalists, who tried to separate text from the world. Instead, eco-critics want to use texts as a way to get to the world itself. They also differ from post-modernists by rejecting the idea that everything is socially and/or linguistically constructed. To them, nature really exists as a force that affects human beings and which human beings can affect (241).

Eco-criticism as a literary theory performs the following functions in literature according to Barry (2002)

- i. re-reads major literary works from an eco-centric perspective, with particular attention to the representation of the natural world;
- ii. extends the applicability of a range of eco-centric concepts and using them of things other than the natural world – concepts such as growth and energy, balance and imbalance, symbiosis and



- mutuality, and sustainable or unsustainable uses of energy resources;
- iii. gives special canonical emphasis to writers who foreground nature as a major part of their subject matter, such as the American transcendentalists, the British romantics, the poetry of John Clare, the works of Thomas Hardy and the Georgian poets of the early twentieth century;
  - iv. extends the range of literary – critical practice by placing a new emphasis on relevant ‘factual’ writing, especially reflective topographical materials such as essays, travel writing, memoirs, and regional literature; and
  - v. turns away from the ‘social constructivism’ and ‘linguistic determinism’ of dominant literary theories (with their emphasis on the linguistic and social constructedness of the external world) and instead emphasize eco-centric values of meticulous observation, collective ethical responsibility, and the claims of the world beyond ourselves (168).

Eco-criticism is expressed with the following concepts: Eco-Consciousness, Zoo-criticism, Eco-melancholia, and Eco-Feminism.

**Eco-Consciousness:** According to Glotfelty (198) eco-consciousness is an attempt to examine nature as something that is real, something that is having life of its own, different from the life seen from an anthropocentric perspective. This walks hand in hand with eco-friendliness. In this regard, nature is privileged, brought to the forefront of human consciousness so that nature transcends the idea of a mere concept. In the new thinking, the shift in consciousness regarding the relationship between man and nature, Elder suggests that what is required is ‘to decentre human’ and give nature ‘back its subjectivity’ (669).

**Zoo-criticism:** is the environmental crusade against the animal harm done to the wild life. This harm is caused mainly by civilization. It calls for the preservation of the wild in order to prevent extinctions of some animals. Throughout western intellectual history, civilization has consistently been

constructed by or against the wild, savage and animalistic world, and has consequently been haunted by it. In the words of Hukan and Tiffin:

The wild man of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries lurked at the dangerously liminal fringe of consolidating European Enlightenment civilization; and, during the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth centuries, hatred against animal, and its accelerating extinctions, both necessitated and enabled animals to exile into Africa and the New world was formed bare in Europe (148).

From the words of Hukan and Tiffin (148), it is clear that man's quest to develop his environment, in other words, civilization causes a lot of harm to the wide life. Zoo-criticism calls for the environmental settlers to 'go native' especially those living in the tropics. This helps to curtail the impending disappearance of the wild. This is the opinion of the Enlightenment Humanists. They essentially call for urgent remedy for the prevention of harms and extinction of many nonhuman species. Hence, they coined the word, eco-catastrophe. Contemporary humanity, having materially destroyed vast areas of wilderness – and many other animals – is now routinely configured as spiritually hollow, as lacking the essence of the human through the repression, withdrawal, destruction or absence, rather than latent threat, of the inner wild. This repression is expressed in both literal and spiritually refractive terms, as a result of the all too successful extermination of that earlier *Heart of Darkness*; and so it is that what had initially been banished by the Enlightenment in order to constitute human civility – the animal and animalistic – is now paradoxically being returned as its essence, its inner core. This brings about the point for a re-theorizing of the place of animals in relation to human societies.

**Eco-melancholia:** According to Clewell (45), “mourning is a necessary temporary process of grieving which spontaneously ends after an unspecified period of time.” In Freud's essay “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), he adopts a nearly identical position. He states that “in proper mourning, grieving occurs, and then dissipates after the object is relinquished.” The termination of mourning is, he says, the healthy restitution of the “normal”,



individuated ego; the healthy ego can and will distinguish between itself and the lost love object.

