



PRIMARY RESEARCH

Analysing women and nature in Kaine Agary's Yellow Yellow, through an ecofeminist lens

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Abstract

The article examines gender and ecology in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006) through cultural ecofeminism. The novel explores how environmental degradation and patriarchal oppression affect women in the Niger Delta. The novel shows how nature and systemic exploitation and marginalisation influence women's identities, livelihoods, and personal problems through Zilayefa, Binaebi, Sisi, and Lolo. This study uses ecofeminist theories from Vandana Shiva, Françoise d'Eaubonne, and Rosemary Ruether to show that Agary's narrative criticises industrialisation and oil extraction, which pollute the land and disempower rural women. Binaebi's agricultural loss due to an oil spill illustrates the socio-ecological violence women experience, which ignores their effort and knowledge. Zilayefa's relocation to the city shows how women are exploited and sexually abused in filthy, male-dominated cities. The study uses a cultural ecofeminist paradigm to examine how characters respond to ecological and social trauma with resilience, resistance, and self-realization. The story shows how women's relationships with land, identity, and each other can fight environmental and patriarchal injustice. Agary's depiction of intergenerational wisdom, ecological decline, and gendered pain emphasises the necessity for inclusive environmental policy and gender-conscious sustainability. *Yellow-Yellow* is a personal and political narrative and a critical reflection on the Global South's environmental and gender concerns. Ecofeminism's intersectional justice that empowers women as agents of change in ecological and social transformation is supported in the novel.

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INTRODUCTION

Many ecofeminist literary works focus on the complex relationship between women and nature within gendered experiences and environmental interactions. This subject analysis, especially in modern storytelling, shows how human exploitation of the environment and women sometimes occurs simultaneously, representing societal male domination and ecological destruction. Chakranarayan's ecofeminist analysis of Toni Morrison's *"Sula"* emphasises how society marginalises women's connection to nature and portrays it as inferior or exploitative (Chakranarayan, 2025). This association supports the idea that women's environmental contacts are important yet often disregarded.

Recent research shows that women's participation in natural resource conservation projects improves program effectiveness, although cultural constraints often limit their participation (James et al., 2021). This exclusion reduces

women's resource management insights and maintains a cycle of unrecognised knowledge and perspectives, causing greater social and environmental consequences. In resource scarcity and climate change environments, where women confront disproportionate obstacles, gender and environmental issues are closely linked. Climate change disproportionately affects women, especially in developing nations, who depend on natural resources for survival (Tanny & Rahman, 2016).

Ecofeminism and sustainable development are increasingly recognised as interconnected, with women's contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as key actors in environmental change (Ugwu, 2025). Ecofeminism and practical sustainability show that empowering women in these circumstances promotes gender parity, ecological consciousness, and resistance to environmental catastrophes. This perspective supports the idea that a holis-

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tic approach to socio-environmental issues must include women's perspectives.

In "Yellow Yellow" Agary (2006a), uses Zilayefa, the protagonist, to expose gender bias and environmental devastation in the Niger Delta. The story shows women's struggle and persistence against oppressive society and environmental challenges. The story shows how women's closeness to environment makes them caretakers and victims of ecological exploitation, reflecting ecofeminism. This analysis addresses these linkages to discuss how literature helps us comprehend women's identities and environmental narratives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecofeminism, a branch of ecocriticism, criticises patriarchal structures that oppress women and nature. In this context, "nature" encompasses the entire physical environment, including humans and non-humans, not only its beauty. This broader perspective emphasises that these organisms' connectivity provides a bond that is crucial to ecological balance for human and planetary flourishing (Mishra, 2016, p. 169).

Ecofeminism links women's oppression to nature's exploitation. This perspective sees patriarchal power and dominance as the cause of these oppressions. French theorist Françoise d'Eaubonne coined "ecofeminism" in 1974 to combine feminist goals like gender equality with ecological concerns. Ecofeminists believe patriarchal beliefs distort reality and advocate for worldviews that value the earth and all life (Gaard & Gruen, 1993). According to Gaard and Gruen (1993, p. 279), "if we can establish that a proposed activity or practise contributes to the subordination of women, then by necessity it becomes a feminist concern". The current ecofeminist movement emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s with US conferences and workshops that united feminism and environmentalism. These events highlighted the historical links between women and nature, laying the groundwork for a movement to address their shared oppressions. Scholars like theologian Rosemary Ruether advised women to recognise and fight nature's dominance before obtaining emancipation (Ruether, 2011). This recognition empowers women to innovate for environmental change and requires them to maintain this connection. This obligation empowers some but restricts others or is founded on preconceptions Ruether (2011, p. 88).

