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Research article

THE WOMAN AS A METAPHOR FOR THE ENVIRONMENT IN KAINE AGARY'S YELLOW-YELLOW

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the exploitation of women in relation to the environment. Women's deprivation and oppression hinder their ability to assert and actualize themselves within their communities of practice, thereby confining them to docility and dependence. A symbolic parallel exists between the afflictions of women and those of the physical environment they inhabit. Environmental exploitation prevents the land and water from yielding the resources required for human sustenance. Drawing on ecofeminist theory, which identifies important connections between the treatment of women and the non-human natural environment, this paper argues that women and the environment experience comparable exploitative injustices that prevent them from realizing their full potential in society. The paper observes that the female body in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* functions as a metaphor for the environment. It concludes that ending the exploitation of women and the environment by patriarchal power and destructive human activity, respectively, will benefit society because their restored potential can contribute to the growth and development of both human and non-human communities.

KEYWORDS

Ecofeminism, Female Exploitation, Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, Environment Degradation, Stereotype, Gender Oppression

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Introduction

The female body functions as a metaphor for the environment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, as depicted in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. Just as the environment is explored, exploited, polluted, and abandoned through oil spills, women experience comparable exploitation and abandonment by both African and non-African men. This parallel resonates with wider African feminist scholarship on patriarchal limitations, gender-role reversal, female solidarity, and the cultural construction of the female body (Egbung, "Patriarchal Limitations"; Egbung, "Reversal of Gender Roles"; Egbung, "Female Solidarity"; Egbung, "Fatness as a Metaphor"). The exploitation of women and the environment prevents them from yielding their full benefits because both are rendered barren and unproductive by men and destructive human activities, respectively. Ovuoke Owhofasa, in "Women as Victims," argues that:

The "woman" is most times metaphorically associated with the "earth". As society, through different phallogocentric standards, regards the woman as an object to be explored, exploited, degraded and dumped when she becomes barren, sterile and fagged out at old age, so has the earth been looked upon as a thing to be explored, exploited, degraded, and abandoned when it appears to be infertile and unproductive. (Ow Hofasa 123)

The above assertion forms the central premise of this paper. It is developed through ecofeminist theory, which explains the connection between the treatment of women and the treatment of the non-human natural environment. Related African literary scholarship has similarly connected ecological degradation with social domination, resistance, and women's vulnerability (Ogar and Odey, "Eco-activism"; Egbung, "Oppression and Revolt").

The Concept of Ecofeminism

The concept of ecofeminism emerges from the relationship between ecology and feminism. Ecology concerns the relationships among plants, animals, human beings, and the environment, while feminism advocates women's equality, agency, and freedom from oppression. In her introduction to *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, Karen Warren states that ecofeminism, also known as ecological feminism, "is the position that there are important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other" (xi). Warren emphasizes that, just as there are different forms of feminism, "there is not one ecofeminism or one ecofeminist philosophy" (4). She further explains that ecological feminism draws on liberal, Marxist, radical, socialist, Black, and Third World feminisms (4).

Kathryn Miles explains that ecofeminism, also called ecological feminism, examines the connections between women and nature (Miles). Owhofasa further notes that the term was coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 to describe women's collective struggle to preserve a natural world continually threatened by human activity (124). She adds that Cheryll Glotfelty views ecofeminism as a "hybrid label" for a theoretical discourse concerned with the relationship between the oppression of women and the domination of nature (Owhofasa 124). Ecofeminism therefore treats nature as a feminist concern, particularly because women in many developing communities depend heavily on land, water, forests, and other natural resources.

Ecofeminism is closely related to Catherine Acholonu's concept of "Motherism," in which the motherist is also an environmentalist. Acholonu connects women and the environment as follows:

Motherism is a multidimensional theory which involves the dynamics of ordering, reordering, creating structures, building and rebuilding in cooperation with mother-nature at all levels of human endeavour. Cooperation with nature is paramount to motherism and the task of the motherist is that of healing and protecting the natural cohesive essence of the family, the child, the society and the environment. Therefore, the Motherist must be a humanist, a healer, a co-creator with God and nature: an environmentalist. (Acholonu 110-11)

Acholonu's position therefore emphasizes that women and the environment should be protected rather than exploited and abandoned.