Eco-melancholia is the inability or unwillingness to stop mourning ecological loss and losses associated with the land, a present where loss continues. According to LeManager, Shewry and Hiltner (2011; 163), eco-melancholia disavows mourning's "renewable" economy and the attendant theory that scarcity mitigates loss. They state further that, the recovery of lost love objects disappearing lands, species, finite natural resources, ways of life – would prove impossible in many instances. There will be no "fresh" objects to replace the natural world, and certainly none "more precious ". It is apparent how those anti-environmental theories of consumption which argue that the earth is replenishing recall Freud's faith in bounty. Freud's "On Transience" offers evidence that Freud borrowed capitalist theories of human consumption to structure his concept of mourning.

Eco-melancholia's historical and memorial disposition defends against mourning's call to prematurely forget about it. It responds to the cumulative losses of nature, land, resources and to traumas tied to those losses, such as death, deracination, and dispossession; it is activated by ongoing and interrelated social and political violence, including the catastrophes of war, genocide, and poverty. Eco-melancholia refuses to take consolation in fantasies of rectification while destruction occurs unabated. Le Manager *et al* (167) note that the eco-melancholic quest to be like the love object, to de-individuate, is the desire which undoes the self/other splitting created in violence.

**Eco-feminism:** Eco-feminism posits that the earth is left bare and barren just like a woman who is naked and barren. Eco-Feminism argues that the struggle for ecological survival is intrinsically linked with the project of women's liberation. Eco-feminism in its various forms, looking back to the suffragettes, instrumental in the campaign against cruise missiles and nuclear power, is an activist movement committed to social justice. Many eco-feminists would see themselves as would-be revolutionaries in an anarchist or socialist tradition. Capitalism and hierarchy stem from a patriarchal system of male rule. In its more mystical form, eco-feminism celebrates Gaia (the hypothesis that the living and nonliving components of the earth function as

a single system in such a way that the living component regulates and maintains conditions so as to be suitable for life) as a living force and looks back to a period variously situated in the early Bronze Age, the Neolithic or a Palaeolithic, a time when a supposedly matriarchal order existed in harmony with nature. Such an ancient society functioned without war or inequality.

Most controversially, it has been argued that women are intrinsically more ecological than men. This seems to explain the reason why most of the ecological terms always connote the female gender. Instances could be seen in both poems of Milton and Osundare. In Milton's *The Nativity Ode*, the poet equates fecundity of the earth in springtime with sexual licentiousness so that Nature, gendered female, must sheepishly cover herself with veil of snow to hide her "naked shame" and "foul deformities". In Osundare's *Ours to Plough not to Plunder*, the poet points out that:

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

Here, the poet uses the female gender's voice in her cry for the need for the preservation of the earth and its resources through unkind and general exploitation of the physical environment by man.

### **Eco-Conscious Analysis of *Beyond the Boiling Point***

Studies (Nwagbara, 2013; Ayinuola, Omidiora & Alagbe, 2016) have shown that that literary analysis from the perspective of ecological considerations is taking the lead in literary establishment. The various natural disasters happening in various parts of the world have attracted the huge attentions of, especially, the literary critics. It is even more so in Africanist literary scholarship. To delve into the evolutionary trend of eco-criticism would do a little to address the kernel of the present study.