By the late 1980s, ecofeminism had moved from academia to politics, influenced by feminist theorist Ynestra King's 1987 Nation article "What Is Ecofeminism?" King encour-

aged readers to evaluate how religious systems enable earth exploitation and women's oppression, expanding the movement's support (King, 1987). Val Plumwood promoted grassroots movement to end discrimination and promote environmental sustainability (Plumwood, 2002).

Contemporary ecofeminists must address ongoing issues by taking an intersectional approach that acknowledges gender, class, and race in ecological discussions. Postcolonial feminist researchers argue that Western ecofeminism does not resonate with Global South women (Tomalin, 2018). This insight has prompted proposals for a more nuanced ecofeminism that includes varied cultural settings and experiences (Wani, Khanday, & Haseen, 2023).

Ecofeminism is a vital movement that critically addresses women's and environmental injustice. An interdisciplinary approach that integrates ecological sustainability with social justice promotes a holistic and inclusive manifestation of women's rights and environmental conservation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS

Ecofeminism promotes environmental justice and women's liberation by acknowledging the interdependence between women and nature. Patriarchal ideologies, represented by hierarchical and exploitative structures that harm women and the environment, are at the heart of this study (Shiva, 2020; Singh & Behura, 2022). According to Milosevic (2019), cultural ecofeminism highlights how patriarchal societies exploit women, nature, and animals, perpetuating the oppressor's perception of control through inferior status.

In reaction to the belief that women and nature are interconnected and devalued in patriarchal society, cultural ecofeminism emerged alongside the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s (Milosevic, 2019). Biological essentialists argue that this connection is often framed through reproductive roles, arguing that women's unique biological capacities for fertility and caregiving align them with nature (Krishna & Jha, 2014; Njoh & Ayuk-Etang, 2021). This viewpoint emphasises that women have higher ethical standards towards the environment, making them ideal champions for ecological preservation and care, commonly referred to as "Mother Earth" and "feminine nature." Cultural ecofeminism has also been criticised for ignoring race, class, sexual orientation, age, and geography's effects on women's lives and identities (Shiva, 2018; Saha, 2024). Cultural ecofeminism in India is exemplified by Vandana Shiva's claim that gender subordination has emerged alongside aggressive development methods. She believes that restoring the feminine concept is necessary for sustainable

development that respects women and the environment (Shiva, 2018; Saha, 2024).

This analysis examines how Zilayefa, Binaebi, Sisi, and Lolo's stories show how female oppression and environmental degradation are linked. Zilayefa's mother's farmland's destruction symbolises women's trauma, while Binaebi's search for alternatives to escape their degraded environment emphasises ecological harm's wider effects. The characters' endurance in the face of misfortune shows how their interwoven identities with the natural terrain provide them strength despite patriarchal perceptions of women as weak (Aksar, Firdaus, & Pasha, 2023; Dong & Keshavjee, 2016).

This study uses cultural ecofeminist texts and concepts to examine how these characters resist gender and environmental injustice. This research uses a cultural ecofeminist lens to examine women's role as custodians of nature and advocates for ecological justice in a patriarchal society and their narratives' transformative power for environmental advocacy and gender equality (Singh & Behura, 2022).

This study examines the complex relationships between female subjectivity and environmental contexts using cultural ecofeminism as a theoretical framework to better understand how women fight systemic oppression and contribute to ecological and feminist discourses.

Plot Summary of the Text

"Yellow-yellow" by Kaine Agary follows Zilayefa, a teenage girl with Greek and Nigerian roots, who leaves her rural home and her mother's protection to find a better life in Port Harcourt. Zilayefa is taken in by grandmother Sisi and her friend Lolo, who help her negotiate city life, at the recommendation of her church pastor. Zilayefa discovers her mixed heritage's social discrimination in Port Harcourt. Zilayefa's weakness leaves her vulnerable to older lovers' attention as she struggles with her father's absence. This interaction shows the delicate balance between desire and exploitation and the power dynamics at play in her need for acceptance. The crime-ridden, polluted landscape of Port Harcourt illustrates the environmental destruction of Nigeria's Niger Delta, where crude oil discovery is a curse rather than a blessing for local residents (Uwadia, Ehiorobo, Ehigior-Irughe, & Oladosu, 2024; Edo et al., 2024).