This paper therefore places the exploitation and oppression of women in a patriarchal society on the same plane as the exploitation of the Niger Delta landscape, waterways, and atmosphere. This concern is consistent with studies of paternalism, family control, patriarchal restriction, and women's revolt in African literature (Egbung, "Paternalism and Family Relationships"; Okereke and Egbung, "Significant Others"; Okereke and Egbung, "Parental Control"; Egbung, "Oppression and Revolt"). Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* provides the primary literary framework for this analysis.

The Woman and the Environment in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*

The physical environment, particularly the farmland of peasants who depend on agriculture for their livelihood, is destroyed by an oil spill, leaving the people helpless and frustrated. *Yellow-Yellow* opens with the distress of Bibi, Zilayefa's mother, who returns to her farm only to discover that crude oil has submerged it. The narrator describes the experience as follows:

During my second to last year in Secondary school, one of the crude oil pipes that ran through my village broke and spilled oil over several hectares of land, my mother's farm included. I was at home that day when she returned shortly after leaving for the farm.... I left them and ran to my mother's farm. It was the first time I saw what crude oil looked like, I watched as the thick liquid spread out, covering more land and drowning small animals in its path. It just kept spreading and I wondered if it would stop, when it would stop, how far it would spread. (Agary 3-4)

Neither the responsible authorities nor the government provides an effective remedy; instead, the oil company attributes the incident to sabotage. The spill destroys farmland and animals, pollutes the surrounding environment, and makes the area increasingly uninhabitable. The narrator captures the community's helplessness:

The community took the matter up with the oil company that owned the pipes, but they said they suspected sabotage by the youths and were not going to pay compensation for all the destruction that the burst pipes had caused. And so it was that, in a single day, my mother lost her main source of sustenance. (Agary 4)

The young and vulnerable woman is manipulated in the same way that the environment is exploited, polluted, and abandoned. Bibi, Zilayefa's mother, is an eighteen-year-old school-leaver who hopes to obtain employment in Port Harcourt. However, a Greek sailor working in Nigeria deceives, exploits, and abandons her. Just as the oil spill destroys the land, his betrayal truncates her future prospects. The narrator states:

...he left Port Harcourt without saying goodbye. She went to the port to look for him one day, as had become her habit, and was told that his ship had left. There was no message; he was just gone, leaving behind his planted seed in my mother's belly. (Agary 7)

Ngozi Chuma-Udeh captures the relationship between betrayal and environmental desecration when she observes that "the seeming betrayal of women is synonymous with the betrayal of the desecrated land" (115). The exploited and abandoned Bibi withdraws into herself and works tirelessly to secure a better future for her daughter. Her experience also reflects wider studies of cultural alienation, transnational abandonment, kinship disruption, and the search for identity in African writing (Egbung and Akpagu, "Cultural Alienation and Exploitation"; Egbung, "African Kinship"; Egbung, "The Search for Identity"; Akung et al., "'Protect People and Not Borders'"). Determined that Zilayefa should succeed where she could not, Bibi regards education as a path to liberation from patriarchal control. She even withdraws from women's social groups because their financial demands would reduce the resources available for her daughter's schooling.

She would make sure that I accomplished what she had not. She had inherited a small piece of land from her family, which she farmed, and sometimes she would go fishing. With the proceeds, she was able to feed us and pay my school fees. She took care of all my needs and even went without sometimes to make sure I got an education. For instance, she expelled herself from the women's group so that she would not be forced to spend money on wrappers for their outings. (Agary 8)

Galadanchi Kabir's position on the value of education is particularly relevant. He argues that:

Education is important for everyone, but is especially significant for girls and women. That is true, only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. (Kabir 285)

Similarly, Itang Egbung and Jayne Owan, in "Literacy and the Girl-Child Empowerment for Sustainable Development," argue that:

Education is an investment in human beings, and the result of the investment is the contribution of the individual to the socio-economic development of the society. It creates awareness among the citizenry and this allows them to participate actively in the political, social, economic and democratic processes of their country. (Egbung and Owan 10)

This argument is reinforced by comparative studies that present education as an equalizer and link environmental knowledge, attitudes, and sustainable behaviour to social development (Egbung and Okereke, "Education as an Equalizer"; Offiong et al.). Bibi's plan to send Zilayefa to university with the income from her farm is shattered when the oil spill destroys and pollutes her only source of livelihood. The narrator describes this loss vividly:

The day my mother's farmland was overrun by crude oil was the day her dream for me started to wither, but she carried on watering it with hope. The black oil that spilled that day swallowed my mother's crops and unraveled the threads that held together her fantasies for me. (Agary 10)

The oil spill represents the devastation of the woman. As Bibi's farmland is soaked in crude oil, her hopes and aspirations for her daughter begin to vanish. The destruction of the land therefore becomes the destruction of the woman's labour and, ultimately, affects the next generation. This intergenerational consequence also appears in studies of family responsibility, parental control, and girls' education (Okereke and Egbung, "Significant Others"; Okereke and Egbung, "Parental Control"; Egbung and Owan, "Literacy and the Girl-Child").

Bibi is devastated and traumatized because the only means through which she hoped to provide a better future for her daughter has been destroyed. Jonas Akung and Azubike Iloeje observe that "the woman symbolizes nature and as man continues to devastate the environment so also is the woman devastated" (80). The logging of trees by wealthy capitalists further demonstrates the exploitation of natural resources for private gain. Such ecological dispossession and its effect on women's livelihoods are also central to Ogar and Odey's study of eco-activism and to recent scholarship on women, naming, community, and environmental belonging (Ogar and Odey, "Eco-activism"; Uwen and Egbung, "Death Has Cut Off My

Right Hand”; Uwen et al., “This Dangerous Bone”). The narrator states: “They were interested in logging timber from the forests in our village and wanted to discuss that possibility with the Amananaowei” (Agary 22). The destruction of trees and other vegetation affects women directly because women often depend more heavily than men on forest products. Warren notes:

First, in developing countries women are more dependent than men on tree and forest products. Trees provide five essential elements in these household economies: food, fuel, fodder, products for the home (including building materials, household utensils, gardens, dyes, medicines) and income. (Warren 5-6)

The exploitation of the girl-child transcends racial boundaries. African and non-African men exploit women because of their vulnerability, just as human beings exploit a vulnerable environment. This pattern echoes studies of sexual slavery, human-rights violations, feminist consciousness, female bonding, and the contemporary tension between artificial and emotional intelligence in representations of women (Egbung, “Sexual Slavery in Nigeria”; Egbung, “Female Bonding as Therapy”; Egbung, “Form and Feminist Consciousness”; Egbung, “Artificial Intelligence Versus Emotional Intelligence”). Sunny Awhefeada, in “Degraded Environment and Destabilized Women,” explains this double exploitation:

Agary reframes the Niger Delta story into a metaphoric novel that can be read along two narrative leads. First, the region in all its pristine endowment and Edenic bliss was devastated and disrupted by the exploitation and exploration of oil by foreigners aided by local conquistadors. The second narrative thread depicts the violation of women in the region by foreign oil workers, and also by indigenous bourgeoisie. What comes to the fore is the violation and debasement of both land and the violation of women, which often results in unwanted pregnancy, amputates their ambitions, aborts their dreams, and confines them to the abyss of impoverishment. (Awhefeada 98)

Sergio, a Spaniard who comes to Nigeria to exploit the vegetative environment for personal gain, also exploits Zilayefa sexually. Their first meeting in the village gives her hope that he will provide an escape from a community devastated by oil pollution; she regards him as “the one who was my ticket out of the village” (Agary 28). After leaving without saying goodbye, Sergio later reappears in Port Harcourt and impregnates her. Zilayefa reflects:

I could not bring Sergio’s child into my world. I could not allow him a place in my heart. That would have been foolish. He was a white man, and as far as I was concerned, his home was somewhere other than Nigeria; here was a transient white man with whom I had no future because as I had learnt, his type left when they had to – and without looking back. (Agary 173)

