

## The Interplay of Poverty, Hardship, And Exploitation in Postcolonial Nigeria in Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow*

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**Abstract:** *This study analyzes Kaine Agary's Yellow Yellow through the lens of postcolonial theory, examining the socio-economic, environmental, and gendered issues in postcolonial Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta. The novel reflects the region's ongoing struggles with neocolonial exploitation, environmental degradation, and identity conflict, intensified by global capitalism and patriarchal structures. A gap exists in analyzing how these dynamics intertwine with postcolonial legacies in Nigerian literature. Using textual analysis, the study explores how Agary critiques these neocolonial forces, illustrating their devastating impact on both people and the environment. Key findings include the portrayal of economic exploitation, environmental degradation, and the marginalization of women, with Zilayefa, the protagonist, embodying the hybrid identity struggling for self-definition. The study recommends further exploration of gendered oppression within postcolonial frameworks and the development of policies to address resource control, environmental justice, and gender equality in postcolonial Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** postcolonial theory, economic exploitation, environmental degradation, neocolonialism, Niger Delta, gendered oppression, cultural hybridity, identity conflict

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## INTRODUCTION

Poverty, hardship, and exploitation are recurring themes in African literature, where the aftermath of colonialism has profoundly shaped the socioeconomic conditions of many postcolonial societies. Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* offers a compelling narrative that explores these themes within the specific context of Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta. Published in 2006, the novel tells the story of Zilayefa, a young woman of mixed heritage (referred to as "Yellow" because of her light skin), who navigates the challenges of growing up in a rural, impoverished community rife with exploitation, environmental degradation, and limited opportunities. Agary's work examines how poverty and hardship entrap individuals in cycles of exploitation, a reality that is inextricably linked to Nigeria's postcolonial identity.

The Niger Delta region, where the novel is set, is central to understanding the dynamics of postcolonial Nigeria. Despite being the epicenter of the country's oil wealth, the region has remained underdeveloped, plagued by environmental disasters, and marked by severe poverty. *Yellow Yellow* poignantly captures this paradox, as the presence of multinational oil companies exacerbates the economic and environmental woes of the local population. Agary's portrayal of the protagonist's life and choices reflects the broader postcolonial challenges that many African nations face—where the legacy of colonialism continues to manifest in systemic poverty, social inequality, and exploitation by both local elites and foreign corporations.

Poverty in *Yellow Yellow* is depicted not merely as a lack of financial resources, but as a state of being that pervades the lives of the characters, influencing their choices, relationships, and futures. Zilayefa's upbringing in a small, impoverished village in the Niger Delta highlights the stark realities faced by many Nigerians who are cut off from the wealth generated by the country's oil industry. The environmental degradation caused by oil spills and pollution has destroyed traditional means of livelihood such as farming and fishing, further entrenching poverty in the region. Similarly, exploitation in *Yellow Yellow* operates on multiple levels—both at the individual and systemic scales. Zilayefa's personal exploitation is mirrored by the larger exploitation of the Niger Delta's resources by foreign oil companies. Hence, in the absence of viable economic opportunities, Zilayefa, like many young women in her community, sees the city as her only chance for a better life. However, her migration to Port Harcourt exposes her to new forms of exploitation, as she becomes entangled in a relationship with a wealthy, older man who uses his position of power to control her.

Agary's depiction of Zilayefa's experiences reflects a broader critique of the economic structures that perpetuate poverty and hardship in postcolonial Nigeria. The oil wealth that should have benefited the Niger Delta has instead enriched a small elite, leaving the majority of the population to grapple with economic deprivation. In this sense, poverty in *Yellow Yellow* is not an isolated phenomenon but a structural issue, deeply intertwined with the country's postcolonial condition. By focusing on the experiences of a young woman, Agary also draws attention to the gendered

dimensions of poverty, where women are often disproportionately affected by economic hardship and face additional barriers to social mobility.

Postcolonial theory posits that economic exploitation is a continuation of the colonial project, where former colonies, though politically independent, remain economically subjugated to global capitalist interests (Nkrumah, 1965; Said, 1978). In the Niger Delta, this is evident in the way oil multinationals operate with little regard for the environmental and social costs of their activities (Watts, 2004). The oil spills that ravage the region's ecosystems are emblematic of the broader exploitation of the land and its people, where the benefits of resource extraction are enjoyed by foreign entities and Nigerian elites, while the local population bears the brunt of the consequences (Obi, 2010). Postcolonial theory provides a critical framework for analyzing how the legacy of colonialism has shaped the lived experiences of formerly colonized peoples, particularly in terms of economic disenfranchisement and cultural alienation (Fanon, 1961). At its core, postcolonial theory interrogates the unequal power relations between the Global North and Global South, where the latter remains subjected to forms of neocolonial exploitation and domination (Young, 2001). In the case of Nigeria, the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta during the colonial period created an economic dependency that has persisted into the post-independence era (Ikporukpo, 1996). The country's wealth is extracted by multinational oil corporations, with little regard for the environmental or social welfare of the local populations (Peel, 2011). As a result, the Niger Delta has become a site of contestation, where the promises of economic prosperity have given way to poverty, environmental degradation, and political instability (Watts, 2009).

Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* offers a profound exploration of poverty, hardship, and exploitation in postcolonial Nigeria, particularly as these issues manifest in the Niger Delta. By focusing on the experiences of Zilayefa, a young woman from a marginalized community, the novel sheds light on the broader social, economic, and environmental challenges that define the region. Postcolonial theory provides a critical framework for understanding how the legacy of colonialism continues to shape these experiences, particularly in terms of economic exploitation and social inequality. In the Niger Delta, the wealth generated from oil has not translated into improved living conditions for the local population; instead, it has entrenched poverty and fostered new forms of exploitation. In employing postcolonial theory, this paper will explore how Agary presents the exploitation of both natural and human resources as central to the lived experiences of poverty and hardship in postcolonial Nigeria.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW ON POVERTY, HARDSHIP, AND EXPLOITATION IN POSTCOLONIAL NIGERIA**

Poverty, hardship, and exploitation are central themes in the postcolonial discourse on Nigeria, a nation whose political independence has not translated into economic liberation for many of its citizens. These issues are deeply rooted in the country's colonial past and have persisted, if not worsened, in the postcolonial era due to various socioeconomic and political factors. Several scholars have explored the connections between Nigeria's colonial legacy, its abundant natural

resources, and the persistent poverty and exploitation of its people. This section reviews the existing literature on these themes in postcolonial Nigeria, focusing on the Niger Delta region as a microcosm of the country's broader challenges.

### **Poverty, Hardship and Exploitation in Postcolonial Nigeria**

Poverty in postcolonial Nigeria is often described as a structural issue, deeply rooted in the nation's colonial history and compounded by mismanagement of resources, corruption, and the unequal distribution of wealth (Akinola, 2018). According to the World Bank (2020), about 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, a statistic that underscores the country's socioeconomic challenges despite its wealth in natural resources, particularly oil. Scholars have pointed to the paradox of Nigeria's oil-rich economy and the widespread poverty experienced by its citizens, especially those in the Niger Delta, where much of the country's oil is extracted (Ikelegbe, 2005). The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta has led to significant economic disparities. While the region is responsible for over 80% of Nigeria's oil wealth, its communities remain some of the poorest in the country (Okonta & Douglas, 2003). This phenomenon has been described as the "resource curse," where countries with abundant natural resources experience slower economic growth and development due to mismanagement, corruption, and conflict over resource control (Ross, 2012). In the Niger Delta, the wealth generated by oil extraction has benefited foreign multinational companies and local elites, while the majority of the population suffers from environmental degradation, unemployment, and poor living conditions (Watts, 2009).

The hardship experienced by many Nigerians is inextricably linked to the country's economic structure, which is heavily reliant on oil exports. This economic dependency has created an unequal society where wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a few, while the majority of the population struggles to meet basic needs (Obi, 2010). The Niger Delta, in particular, has been described as a region of "extreme hardship," where decades of oil exploration have led to environmental destruction and the collapse of traditional livelihoods such as farming and fishing (Watts, 2004). The socioeconomic hardships in the Niger Delta are exacerbated by the environmental consequences of oil exploration, which have rendered large swathes of land uninhabitable and water bodies unusable (Peel, 2011). Oil spills, gas flaring, and deforestation have destroyed the natural resources that local communities depend on, leading to increased poverty and social unrest. The environmental degradation has also contributed to health problems, further worsening the living conditions in the region (Ikporukpo, 1996). Scholars argue that the hardships faced by the people of the Niger Delta are not only a result of economic mismanagement but also a form of systemic exploitation where local communities bear the environmental and social costs of oil production without reaping its benefits (Omotola, 2009).

Exploitation in postcolonial Nigeria is often viewed through the lens of neocolonialism, where former colonies, despite achieving political independence, remain economically dependent on and exploited by foreign powers (Nkrumah, 1965). In Nigeria, this neocolonial relationship is most evident in the oil industry, where multinational corporations such as Shell and Chevron control

much of the country's oil production (Frynas, 2000). These corporations, often in collusion with local elites, extract vast amounts of wealth from Nigeria's oil reserves while contributing little to the development of the country or the welfare of its citizens (Okonta, 2008). The exploitation of Nigeria's natural resources has been a major driver of poverty and social inequality, particularly in the Niger Delta. Scholars have argued that the region's resources are being siphoned off to benefit foreign interests and local elites, while the local population is left to deal with the consequences of environmental degradation and economic disenfranchisement (Watts, 2009). The situation in the Niger Delta has been described as a "double exploitation," where the land is exploited for its resources, and the people are exploited through the marginalization and exclusion from the benefits of those resources (Obi, 2010).