According to Glotfelty and Fromm (1996, 198), eco-consciousness is an attempt to examine nature as something that is real, something that is having life of its own, different from the life seen from an anthropocentric perspective. This works hand in hand with eco-friendliness. In this regard,



nature is privileged, brought to the forefront of human consciousness, so that nature transcends the idea of a mere concept (198). In the new thinking, the shift in consciousness regarding the relationship between man and nature, Elder suggests that what is required is ‘to decentre human’ and give nature ‘back its subjectivity’ (Elder 669). This approach is necessitated by what has been considered man’s self-centered attitude to matters of the environment. Thus, there is the notion, albeit an erroneous one, ‘that human beings are so special that the earth exists for our comfort and disposal alone’. The problem is that humans conduct their affairs to the detriment of the environment, and therefore have failed to recognize the need for the common survival of human and nonhuman elements alike. Fromm (263) articulates this idea quite clearly in the essay ‘From Transcendence to Obsolescence: A Road Map’. There, Fromm writes:

The roots of his (man’s) being are in the earth; and he has failed to see this because Nature, whose effects on man were formerly immediate, is now mediated by technology so that it appears that technology and not Nature is actually responsible for everything.

Glotfelty & Fromm’s (1996) argument is that, driven by technology and industrialization, man has failed to fully appreciate the place of nature in his natural environment – together with his insatiable, self-centered and destructive appropriation of nonhuman life in the environment is driving man’s natural environment to stop nurturing and start killing. For this reason, it is expedient to re-examine the reciprocal relationship between man and the environment. Thus, part of the motivation for an eco-centered literature, Elder has said, is to extend ‘human morality to the non-human world...’ (229). This would make it possible for the eco-consciousness of the whole earth’. Clearly, then the eco-critical literature is one which responds to the problem of the environment. In the insight of Glotfelty and Fromm (1996), an earth –centered literary work depicts how ‘human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it’ (XIX).

In synthesis of various eco-critical perspectives, Zapf (2016), among others, identifies the sociopolitical, cultural and anthropological and ethical

perspectives as common orientations. Of these, the sociopolitical dimensions seem relatively more connected to a broad range of concerns at the heart of the literature of the environment. According to Zapf, from the perspectives of the sociopolitical, literary texts are deemed eco-friendly if they pay ‘attention to natural phenomena with regards to their degree of environmental awareness, their recognition of diversity, their attitude to nonhuman forms of life, or their awareness of the interconnectedness between local and global ecological issues’. Given Africa’s peculiar history, Zapf conceptualization – the sociopolitical paradigm bears more relevance to African literature of the environment, going by Slaymaker’s study of black Africa’s response to the subject. That African writers like Onyemelukwe and other African eco-conscious writers including Osundare, Ojaide, etc have been engaged with the environment in different ways is not in doubt.

Onyemelukwe’s eco-centered novel, *Beyond the Boiling Point* belongs to a body of works in which ecological concerns are bound up with sociopolitical themes. Onyemelukwe vivifies man’s physical environment so that the novel foregrounds nature; the privilege eco-centric values and calls attention to the myriad of human-induced environmental problems bedeviling humans in their environments. Onyemelukwe, a notable Nigerian novelist incorporated African environmental setting and thought into her novel. Much of her prose works are garnished with personal experiences and her vast knowledge of her rustic environment, especially the serene Igbo region (fictionally called Vubcha) where she was born and bred. However, from the range of subjects she deals with, it seems Onyemelukwe is at her best when she writes about the rural environment of the Igbo tribe from where she came. These are evidenced in some rustic Igbo adage, folktales, anecdotes and rhymes that are replete in the novel. Thus, she interrogates the socioeconomic, political and environmental problems of the region. The problems, which in broad terms include ecological destruction, pollution, loss of farming and houses, the disappearance of migratory birds in the sky and extinction of animal and plant species. Thus, in great bewilderment, the narrator asks: ‘Is this Vubcha where many are dying on daily basis, minute per minute, second per second?’ (173). There is evidence in Onyemelukwe’s novel to suggest that she takes these issues seriously. It is no wonder then that environment-related issues, in terms of the survival of human and nonhuman life in the environmental ecosphere,