Other foreigners, including Filipinos and Chinese men, also exploit young women sexually by using gifts and money as bait: “The Filipinos and the Chinkos did not give as much money, but they bought many gifts” (Agary 37). The women are not only sexually exploited but also physically brutalized by men who use violence as part of the transaction. The narrator recounts:

Our visitors told of times when they fell into the hands of a crazy whitey who beat them up or pushed objects like bottles into their privates as part of the “fun”. It seemed that, sometimes, there were so many unimaginable horrors to get through before the “clients” released the money. Nevertheless, if one were lucky, before they made the mistakes of taking off with one of the crazy whiteys, someone else who had experienced his brutality would tactically stop them and warn them off him. (Agary 37-38)

Women therefore experience double oppression from foreign men and local youths. The foreigners beat and sexually abuse them, while local boys subject them to assault, theft, and intimidation. This representation belongs to a broader body of Nigerian writing on state brutality, violent rhetoric, insurgency, drug-related social harm, and the trauma of the voiceless (Edung et al., “Scarred by the Badge”; Ogar and Odey, “Violent Rhetoric”; Odey, Ogar, and Sunday; Odey et al., “Socio-Psychological Implications”; Ogar and Odey, “Rallies of the Voiceless”).

Occasionally, the local boys would remind the girls that they still had power in town. They would attack the shacks where the girls lived, beat them up, steal their money, and, if their minds had been taken over by the evil spirits in bronze and hard drugs, they would destroy all the property that had gotten in the way of their mission. (Agary 38)

African men also collaborate, directly or indirectly, with structures that exploit African women and the environment. Admiral, a sixty-year-old retired naval officer, takes advantage of Zilayefa, a seventeen-year-old girl who interprets his

attention as the fatherly affection she has never experienced. He lures her with money and gifts and tells her, “You do look like you’d be sweet to bite...” (Agary 130). He then takes her virginity: “He saw the tears in my eyes after he was done and laughed, ‘You’re a woman now. Don’t worry, it gets better’” (Agary 144). Her tears symbolize helplessness before a powerful man who exploits her disadvantaged position. The episode can be read alongside studies of sexual slavery, caste-based gender vulnerability, and pregnancy or childbirth trauma in Nigerian women’s narratives (Egbung, “Sexual Slavery in Nigeria”; Odey, Ogar, and Nathaniel; Onuoha et al.). Grace Etuk argues that such conduct constitutes sexual harassment, which:

Could take the form of a man using his advantaged position over a woman to get her to submit to having sexual intercourse with him. In this case force is not involved but the woman accepts because of her disadvantaged position. (Etuk 115)

Admiral’s exploitative behaviour leads him to withdraw from the young woman whose sexual and emotional life he has disrupted. Zilayefa becomes restless and distressed when she does not see or hear from him for two weeks. Her experience reflects the recurring representation of intimate torment and embodied trauma in contemporary African women’s writing (Egbung, *Torment of an Angel*; Onuoha et al.). She explains:

After our first sexual encounter, I did not see Admiral again for almost two weeks.... I waited to receive a message from him and expected his driver every other day. I was torn and worried about the one-sidedness of the relationship. I had to decide that I was ready to deal with seeing him on his own terms and at his own time. But already I felt jealous of everything and everyone who had his attention. (Agary 149)

Admiral relates to Zilayefa entirely on his own terms and disregards her emotional needs because she is a minor and does not share his social status. He meets her only when he chooses and repeatedly exploits her sexually, effectively reducing her to a sexual object. Chibueze Orie, in *Who Is a Woman Being?*, observes:

He travels out without telling her. He seems ignorant of the relevance of his presence to her whenever she needs him; he thinks, it seems, that money is and should be everything to her. So, he gives her chunks of money to spend in lieu of his company. He gives more attention to his incessant, crowded political meetings and unending business trips than the time allotted to this girl friend of his. (Orie 17)