### **Gendered Dimensions of Exploitation and Poverty**

The literature on poverty and exploitation in postcolonial Nigeria has increasingly highlighted the gendered dimensions of these issues. Women, particularly in rural areas, are disproportionately affected by poverty and hardship due to their limited access to education, employment, and economic resources (Ejumudo, 2013). In the Niger Delta, women often bear the brunt of environmental degradation, as they are primarily responsible for providing food and water for their families (Udoh, 2013). The destruction of farmland and water sources due to oil spills has placed an additional burden on women, who must travel longer distances to find clean water and arable land, further entrenching their poverty and social marginalization. Additionally, the exploitation of women in the Niger Delta is also reflected in their vulnerability to sexual exploitation and trafficking, as poverty forces many women into precarious economic situations (Ojakorotu & Gilbert, 2010). This form of exploitation is often overlooked in the broader literature on poverty and hardship in the region, which tends to focus on the economic and environmental impacts of oil extraction. However, scholars such as Agbibo (2013) have argued that the gendered dimensions of poverty and exploitation in the Niger Delta are critical to understanding the full scope of the region's challenges.

### **Poverty, Hardship, and Exploitation in Postcolonial Nigeria as Depicted in Literature**

The depiction of poverty, hardship, and exploitation in postcolonial Nigerian literature has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry. These themes are intricately tied to Nigeria's colonial history and the enduring socio-economic challenges that have characterized the post-independence era. Nigerian authors have used literature as a means to critique the lingering effects of colonialism, neocolonialism, and the resultant economic and social disparities. This section reviews previous studies that have examined these issues in Nigerian literature, focusing on how scholars have analyzed the representation of poverty, hardship, and exploitation in key literary works.

### **Poverty, Hardship and Exploitation in Postcolonial Nigerian Fiction**

Many scholars have analyzed the theme of poverty in Nigerian literature, particularly focusing on how authors depict the lives of those marginalized by economic inequality. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Buchi Emecheta have been lauded for their portrayals of the socio-economic struggles faced by individuals and communities in postcolonial Nigeria (Aghogho, 2019). In Achebe's works, for instance, the degradation of traditional structures due to colonialism often leaves communities in disarray, where poverty becomes a key consequence of the colonial legacy (Ojinmah, 1991). Similarly, Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* offers a vivid portrayal of urban poverty and its devastating impact on women and families in Lagos (James, 1990). The depiction of poverty in Nigerian literature is often tied to broader critiques of economic systems and policies that have failed to improve the living conditions of the majority of the population. Scholars such as Chukwuma (2015) have argued that many Nigerian novels highlight the paradox of independence, where political liberation has not translated into economic prosperity for the common people. Instead, poverty has been exacerbated by corruption, poor governance, and unequal distribution of wealth. These studies show how literature has become a tool for critiquing the socio-economic policies of the Nigerian state and for advocating for the marginalized.

In addition, a significant body of research has focused on how Nigerian literature critiques the exploitation of the country's resources and people, often framed within a postcolonial and neocolonial context. The exploitation of natural resources, especially oil, has been a recurring theme in the works of Nigerian authors, particularly those who write about the Niger Delta. Tanure Ojaide, for instance, has been a central figure in documenting the environmental and social degradation of the Niger Delta due to oil exploration (Ojaide, 2011). His poetry and prose often portray the exploitation of the land and the marginalization of local communities by both multinational oil companies and the Nigerian government.

Scholars such as Nixon (2011) and Omotayo (2013), have examined the concept of "slow violence" in Nigerian literature, which refers to the gradual and often invisible destruction of environments and communities through resource exploitation. This type of violence is evident in novels like Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010), where the environmental degradation caused by oil spills and gas flaring leads to widespread poverty, displacement, and social unrest in the Niger Delta. Habila's work, along with others, provides a lens into the intricate relationship between neocolonial exploitation and the economic struggles of the Nigerian people. Other Omotayo (2013) in particular have argued that Nigerian literature frequently depicts neocolonialism as a continuation of the economic subjugation of Nigeria, where multinational corporations and foreign governments play a dominant role in exploiting the country's resources. These works reveal the ways in which postcolonial Nigeria remains economically dependent on global capitalist forces, despite its political independence.

Furthermore, the Niger Delta, home to Nigeria's vast oil reserves, has been a focal point for literature that examines the intersection of environmental degradation, exploitation, and poverty.

Several studies have explored how authors from or writing about the Niger Delta have depicted the environmental and social costs of oil extraction. Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* (2006), for example, provides a nuanced portrayal of how young women in the Niger Delta are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and poverty, often as a direct consequence of the region's environmental degradation (Ikiriko, 2014). Agary's novel has been noted for its focus on the gendered dimensions of poverty and environmental hardship, shedding light on how women are disproportionately affected by the socio-economic conditions in the region.

Tanure Ojaide's poetry has similarly been praised for its environmental activism, with scholars such as Ukaegbu (2015) noting how his work chronicles the environmental destruction and exploitation caused by the oil industry. Ojaide's depiction of the Niger Delta reflects a broader critique of the neocolonial relationship between Nigeria and multinational corporations, where the benefits of oil extraction are enjoyed by foreign entities and local elites while the local population endures hardship. Moreover, Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* is often cited as a significant contribution to the literature of environmental exploitation in Nigeria. Scholars like Amakoromo (2018) have highlighted how Habila's novel addresses the human cost of oil exploitation, particularly the displacement of communities, environmental degradation, and the violence that often accompanies resource conflicts in the Niger Delta.