Agary's story shows how characters fight for survival against environmental deterioration and social apathy. The author's vivid descriptions depict the emotional and physical landscape of a place plagued by oil exploitation. Zilayefa's interactions with her environment illustrate resilience, fragility, and the interdependence of community

and nature, capturing the hardships of those living in a deeply damaged region (Owoeye, 2023; Amosu & Adeosun, 2021).

The narrative explores Zilayefa's identity and the ecological disaster via her voyage. The story poignantly shows how land deterioration causes family estrangement and loss, echoing society fights against ecological catastrophe. Zilayefa's mother's lost farmland symbolises this disturbance and its catastrophic repercussions on their family relations, forcing her to seek alternatives and make sacrifices that reshape her identity and worldview (Owoeye, 2023; Amosu & Adeosun, 2021).

"Yellow-yellow" depicts the Niger Delta realistically, prompting thought on women's empowerment and oil exploitation's socio-environmental impacts. Agary's work is both a personal narrative and a critique of the socio-political climate in which environmental issues are inextricably linked to personal and communal identities, emphasising the need for environmental justice and awareness of exploitation (Anurogo, 2023).

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Yellow-yellow takes place in Rivers State, Niger Delta, where Zilayefa moves from a remote hamlet to Port Harcourt. This spatial shift captures environmental degradation and personal loss, making it crucial. Zilayefa's childhood is marred by a crude oil pipeline rupture that pollutes wide areas, including her mother's farm, their livelihood. This poignantly shows cultural ecofeminism and the close relationship between women and their environment (Jumrah & Karim, 2022). Zilayefa's mother, Binaebi, is traumatised after losing her farm to the oil spill, a regular occurrence in the Niger Delta, where women have traditionally relied on the land.

This terrible occurrence matches ecofeminist literature, showing how environmental deterioration and women's suffering are linked. Binaebi represents a struggle against a patriarchal society that exploits women and nature for profit, like the Chipko movement (Ozigis, Kaduk, & Jarvis, 2019). Agary criticises this exploitation using Vandana Shiva's idea of "mal-development," which prioritises profit over ecological stability and social equality (Oluduro, 2012).

(Nganda, Drakeley, Reyburn, & Marchant, 2004) noted that society views women as more emotionally capable than men, who are more logic-driven. This social framing minimises women's child-rearing and domestic responsibilities, reinforcing a system that limits female workforce participation. After Zilayefa's father, a Greek sailor, abandons her, Binaebi must cope as a single mother. The sailor's

brief presence is linked to a cycle of dominance—he exploits the environment and leaves Binaebi to deal with the socio-economic instability (Umar et al., 2021).

Single parenting in Africa is stigmatised. Culturally, raising a child out of wedlock is called "born troway" (bastard) (Ordinioha & Brisibe, 2013). Binaebi faces judgement. She struggles to improve Zilayefa's future due to this stigma's social impact. Her emotional distress and social rejection highlight the hard realities experienced by many women compelled to face patriarchal judgements without their children's fathers' support (Adekola & Mitchell, 2011). Binaebi finds peace in nature. She supports herself and Zilayefa by farming and fishing, showing how women and their environments are interconnected. This relationship empowers Binaebi to overcome loss and social rejection. Zilayefa compassionately says, "I watched as the thick liquid spread out, covering more land and drowning small animals in its path" (Chinedu & Chukwuemeka, 2018). References to environmental degradation remind them of loss and reflect Niger Delta women's struggle for existence.

Oil extraction alters the ecosystem and harms public health, according to Kadafa et al. (2012) and (Jumrah, 2022). This matches Zilayefa's testimony about her mother's lost farmland. Pollution has reduced yields on once-abundant land, reflecting the cycle of degradation on women and the environment. Degradation mirrors their social position, showing their challenges overlap (Wekpe, Whitworth, & Baily, 2024).

Ortner depicts women as environmental sufferers through Binaebi's sacrifices. Her determination to educate Zilayefa to escape single motherhood narratives shows her resistance to oppressive structures that define them (Oluduro, 2012). Agary challenges Niger Delta patriarchy by portraying Binaebi as a father and mother. Agary challenges women's agency-limiting social constructs through her character. The contrast between rural Port Harcourt, with its environmental degradation and poverty, and metropolitan Port Harcourt shows the continual battle to escape institutional oppression. Zilayefa's memories of her mother's youth in a better environment reaffirm the Ijaw community's vital connection to nature, which oil production has destroyed (Umar et al., 2019).