feature prominently in *Beyond the Boiling Point*. This is what makes the examination of Onyemelukwe's novel from an eco-conscious perspective relevant. Thus, for instance the degradation of the environment is vividly portrayed when we read: 'real towns weep because their soil has been grossly robbed of its natural vegetation. Deforestation...' (176). Often, the depiction is deeply political in calling attention to the environmental crisis. It is, therefore, difficult for the author to turn away from such a pervasive problem, which clearly puts human and nonhuman problem, which may result in the decimation of countless animals and plant species as we are told that 'Wbenian bomber pilots bombed the few cities remaining in Vubcha on daily basis. The air raid at Ovi Airport was to a grotesque proportion.' (158). Second, the river is dying because of the harmful substances discharged into it. No nature aspect is spared in the novelist's illustration of the theme of degradation. These are the points which Onyemelukwe is making.

The author, being very sensitive to the survival of the environmental creatures, is disturbed by the destruction of the natural endowment; poses the sober questions, 'where have all the flowers gone?' (160) as the destructions of the flowers add to the problems of the environment. By calling attention to the problems, the author invariably plays the role of an environmental activist keen on protecting the environment. It is obvious that man's quest for material and political advancement through the use of destructive weapons has created more problems than solutions for the natural environment and its capacity to sustain life. Chemical and atomic weapons and other forms of contaminants have saturated the environment, forcing human, animal, aquatics and other creatures to literally gasp for breath. Their life-support system – the environment is made increasingly uninhabitable, and with its life-giving substances fast depleting. That is the scenario we witness on page 158 where the author affirms that: 'ridiculous heavy bombing had taken place. Massive destruction – buildings demolished by the explosives, many people were dead, a large number wounded. I could see some affected houses still burning, some covered with heavy smoke'.

### **Eco-Melancholia in *Beyond the Boiling Point***

Other endearing quality of Onyemelukwe's novel is her great concern in mourning the ecological losses that is, being eco-melancholic. Eco-melancholia is the inability or unwillingness to stop mourning ecological loss and losses associated with the land, a present where loss continues. The author applies the tone of mourning throughout the novel. Right from the prologue, we can envisage the impacts of the ecological destructions. The author draws the reader's attention to the impacts of war in the ecological terrain of Wbenia. War destroys the ecological landscape of Wbenia thereby putting the author in deep pain. Thus, 'It left a deep pain on the inside of me' (1). The author laments on the problem of human violence and its impact on the environment. In the novel, there is a connection between the author's disillusionment about life during the war in Wbenia and the environmental hazards that impinge on her consciousness. Thus, 'It was not just the problem of environmental pollution which has aggravated with heightened urbanization and sprawling nature of our cities, what tended to worsen the greenhouse effect' (1). The greenhouse effect is the process by which radiation from a planet's atmosphere warms the planet's surface to a temperature above what it would be in the absence of its atmosphere. If a planet's atmosphere contains relatively active gas (i.e. greenhouse gases) the atmosphere radiates energy in all direction.

Wbenia is known for its natural and harmonious environment. Its natural ecological setting captures the author's attention that she stands in admiration to appreciate nature. In describing the natural setting the author states that 'As I was ruminating on these fascinating details of our culture and natural milieu...I admired the newly polished walls inside and outside the thatched-roofed hut' (13). She is so enthused by the beauty which she beholds but bemoans herself for how the environment is now in complete ruins. Bloodshed, environmental pollution are the order of day. Thus, 'In one higher institution of learning in the North of Wbenia, all the Kalia lecturers were assembled in front of a block and massacred' (19); thereby causing environmental degradation. The author goes further to mourn ecological losses that have taken place at Enuani. The environment known for its natural and green vegetation has 'given way to urbanization and modernization' (41). Environmental pollution and other hazards 'heaps of refuse littered the town