### **Postcolonial Theory and Its Applicability to this Study**

Postcolonial theory emerged as a critical framework in the late 20th century, primarily influenced by the works of scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha. This theory examines the cultural, political, and economic legacies of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the ways in which colonial power dynamics continue to influence formerly colonized societies even after achieving political independence (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994). At its core, postcolonial theory interrogates the complex and enduring relationships between the colonizer and the colonized, emphasizing how colonial histories shape contemporary issues of identity, power, and representation. It challenges the binary oppositions created by colonial discourse, such as those between the West and the Rest, and highlights the ongoing impact of these power imbalances on postcolonial societies (Said, 1978).

### **Key Concepts in Postcolonial Theory**

First, Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism" explores how Western representations of the East perpetuate stereotypes and justify colonial domination (Said, 1978). This framework is crucial for understanding how colonial powers constructed and maintained control over colonized societies through cultural and intellectual means. Second, Homi Bhabha introduced the idea of "hybridity," which refers to the blending of cultural elements from both colonizers and the colonized, creating new, hybrid forms of identity and culture (Bhabha, 1994). The "Third Space" concept highlights the dynamic and contested nature of postcolonial identities, which are formed in the interstices between different cultural influences. Third, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work on the "subaltern"

emphasizes the voices and experiences of those marginalized and silenced by colonial and postcolonial power structures (Spivak, 1988). This approach seeks to recover and amplify the perspectives of those excluded from dominant historical narratives. Finally, Postcolonial theory also addresses the concept of neocolonialism, where former colonies remain economically dependent on and exploited by former colonial powers and global capitalist interests (Nkrumah, 1965). This concept is essential for analyzing the ongoing economic and social inequalities in postcolonial states.

### **Applicability to the Study**

In analyzing poverty, hardship, and exploitation in Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* through the lens of postcolonial theory, several key aspects become apparent: First, Agary's novel reflects the economic exploitation and neocolonial dynamics in Nigeria's Niger Delta. The oil industry's exploitation of the region's resources and the resulting environmental degradation illustrate the continued economic subjugation of the local population, despite political independence (Ikiriko, 2014). Postcolonial theory provides a framework to examine how these economic structures perpetuate colonial-era inequalities and marginalization. In addition, the depiction of poverty and hardship in *Yellow Yellow* can be analyzed through the lens of colonial discourse and representation. The novel's portrayal of the environmental and socio-economic conditions faced by the protagonist and her community highlights the ongoing effects of colonial legacies on contemporary Nigerian society (Agary, 2006). This analysis aligns with Said's critique of how colonial narratives continue to shape postcolonial realities.

Furthermore, Bhabha's concept of hybridity is relevant for understanding how characters in *Yellow Yellow* navigate their identities amidst conflicting cultural and economic influences. The blending of traditional and modern elements in the novel reflects the complex identity formation in postcolonial contexts, where colonial and indigenous elements intersect to create new forms of cultural expression (Bhabha, 1994). Finally, Spivak's notion of the subaltern is applicable to Agary's portrayal of marginalized voices in the Niger Delta. The novel's focus on the experiences of women and the impoverished underscores the importance of highlighting and addressing the perspectives of those who have been historically marginalized and silenced by dominant power structures (Spivak, 1988). In summary, postcolonial theory offers valuable insights into the economic, cultural, and social dimensions of poverty, hardship, and exploitation depicted in *Yellow Yellow*. By applying this theoretical framework, the study can critically engage with the novel's representation of postcolonial realities and contribute to a deeper understanding of the lingering effects of colonialism on contemporary Nigerian society.

### **Gap in Literature**

While considerable scholarship exists on the themes of poverty, hardship, and exploitation in Nigerian literature, several gaps remain. First, much of the existing research has focused on the broader economic and environmental factors affecting the Niger Delta without fully exploring the



personal and psychological dimensions of these experiences. For example, while novels like *Yellow Yellow* and *Oil on Water* have been analyzed for their environmental and socio-political critiques, there is limited scholarship on how these works explore the internal struggles of their characters in dealing with the day-to-day realities of poverty and exploitation and the emotional and mental toll of poverty, particularly on women and young people.

Furthermore, there is a notable gap in research that specifically addresses the intersection of gender, poverty, and environmental exploitation. While some studies, like those focusing on *Yellow Yellow*, have begun to explore this intersection, there is still a need for more comprehensive analysis of how Nigerian literature portrays the gendered aspects of these challenges, particularly in the context of rural and marginalized communities in the Niger Delta. Finally, while the literature on neocolonialism and exploitation in Nigeria is well-established, there is a lack of interdisciplinary studies that combine literary analysis with environmental, economic, and sociological perspectives to provide a more wholistic understanding of the issues facing postcolonial Nigeria and the Niger Delta's challenges. This study seeks to fill these gaps by offering a close reading of *Yellow Yellow* through a postcolonial lens, focusing on how the novel portrays the interconnectedness of poverty, exploitation, and environmental degradation, particularly from a gendered perspective.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the themes of poverty, hardship, and exploitation in Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* through the lens of postcolonial theory. The aim is to explore how the novel reflects and critiques the socio-economic and environmental issues in postcolonial Nigeria, with a focus on the Niger Delta region. The methodology encompasses text analysis, thematic analysis, and a theoretical framework to interpret the novel's depiction of postcolonial realities. The primary method for this study is textual analysis, which involves a close reading of *Yellow Yellow* to identify and interpret its key themes related to poverty, hardship, and exploitation. Textual analysis allows for an in-depth examination of the novel's narrative structure, character development, and thematic content. This analysis will be guided by postcolonial theory, which provides a lens to interpret the novel's representation of postcolonial conditions. The theoretical framework includes:

**Economic Exploitation and Neocolonialism:** Application of concepts related to economic exploitation and neocolonialism to understand how the novel depicts the continuation of colonial-era economic dynamics in the Niger Delta (Nkrumah, 1965).