In conclusion, *Yellow-yellow* effectively weaves women's stories with land deterioration, showing perseverance to overcome personal and ecological problems. Agary's study of Binaebi and Zilayefa shows the complex links between women's efforts and environmental justice, emphasising the Niger Delta's urgent need for social and ecological reforms. The book provides a critical reflection on gender and

environmental crises and calls for radical change in a culture of exploitation and neglect.

The Fate of Women in the Deteriorated Environment (Showing Women and Nature Connections)

In *Yellow-yellow*, Zilayefa vividly describes life in the Niger Delta during the environmental crisis caused by uncontrolled oil exploration. Her mother Binaebi's land was destroyed by an oil spill, ending her livelihood and her ambitions for her daughter. Many Niger Delta women own and operate farms, which are their main sources of income and empowerment, therefore their destruction represents a larger fate.

Zilayefa's observations suggest the community's environmental crisis response is inadequate. The oil firm blames local youngsters for the spillage rather than admitting fault. Zilayefa says, "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" (Ikeke, 2024). The literature on multinational firms and environmental responsibility often blames local communities instead of corporations (Shrestha, 2025).

Nganda et al. (2004) revealed a link between women and nature, highlighting that non-human nature provides food, clothing, and shelter (Gal, 2023). Loss of agricultural land affects women's ability to support their family. As Zilayefa's mother, Binaebi represents the struggles of Niger Delta women who are displaced by environmental degradation. After the oil catastrophe, the community's crops are no longer viable, forcing Zilayefa to leave the rural, environmentally devastated area.

Agary centres the story on Zilayefa and her mother to highlight the plight of rural women devastated by industrialisation. Zilayefa laments, "The only option I was unwilling to consider, that tormented my quiet moments the most, was to remain in my village" (Rosyidah, Ulfa, & Wahyuni, 2024). Zilayefa moves to Port Harcourt to search greater chances than her hometown can offer.

Many women in the community turned to illegal activities to survive. The narrative contrasts the governing class, who benefit from land extraction, and the destitute peasantry. According to Zilayefa, "That water that flowed with streaks of blue, purple and red, as drops of oil escaped from the pipelines that moved the wealth from beneath my land and into the pockets of the select few who ruled Nigeria was the same water I drank" (Ikeke, 2024). This shows the unfair distribution of wealth and the negative effects of oil extraction on locals, especially women who fight for basic requirements

in a polluted environment.

Zilayefa and other young women move to the city, where they face fresh exploitation. Port Harcourt sex workers target the same oil industry workers that degraded their villages. The cycle of sexual exploitation makes women who should be free vulnerable to more abuse: "One of the visitors told of times when they fell into the hands of crazy whitey (Expatriates) who beat them up or pushed objects like bottles into their privates as part of the 'fun'" (Rosyidah et al., 2024).

Binaebi symbolises village women's resilience. She keeps fishing and farming despite environmental degradation: "Farming and fishing, the occupations that had sustained my mother, her mother, and her mother's mother no longer provided gain" (Ikeke, 2024). Her adaptability shows the close relationship between women and nature, where women usually tend the land. The Niger Delta's constant flooding and erosion show systemic environmental failures, and industrial expansion overvalues traditional knowledge (Silva & Cosenza, 2021; Anwar, Khan, et al., 2021).

Due to the devastation of their farming and fishing regions, women migrated to cities, a sorrowful departure from an environment where their contributions were crucial. Zilayefa, however, symbolises a generation of women forced to relocate owing to environmental conditions: "Many of my friends slept with oil company workers, exchanging their bodies for money" (Amorelli & García-Sánchez, 2020). The tragic irony of their survival on the very resources they plundered has broader ramifications for human trafficking and sexual exploitation (Rindha, 2020).

Yellow-yellow shows how industrial practices destroy the land, women, and their dreams. Agary uses ecofeminism to highlight the need for environmental justice and women's agency in these communities. Environmental disillusionment and institutional patriarchy fuel this cycle of exploitation, which politicians and gender and environmental justice campaigners must address immediately (Jumrah & Karim, 2022; Jam et al., 2011).

The Journey towards Self Realization (Ecofeminist Struggles)

Kaine Agary's *Yellow-yellow* follows the ecofeminist fights of important female characters—Sisi, Lolo, Binaebi, and Zilayefa—against environmental degradation and patriarchal conventions. This historical, psychological, and literary analysis of self-realization shows their rise from oppression to self-assertion.