Because Zilayefa is too young to be introduced to Admiral’s business and political associates, he hides her in his bedroom. Although he is reputed to prefer very young girls—“he did have a reputation of liking very young girls” (Agary 159)—he is unwilling to acknowledge her publicly. When he learns that she is pregnant, he distances himself and appears to move on to another victim. Zilayefa laments that “Admiral had become distant, but I was not sure if it was because he had moved on to the next young girl” (Agary 173). Orie confirms that the relationship remains entirely on Admiral’s terms and that Zilayefa lacks the voice to challenge it (17). Her silencing can also be situated within scholarship on female bonding, solidarity, vocality, resistance, and the rallying of marginalized voices (Egbung, “Female Bonding as Therapy”; Egbung, “Female Solidarity”; Ogar and Odey, “Rallies of the Voiceless”; Odey, Ogar, and Aboh).

The Stereotyped Woman in Yellow-Yellow

The presence of Portuguese, British, Greek, Syrian, Lebanese, Filipino, Chinese, and American men in Port Harcourt, and their relationships with Nigerian women, produces generations of biracial children known as “Yellows” in the Niger Delta. Some are acknowledged and supported by their fathers, but Zilayefa, popularly called “Yellow,” belongs to those abandoned in much the same way as the environment. Her experience intersects with wider representations of racial prejudice, diasporic identity, cultural alienation, and kinship across borders (Egbung, “Racial Prejudice”; Akung et al.; Egbung and Akpagu, “Cultural Alienation and Exploitation”; Egbung, “African Kinship”).

Their skin colour makes them particularly vulnerable because they are viewed as the children of women who compromised their dignity with white men. Consequently, they are stereotyped, prejudged, and discriminated against within their own society. The narrator states:

The rest of us were born-troways, rejected by our fathers or, worse, nonexistent to them....I came to understand that people had preconceived notion about others of mixed race – they thought were conceited, promiscuous, undisciplined, and confused...we were products of women of easy virtue who did not have morals to pass on to their children. (Agary 74)

Zilayefa's desire to define herself within a society that stereotypes her contributes to her involvement with older men whom she regards as father figures. Ifeoma Onyemelukwe notes that an adolescent searching for identity asks questions such as: "Who am I? What am I? How do people see me? How do I see myself? What do I want to become? How can I connect myself to explorations with the opportunities and demands of society" (36). These questions appear to shape Zilayefa's self-perception. Her struggle resembles other literary explorations of racial prejudice, cultural alienation, migration, and the search for self (Egbung, "The Search for Identity"; Egbung, "Racial Prejudice"; Egbung and Akpagu, "Cultural Alienation and Exploitation"; Akung et al.). Chuma-Udeh similarly argues that Agary's novel interrogates the trauma of Niger Delta women who are treated by white men as purchasable sexual objects (122).

Society applies a double standard: biracial girls are stigmatized while simultaneously being displayed as attractive figures capable of drawing customers to commercial establishments. Through Sisi's assistance, Zilayefa obtains work as a hotel attendant in Port Harcourt and is placed at the reception desk because of her appearance. She describes the experience as follows:

I was used to being referred to as mammy-water. I do not think anyone really believed that I was a follower of the water's mother spirit, but I had one of the qualifying characteristics – my complexion. Mammy-waters were said to be beautiful, light-skinned, and possessed of wily charm. It did not mean much to me, but in a place like the hotel reception desk, where they needed generous tips from guests to augment meager salaries, it was good to have another mammy-water on board. (Agary 71)

Zilayefa and her contemporaries are not the first generation of "Yellows" in the novel; Sisi, her guardian, belongs to an older generation of biracial women. Unlike Zilayefa, Sisi is an independent entrepreneur and therefore experiences less overt stigmatization. This supports Acholonu's view that "in most traditional African societies, the peasantry suffered exploitation by the wealthy and powerful" (51). It also aligns with Egbung's analyses of patriarchal limitation and the reinvention of the African woman through agency and resilience (Egbung, "Patriarchal Limitations"; Egbung, "Reinventing the African Woman"). Zilayefa and Bibi are more vulnerable because of their poverty and limited social power; consequently, the degree of exploitation experienced by the "Yellows" is shaped by social status. The novel identifies several generations:

I found out there were generations of yellows in the Niger Delta area, and each one had a different story. There were the yellows from the 1800s, the days of the Royal Niger Company, later known as the United Africa Company (UAC), which the British had set up to maximize their gains from the palm oil trade.