**Hybridity and Identity:** Use of Bhabha's concept of hybridity to analyze how characters navigate their identities amidst conflicting cultural influences (Bhabha, 1994).

**Subaltern Studies:** Integration of Spivak's notion of the subaltern to explore how the novel amplifies marginalized voices and experiences (Spivak, 1988).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study will adhere to ethical guidelines for literary research, including respect for intellectual property and acknowledgment of sources. The analysis will be conducted with an awareness of cultural sensitivity and an objective approach to interpreting the text. Lastly, this methodology aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how *Yellow Yellow* reflects and critiques postcolonial conditions in Nigeria, contributing to the broader discourse on postcolonial literature and socio-economic issues.

### **Textual Analysis of *Yellow Yellow* Using Postcolonial Theory**

Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* provides a compelling narrative that explores the lived experiences of a young woman, Zilayefa, within the socio-economic and environmental turmoil of Nigeria's Niger Delta. Utilizing postcolonial theory as an analytical framework helps to unpack the text's deeper meanings, particularly in relation to themes of economic exploitation, neocolonialism, identity, and cultural hybridity.

### **Synopsis of *Yellow Yellow***

*Yellow Yellow*, a novel by Nigerian author Kaine Agary, follows the life of a young woman named Zilayefa, often called Yellow due to her mixed-race heritage. Born to a Nigerian mother and a Greek sailor father who abandoned them, Zilayefa grows up in a small village in the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Her life is shaped by the poverty, environmental degradation, and social challenges that afflict her community due to the exploitation of the region's oil resources. Seeking a better life, Zilayefa moves to Port Harcourt, a bustling city, where she is exposed to the harsh realities of urban life, including economic hardship, gender-based exploitation, and complex relationships. The novel explores her struggle to define her identity as she navigates the difficult circumstances of her background and her desire for self-improvement. Through Zilayefa's story, Agary addresses critical themes like the exploitation of Nigeria's oil resources, environmental destruction, poverty, and the marginalization of women in a patriarchal society. *Yellow Yellow* paints a vivid picture of the socio-economic and environmental challenges faced by the people of the Niger Delta, offering a nuanced critique of postcolonial Nigeria and its lingering struggles with exploitation and inequality.

### **Economic Exploitation and Neocolonialism in *Yellow Yellow***

One of the most prominent themes in *Yellow Yellow* is the economic exploitation of the Niger Delta and its people by oil companies, which reflects the broader postcolonial condition of neocolonialism. Neocolonialism refers to the continuation of colonial forms of exploitation and domination, even after a country achieves political independence (Nkrumah, 1965). This is evident in the novel, where the local communities bear the brunt of the environmental degradation caused by oil extraction, while foreign multinational corporations and local elites reap the profits.

Zilayefa's village suffers from poverty and environmental degradation due to the pollution caused by oil spills and gas flaring. The local people, dependent on the land and water for their livelihood, are rendered powerless as their environment is destroyed. Zilayefa reflects on the consequences of this exploitation: "Our rivers no longer brought fish to the people... oil had poisoned the land and water" (Agary, 2006, p. 33). This quote encapsulates the dire consequences of the region's reliance on oil extraction and the disregard for the environmental and social costs borne by the local population. Postcolonial theory reveals the lingering effects of colonialism in the form of economic exploitation, where the wealth of the Niger Delta is extracted by external forces, continuing the colonial legacy of resource extraction. This situation mirrors what Frantz Fanon (1963) describes as the postcolonial state's dependency on Western capital, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and exploitation.

### **Environmental Degradation and Colonial Legacy in *Yellow Yellow***

The environmental degradation in *Yellow Yellow* also reflects the colonial legacy of resource extraction and ecological exploitation. The novel vividly depicts the devastation caused by oil pollution, linking it to the broader exploitation of the land and its people. In this regard, postcolonial theory emphasizes the interconnectedness between colonial exploitation and environmental destruction (Nixon, 2011). Zilayefa notes, "The smell of oil was everywhere, and sometimes it felt like I was choking on it. The land was dying, and we were dying with it" (Agary, 2006, p. 45). This passage highlights the choking grip of neocolonial forces on the Niger Delta's environment, resonating with postcolonial ecocriticism, which links environmental damage to the legacies of colonial exploitation. The destruction of the natural environment in the Niger Delta reflects the continued marginalization of the region's people in the global economic system, as the profits from oil extraction flow to multinational corporations and the Nigerian elite, leaving the local population impoverished and disenfranchised.