in various places (41)'. The water and everything is polluted bringing a huge environmental devastation in such areas as habitat destruction and species extinction, air and water pollution, ground water depletion and contamination, and chemical risks (the Great River where all sorts of rubbish were dumped, (41); people discharge stinks on water and on the land. This has adverse effects on the physical environment; 'the swampy, dirty soil by the beach is actually stinking. The stink was actually worsened by the scorching sun and the intense heat of the sun whose rays seemed to pass directly to the earth without any blanket to check them' (41). Without any doubt, there are environmental harms like deforestations and pollution; these cause the depletion of the ozone layers, greenhouse effect and global warming as we are told by the author that 'the sun whose rays seemed to pass directly to the earth without any cloud blanket to check them (41)'. There are also, nutrients losses in the soil; the soil fertility is made hazardous by the ultra violet rays coming directly from the sun. These are the banes of the physical environments. The author could not hold herself than to continue to mourn these ecological losses. Thus, she cries, 'What an ugly sight! What a sorry sight! This environmental pollution was, without doubt, so unhealthy' (41). The point that the author is making here is that, no doubt, urbanization and industrialization lead to ecological losses. The author is not alone in this practice of mourning for ecological hazards and consequent loss. Ayinuola (25) expresses his own mourning as follows: 'The industrial revolution with the attendant mechanization of life at the period brought about the destruction of landscapes, general chaos, changes both in the landscape and in the social lives of the people.'

Ecological mourning continues as the author takes the reader to the adverse effects of war on the human's physical environments. Wars bring about physical destruction and losses for many people in society. In this novel, lives are lost; houses are burnt, thus destroying the natural ecology. With a deep tone of anger, the author roars: 'See what the war has done to us' (83). The weapons used for the war in the world could account for low productions we record today in agriculture. Other environmental hazards stem up from the ruins; the author states that 'sophisticated weapons of these soldiers who were advancing—armored tanks, machine guns, ferrets, rockets' (129) are all used during the war. No doubt, the hecatombs and other activities of war destroy

the ecosystem. This is the major cause of mourning by the author-narrator. Thus, ‘With tears in her eyes, she went on with her war gist’ (135).

### **Echoes of Eco-Feminism in *Beyond the Boiling Point***

As stated earlier, Eco-feminism posits that the earth is left bare and barren just like a woman who is naked and barren. Eco-Feminism argues that the struggle for ecological survival is intrinsically linked with the project of women’s liberation. Eco-feminism in its various forms, looking back to the suffragettes, instrumental in the campaign against cruise missiles and nuclear power, is an activist movement committed to social justice. Many eco-feminists like Vandana Shiva, the Chipko Andolan movement in India and the Green Belt Movement in Kenya would see themselves as would-be revolutionaries in an anarchist or socialist tradition. In *Beyond the Boiling Point* the narrator is no doubt a female voice; lamenting and probing people for the irrational engagements in war. In eco-feminism, nature takes on a female voice. In this novel, Alie, a sixteen-year-old girl narrates her experience of the Vubchan war. According to the narrator, ‘I had vantage position from where I observe clearly the war zone’ (136). As an eco-feminist who observes everything first-hand the author-narrator serves as a revolutionary voice in the novel. Right from the prologue, we are informed of how the 320 Zengui school girls are abducted. The questions are, why females and not males? Why should males be busy fighting wars and being killed while females are hoarded in the refugee camp to tell the story? These are linked with the eco-feminists’ view that the earth is like a woman who is preserved and left idle. This is the angle from where the author is driving. At the end, the hope that Wbenia will not break comes from the female voice.

### **Conclusion**

We would like to conclude this paper with the remark that *Beyond the Boiling Point* is a narrativization of a crucial moment at which global technology, religion, and military prowess triumph over nature in an otherwise natural indigenous community while bringing harm to the environment. The point is that, in this era of the increasing globalization of cultures, faiths, technologies, and institutions, *Beyond the Boiling Point* shows us the beginnings of this process in one small corner of the world, Vubcha but which, through the same historical processes, now has significance for all



peoples and cultures, since these worlds and communities are becoming interconnected. This study concludes that war is devastating, its effect on the society and people are unquantifiable.

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