The novel further explains that Portuguese traders remained in the region until the British consolidated control. Along Nigeria's coastal communities, these British and Portuguese encounters produced earlier generations of "Yellows," including Sisi. Later generations resulted from relationships involving Syrian, Lebanese, and Greek businessmen and sailors, some of whom married Nigerian women and supported their biracial children, including by funding overseas education. These were the fortunate ones.

The narrator contrasts them with those who were abandoned: "The rest of us were born-troways, rejected by our fathers or, worse, nonexistent to them. Our crop of yellows was full of variety, coloured by the Filipinos, the Chinese, the British, and the Americans who worked in the oil sector" (Agary 74).

Aspects of Style

Symbolism

The title *Yellow-Yellow* symbolizes environmental degradation and the abnormal conditions imposed on both plants and human beings. Oil exploration and pollution strip the landscape of fertility, while polluted rivers destroy the fish on which many Niger Delta communities depend. The title therefore operates as a semiotic sign whose meanings emerge through colour, land, bodies, and historical experience. This interpretation is strengthened by Affiong Effiom's scholarship on semiotics, symbolic performance, historical violence, intertextual quotation, and culturally grounded Nigerian aesthetics (Effiom, "Semiotics and Contemporary Play Directing"; Effiom, "The Luminous Theories"; Effiom, "Performing British Violence"; Effiom and Abeeb; Effiom, "Intertextuality as Resistance"). Orie explains:

Yellow is symbolic of the yellowish land washed off of its greenness by oil exploration, oil pollution of land and rivers, a land that is turned unfertile, unproductive and bereft of healthy lives: it is only stunted plants that dot on the land! (Orie 7)

Similarly, the biracial children are called “Yellow-Yellow” (Agary 7). They are stigmatized through labels such as “African-profits,” “born-troways,” “ashawo-pickins,” and “father-unknowns” (Agary 171). These derogatory names position them as social outsiders and make them more vulnerable to exploitation.

The Greek sailor, Admiral, and Sergio—the wealthy adult men who exploit Bibi and Zilayefa because of their vulnerability—symbolize the multinational oil companies that exploit and pollute the rivers and farmland of the Niger Delta. In both cases, the powerful extract what they desire and leave the woman or the environment damaged, infertile, and unproductive.

Language Use

The use of indigenous language reflects the author’s cultural and linguistic background. God’sgift Uwen, Itang Egbung, Stephen Ellah, and Josephat Odey argue that the use of indigenous linguistic resources and traditional religious ideologies strengthens dialogue and communal meaning (15). The expression “Ere ow’ ama bien mo gbein mo daba, owei mo ‘yaimo aki, hm hm” (Agary 15) exemplifies this cultural grounding. Egbung argues that cultural expression displays African values and principles in ways that challenge Western ideology (Egbung, “Cultural Expression”). This position also connects with studies of African literary language, ethnopragmatic meaning in dirges and personal names, Nigerian Pidgin as a vehicle of social reconstruction, digital oral rendition, and the reimagining of folklore in interactive media (Egbung, “A Survey of the Criticism”; Uwen and Egbung, “Death Has Cut Off My Right Hand”; Uwen et al., “This Dangerous Bone”; Odey, Uwen, and Ogar; Odey and Ogar, “Exploring Socio-Political Decay”; Edung et al., “Spoken Word Poetry”; Edung et al., “The Digital Uncanny”). The use of Pidgin also reveals the educational and socio-economic conditions of the Niger Delta community. At the scene of the oil spill, Zilayefa is told: “You no go commot for there? You dey look like say na beta tin! Come on, leave dat place!” (Agary 4). The language situates the environmental disaster within everyday communal speech.