### **Identity, Hybridity, and Cultural Alienation in *Yellow Yellow***

Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of *hybridity* is central to the exploration of Zilayefa's identity in *Yellow Yellow*. As a child of mixed heritage—Nigerian and Greek—Zilayefa grapples with her identity, caught between two worlds. Her mixed race, referred to as "yellow" due to her lighter skin, sets her apart from her peers and creates an internal conflict over belonging and self-identity. This hybrid identity represents the complex interplay of colonial and indigenous cultures, a hallmark of postcolonial societies. Zilayefa's struggles with her identity are compounded by her sense of alienation in both her rural village and urban Port Harcourt. She reflects on her mixed heritage: "I wasn't fully Nigerian, yet I didn't feel connected to my father's foreign world either. I was stuck in between, belonging nowhere" (Agary, 2006, p. 12).

Bhabha's (1994) idea of the "third space" is relevant here, as Zilayefa occupies a space of cultural in-betweenness where her identity is shaped by both colonial influences (her Greek father) and indigenous Nigerian culture. This hybridity creates tension, as she navigates the expectations

placed on her by society while attempting to define her own path. Her move to the city of Port Harcourt represents her desire for a new identity and a break from the constraints of her rural life. However, in the city, she encounters exploitation and gendered power dynamics, revealing the continued colonial influence on gender and socio-economic relations. Her entanglement with an older man, who offers her financial support, mirrors the neocolonial relationships between the Global North and the Global South, where the powerful exploit the vulnerable.

### **Gendered Exploitation and the Subaltern in *Yellow Yellow***

Gayatri Spivak's (1988) concept of the *subaltern*—the marginalized individuals whose voices are silenced by dominant power structures—applies to the experiences of women in *Yellow Yellow*. Zilayefa, as a young, impoverished woman, faces multiple layers of oppression: she is marginalized by her socio-economic status, her gender, and her mixed-race identity. Her interactions with male figures, including her benefactor, represent the exploitative power dynamics that reflect both the postcolonial and patriarchal structures of Nigerian society. Zilayefa's story exemplifies Spivak's argument that the subaltern, particularly women, struggle to have their voices heard in a system that continues to privilege the powerful (Spivak, 1988).

Agary uses Zilayefa's relationship with Admiral, an older, wealthy man, as a microcosm of this exploitation. Zilayefa, whose limited economic options force her to depend on Admiral for financial support, represents the broader vulnerability of the Niger Delta's people, who are caught in a system that exploits their resources and labour. Admiral, like the multinational oil companies, takes advantage of Zilayefa's poverty and naivety, reinforcing the power dynamics that characterize both personal and systemic exploitation. Through this relationship, Agary critiques the ways in which wealth and power are used to manipulate and control those who are economically marginalized, drawing parallels between personal exploitation and the larger neocolonial structures at play in Nigeria. Throughout the novel, Zilayefa's agency is limited by the socio-economic conditions of her environment and the predatory behaviours of those in positions of authority. Her internal conflict, combined with external pressures, illustrates how women in postcolonial societies often face compounded layers of exploitation and marginalization.

Summarily, using postcolonial theory to analyze *Yellow Yellow* uncovers the novel's critical engagement with issues of economic exploitation, environmental degradation, identity, and gendered oppression. Through the lens of postcolonial theory, it becomes clear that the Niger Delta's exploitation by multinational corporations represents the ongoing neocolonial relationship between the Global North and Global South, while Zilayefa's personal struggles reflect the broader cultural and social tensions of postcolonial Nigeria. The novel thus offers a powerful commentary on the enduring legacies of colonialism in contemporary African societies.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow*, several critical themes emerge that reflect the socio-economic and environmental challenges of postcolonial Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta. Through a postcolonial lens, the novel critiques the ongoing exploitation of the region's resources by multinational corporations and local elites, while the local population suffers from poverty and underdevelopment. This unequal distribution of wealth and environmental destruction illustrates the neocolonial dynamics at play, where former colonies like Nigeria continue to experience economic subjugation even after gaining political independence. The environmental degradation depicted in the novel is a powerful commentary on the destructive legacy of colonialism, as oil extraction devastates the land and livelihoods of the Niger Delta people. Agary highlights the ecological ruin caused by unchecked corporate activities, linking it to the broader exploitation of postcolonial nations, where marginalized communities bear the environmental costs of resource extraction. The novel critiques how the region's natural resources, instead of benefiting the local population, are commodified for the benefit of external actors, exacerbating poverty and social unrest.

Identity conflict is another significant theme in *Yellow Yellow*, with Zilayefa's mixed heritage positioning her in a space of cultural hybridity. Her struggle to reconcile her Nigerian and Greek backgrounds reflects the complexities of identity in postcolonial societies, where individuals often navigate conflicting cultural legacies. Zilayefa's experiences highlight the challenges faced by those in postcolonial contexts, where racial and cultural hybridity create a sense of alienation and in-betweenness, a condition that is both personal and reflective of broader postcolonial realities. Lastly, the novel addresses gendered exploitation, portraying Zilayefa's vulnerability as a young woman in a patriarchal society where economic dependence and power imbalances dominate her relationships with older, wealthier men. This dynamic mirrors the broader exploitation of postcolonial nations, drawing parallels between the socio-economic marginalization of individuals and the systemic exploitation of entire societies. Agary's depiction of Zilayefa's lack of agency resonates with the postcolonial concept of the subaltern, further emphasizing the intersection of gender and socio-economic oppression in postcolonial Nigeria.