Zilayefa's mother, Binaebi, struggles with the aftermath of her lover's abandonment, raising Zilayefa alone. Binaebi's

farming and fishing livelihood symbolises her love of nature and her desire for her daughter's future (Agary, 2006b). Binaebi wants to protect her daughter Zilayefa from mixed-race prejudice and help her rediscover her identity by investing in her education (Ikeke, 2024). She must consider sending Zilayefa abroad to ensure a future after the oil leak destroys her crops, illustrating the link of environmental degradation and women's oppression (Agary, 2006b).

Zilayefa's self-discovery came after moving to Port Harcourt. She is labelled "Yellow Yellow" in her hometown and experiences increased stigma in the city due to her mixed-race identity. She realises that being 'yellow' affects how others see her: "They thought we were conceited, promiscuous, undisciplined, and confused" (Agary, 2006, p. 74). Environmental racism and gender discrimination sometimes confine mixed-race women into negative narratives, disempowering them (Justin & Menon, 2022).

Finding camaraderie with Emem, another mixed-race woman, helps Zilayefa place her struggles in history. After learning about the lineages of "yellows," she feels like she belongs and understands her existence (Agary, 2006b). This realisation boosts her commitment and empowers her to defend her mother's choices against society. Zilayefa asserts herself and challenges her mixed-race stereotypes as she accepts her identity.

A subplot, Sisi's story helps Zilayefa mature. Sisi, like Zilayefa, struggles with being "yellow" in a culturally and racially charged environment. Sisi's father's family rejects her after she gets pregnant, showing intersectional identities and cultural expectations (Agary, 2006b). Her journey shows how cultural dislocation and power dynamics affect women in these cultures. Sisi laments that her foreign father prioritised lineage over her existence, highlighting how society values certain identities over others: "Because my Papa na Oyinbo. His son had to marry someone from his bloodline (Agary, 2006, p. 101).

The tale shows Binaebi, Zilayefa, and Sisi's socio-environmental surroundings through their connections and experiences. Each woman perseveres to empower herself in oppressive systems. Binaebi's diligent farming, Zilayefa's schooling, and Sisi's unity with other women demonstrate the seriousness of environmental deterioration and women's duties in safeguarding and developing their identities (Anurogo, 2023).

The protagonists' experiences show that ecofeminism's self-realization requires accepting one's uniqueness and fighting society's oppressive narratives. Zilayefa's transformation from vulnerability to resilience shows how gender, race, and environmental health are interconnected towards

empowerment. These women become change agents by overcoming their identities' problems and redefining their relationship with their environments and civilisations.

Agary emphasises the importance of women's struggles and environmental justice. The narrative shows that Binaebi, Zilayefa, and Sisi's journeys connect personal empowerment to ecological degradation, showing that environmental justice and women's rights are intertwined (ALTIPARMAK, 2022).

The endurance and interwoven struggle of these female characters in *Yellow-yellow* embody ecofeminism. Agary emphasises the necessity for collective action to solve gender and environmental inequities through her strong analysis of their identities and socio-environmental circumstances. This story criticises repressive social systems and celebrates the self-realization that comes from connecting with nature..

CONCLUSION

Kaine Agary's ecofeminist *Yellow-Yellow* (2006) effectively depicts women and nature's intertwined struggles in a patriarchal and ecologically exploitative society. The novel highlights Zilayefa and Binaebi, Niger Delta women who

are affected by environmental destruction and gender inequality. Agary shows how patriarchal regimes abuse the earth and women for profit and power by destroying agriculture, rivers, and communal areas and eroding women's agency. This analysis shows that the female characters' interactions with the environment are serious because their existence, identity, and resistance depend on the land. Binaebi's farming loss and Zilayefa's urban disenchantment symbolise women's displacement and dispossession due to industrialisation and oil extraction. These women defy the victim stereotype with perseverance, adaptation, and agency. Agary's narrative shows how environmental deterioration and gender inequality are interconnected and necessitate a rethinking of ecological and social justice, enriching ecofeminist discourse. The characters' journeys—from rural to urban, from quiet to self-realization—show the need of including women's voices and ecological consciousness in development, legislation, and literature. *Yellow-Yellow* is a powerful ecofeminist case study that shows how fiction can influence attitudes towards gender injustice and environmental catastrophe. Agary's work is about the need for inclusive, intersectional justice that empowers women and protects nature, not only her own struggle.

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