Na de money I come to collect o. I no get money so I dey return de cloth. I neva cut am. Bibi, na wa for you o. We all poor but we dey join hand help each other. De day wey you go need something, make you no come meet us o. (Agary 8)

The exchange between Bibi and the chairlady of the women’s group reveals the woman’s helplessness, poverty, and deprivation. Bibi has been abandoned with a child to support, and she cannot meet her social obligations because environmental pollution has destroyed her livelihood. The dialogue therefore links language, gendered poverty, communal expectations, and ecological loss.

Imagery

The Niger Delta is a riverine region in which fishing is a major occupation. Agary uses the image of the fisherwoman to communicate independence, happiness, and freedom before environmental degradation. The river once provided women with a livelihood and enabled them to support their families. This nostalgic imagery can be read alongside scholarship on African consciousness, satire, ecological resistance, eschatological storytelling, and changing visions in Nigerian poetry (Egbung, “African Consciousness”; Egbung, “Satire”; Ogar and Odey, “Eco-activism”; Odey, Ogar, and Ushie; Odey, Ogar, and Aboh). The narrator recalls:

My mother told me of the days of her youth when every husband was expected to give his new wife a dugout canoe that he had carved out and crafted himself. The wife would use this canoe to fish, earn a living, and help to feed the family. Those were the days when boys carved out decorative paddles that carried the legends of the Ijaws in every curve. Those were the days when the Ijaw woman could ignore the nature of the Ijaw man because she had a means of earning a living and providing the needs of her children. Those were the days when Ijaw women cooked a fresh pot of soup every day because the rivers were teeming with fish. (Agary 39-40)

Egbung argues that “the image of the African woman in precolonial Africa was that of an industrious, hardworking and an independent woman” (“Reinventing the African Woman” 8).

The oil spill pollutes the river and destroys aquatic life, directly affecting women whose livelihoods depend on nature and nurture. Owhofasa insists that “the women and children in Africa suffer more from environmental degradation because they are not only vulnerable, they are equally the most powerless of the population” (123). Recent multidisciplinary research

co-authored by Affiong Fred Effiom similarly examines how conservation constraints shape aquatic livelihood transitions among riverine women in the Cross River Basin (Eneyo et al.).

Conclusion

This paper has examined the interconnectedness of women and the environment in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* through ecofeminist theory. Ecofeminism identifies a relationship between the treatment of women and the treatment of the environment, particularly where both are rendered vulnerable by unequal systems of power. In the novel, the girl-child is exploited and abandoned by men whom she regards as father figures, while multinational oil companies extract the wealth of the Niger Delta and leave its people in poverty. These concerns correspond with wider literary discussions of levirate marriage, feminist perspectives, insurgency, resistance, gendered trauma, and the silencing of vulnerable communities (Egbung, "Levirate Marriage"; Egbung, "Artificial Intelligence Versus Emotional Intelligence"; Egbung, "Insurgency as a Threat"; Ogar and Odey, "Rallies of the Voiceless"; Onuoha et al.). Julie Agbasiere observes that "the adult world in which the child lives in is harsh and violent" (74). Oil pollution further impoverishes the people by destroying farmland, rivers, and aquatic life. Ending the deprivation, exploitation, and abandonment of women and the environment would enable both to realize their potential and contribute to social wellbeing. This conclusion supports Orie's position that Agary is:

Agitating that Niger Delta at one hand the women at another, should be paid urgent attention by the governments of the world...a healthy environment is a lead to womanist revival and empowerment; but while women empowerment and feting of femalehood could go without carrying along the revamping of endangered environment, the rehabilitation of destroyed environment cannot go without the remediating repositioning and empowering value urgency of women beings. (Orie 20)

The paper also demonstrates that style is central to the representation of deprivation and exploitation. The wealthy older men who exploit the naïve young woman function as metaphors for multinational companies that exploit the vulnerable Niger Delta environment. As Orie notes, Zilayefa is an "underprivileged girl taken advantage of by an affluent love-veteran, Admiral" (19). In each case, the privileged use unequal power to oppress the vulnerable and advance selfish interests.

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