Ultimately, the findings from this study demonstrate that Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* is a rich and complex text that critically engages with the key concerns of postcolonial theory. The novel highlights the ongoing economic exploitation and environmental degradation of the Niger Delta, reflecting the neocolonial forces that continue to operate in postcolonial Nigeria. Zilayefa's identity conflict, framed by cultural hybridity, and her experiences of gendered exploitation further exemplify the layered and multifaceted nature of postcolonial oppression. By using postcolonial theory as a framework, this study reveals how *Yellow Yellow* offers a nuanced critique of the socio-economic and environmental challenges faced by postcolonial Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta, and provides a voice to the marginalized individuals, particularly women, whose stories are often overlooked in both the postcolonial and global narratives.

### **Implications of Findings for Research**

The findings from the analysis of Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* using postcolonial theory have significant implications for both literary and interdisciplinary research, particularly in the areas of postcolonial studies, environmental humanities, gender studies, and socio-economic development in Africa. By revealing the multifaceted ways in which the novel engages with themes of economic exploitation, environmental degradation, identity conflict, and gendered oppression, this study offers several directions for future scholarly inquiry.

### **Broadening the Scope of Postcolonial Literary Analysis**

The study demonstrates how *Yellow Yellow* serves as a critical text within postcolonial Nigerian literature, providing a lens through which to examine the complex and persistent effects of colonialism in contemporary African societies. The findings suggest that future research on postcolonial literature should continue to explore how contemporary African writers address not only the lingering legacies of colonialism but also the modern forms of neocolonialism that manifest in economic exploitation, environmental degradation, and socio-political inequalities. This novel underscores the need for more nuanced analysis of African literature that centers on the lived experiences of marginalized communities, particularly those in resource-rich but economically disenfranchised regions such as the Niger Delta. As such, future research should explore how postcolonial literature engages with specific local contexts to offer insights into broader global economic and environmental issues.

### **Integration of Postcolonial Ecocriticism into Literary and Environmental Studies**

One of the key findings of this study is the centrality of environmental degradation in *Yellow Yellow*, which ties into the broader conversation about postcolonial ecocriticism—a field that links the exploitation of natural resources in formerly colonized nations to their colonial pasts. The novel's depiction of the Niger Delta's environmental crisis demonstrates how ecological destruction is inextricably tied to the economic interests of multinational corporations and the global capitalist system. This finding has important implications for the integration of environmental studies and postcolonial theory, suggesting that future research should continue to explore the intersection between ecology and postcolonialism. Scholars in both fields can benefit from examining how African literature critiques not only the exploitation of people but also the exploitation of land and resources, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of postcolonial environmentalism.

## **Fostering Interdisciplinary Research on Gender and Postcolonialism**

Zilayefa's experiences as a young woman in *Yellow Yellow* highlight the compounded nature of marginalization for women in postcolonial societies, particularly in patriarchal systems where socio-economic exploitation is prevalent. The findings suggest that there is a need for more research at the intersection of postcolonial theory and gender studies, focusing on how African literature portrays the specific challenges faced by women in postcolonial contexts. The novel's exploration of Zilayefa's gendered exploitation resonates with Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern and provides a basis for further research on the gender dynamics in African postcolonial literature. Future research could examine how African female writers, in particular, engage with issues of gender, power, and exploitation in their works, offering a gendered critique of postcolonial conditions that complements the broader socio-political critiques of neocolonialism.

## **Implications for Research on Socio-Economic Development in Africa**

The findings also have significant implications for socio-economic research, particularly regarding the socio-economic challenges faced by marginalized communities in resource-rich areas like the Niger Delta. *Yellow Yellow* provides a literary case study of how local communities suffer from poverty and environmental degradation despite the presence of valuable natural resources. This reflects the broader issue of the "resource curse" in many African countries, where wealth from natural resources does not translate into economic development for local populations. This finding suggests that future research on African development should not only focus on policy and economic analysis but also consider the cultural and social dimensions of development. By incorporating literary works such as *Yellow Yellow* into socio-economic research, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of how resource exploitation impacts local populations at both the environmental and individual levels. This interdisciplinary approach can enrich development studies by providing a human-centered perspective on the challenges of postcolonial economic systems.

## **Research Gap and the Contribution of this Study**

The findings of this study fill a gap in existing literature by providing a comprehensive postcolonial analysis of *Yellow Yellow*, which has not been widely studied within the broader field of African postcolonial literature. While some research has examined the socio-economic and environmental issues in the Niger Delta, this study contributes to the literature by offering a focused literary analysis that draws on postcolonial theory to explore the specific intersections of economic exploitation, environmental degradation, and identity conflict in the novel. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of examining contemporary African literature within the context of global socio-economic systems, emphasizing the ways in which local struggles are connected to larger global forces of neocolonialism and capitalism. This interdisciplinary approach provides a

model for future research that seeks to bridge the gap between literary studies and social sciences, offering a more wholistic understanding of postcolonial African societies.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching, suggesting that *Yellow Yellow* is not only a valuable literary text but also an important site for exploring broader postcolonial issues in Africa. The novel's engagement with economic exploitation, environmental degradation, and gendered oppression provides fertile ground for future research in postcolonial theory, environmental studies, gender studies, and African development. This study fills a gap in the existing literature by offering a postcolonial analysis of *Yellow Yellow* and paves the way for more interdisciplinary research that connects African literature with the pressing socio-economic and environmental challenges of the postcolonial world.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the themes of poverty, hardship, and exploitation in Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* through the lens of postcolonial theory. By critically engaging with postcolonial concepts, the analysis reveals how the novel reflects the socio-economic and environmental challenges faced by the Niger Delta region in postcolonial Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that *Yellow Yellow* is a powerful critique of neocolonialism, highlighting the ways in which multinational corporations, in collusion with local elites, continue to exploit the region's natural resources, leaving its people in poverty and environmental devastation. Through the character of Zilayefa, Agary portrays the complex intersection of identity conflict, cultural hybridity, and gendered oppression. The novel's depiction of her struggle for autonomy in a patriarchal and economically oppressive society reflects the broader marginalization of women in postcolonial contexts, aligning with Spivak's concept of the subaltern. The environmental degradation caused by oil extraction in the Niger Delta serves as a backdrop for the novel, reflecting the ecological and economic exploitation that continues to plague many postcolonial nations.

The study also highlights how *Yellow Yellow* contributes to postcolonial literary discourse by offering a critical examination of the local and global forces that perpetuate poverty and exploitation in the Niger Delta. It emphasizes the need for more research at the intersection of postcolonial theory, environmental studies, and gender studies to fully understand the complexities of postcolonial African societies. In conclusion, Agary's *Yellow Yellow* is not only a work of fiction but also a profound commentary on the postcolonial condition in Nigeria. It underscores the need to address the ongoing legacies of colonialism, both in terms of economic structures and social inequalities, and calls for a rethinking of how postcolonial societies can navigate the challenges of neocolonialism and global capitalism. Through its rich thematic content, the novel contributes to broader conversations about justice, equity, and empowerment in the postcolonial world, making it a significant text for future scholarly inquiry.



### **Areas for Further Research**

This study has opened up several potential areas for further research, particularly in relation to postcolonial theory, environmental studies, gender, and socio-economic issues in postcolonial African literature. The findings from the analysis of *Yellow Yellow* suggest the following avenues for future scholarly inquiry:

#### **Comparative Studies of Postcolonial Exploitation in African Literature**

Future research could compare *Yellow Yellow* with other African literary works that address similar themes of exploitation, poverty, and environmental degradation. By comparing Agary's depiction of the Niger Delta with other oil-producing regions in African literature—such as the Angolan or Sudanese contexts—scholars could explore how different writers tackle the socio-political impacts of resource extraction and neocolonial exploitation.

#### **Postcolonial Ecocriticism in African Literature**

While this study touches on the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, future research could delve deeper into postcolonial ecocriticism. Scholars could investigate how African writers use literature to critique environmental injustice, exploring the relationship between natural resource exploitation, environmental degradation, and the impact on marginalized communities. This could include examining the role of environmental activism in postcolonial literature and its intersection with broader global movements for environmental justice.

#### **Neocolonialism and Global Capitalism in African Literature**

This study has highlighted the neocolonial dynamics at play in the Niger Delta, with multinational corporations exploiting local resources while leaving the local population impoverished. Future research could expand this analysis by investigating how other African writers engage with the concept of neocolonialism and global capitalism in their works. Analyzing literature that critiques the economic systems perpetuated by global capitalist structures could deepen the understanding of postcolonial economies and their challenges.

#### **Socio-Economic Development and Literature as Advocacy**

Further research could examine how literature like *Yellow Yellow* can serve as a form of social and political advocacy, influencing policy discussions on poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability. This could involve interdisciplinary research that connects literary analysis with development studies, focusing on how literary representations of economic disenfranchisement can inform real-world socio-economic development strategies, especially in resource-rich but impoverished regions like the Niger Delta.

## **Impact of Oil Multinationals on Local Communities in African Literature**

A focused analysis on how African literature addresses the specific impact of oil multinationals on local communities would be valuable for understanding the socio-political dynamics of resource extraction. By looking at texts that explore corporate exploitation, environmental harm, and the resulting socio-economic instability, future research could provide critical insights into the role of literature in documenting and critiquing corporate neocolonialism.

These areas for further research underscore the richness of *Yellow Yellow* as a literary text that engages with complex postcolonial issues. They also highlight the potential for interdisciplinary scholarship that connects literary studies with socio-economic, environmental, and gender concerns in postcolonial African societies. Future research in these areas will contribute to a deeper understanding of postcolonial dynamics and the ongoing struggles for justice and equity in formerly colonized nations.

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