

Debilitating Ecologies: Eco-Crip Resistance in Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day* and Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37536/ECOZONA.2026.17.2.6088>



Abstract

This paper examines the intersections of disability and environmental degradation in Nigeria's Niger Delta through an eco-crip lens, focusing on Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* (1995) and Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006). Drawing on Jasbir Puar's concept of debility and Rob Nixon's "slow violence," it argues that these texts represent the debilitating effects of oil pollution—poisoned air and water, threatened food supplies, reproductive harm, and communal dysfunction—as environmentally induced disabilities. This approach addresses the absence of conventional Western disability representations in Nigerian literature while critiquing ableist and extractive norms perpetuated by oil companies and state complicity. Saro-Wiwa's memoir foregrounds Ogoni health crises and activist resistance via the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, while Agary's novel illuminates gendered debility, such as the reproductive harms to which poverty, displacement, and environmental ruin expose women, infusing the eco-crip perspective with feminist agency. Employing a cultural studies approach, this article responds to the non-hierarchical appraisals of diverse embodiments, emphasising tensions and toxicities in Delta spaces and bodies. By juxtaposing Saro-Wiwa's activism with Agary's feminist narrative, it reimagines well-being through plural contributions, situating the Delta's struggle within broader African environmental justice discourses.

Keywords: Eco-crip theory, debility, Niger Delta, environmental justice, slow violence.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza las intersecciones entre la discapacidad y la degradación medioambiental en el delta del Níger, en Nigeria, desde una perspectiva *eco-crip*, centrándose en las obras *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* (1995), de Ken Saro-Wiwa, y *Yellow-Yellow* (2006), de Kaine Agary. Basándose en el concepto de debilidad de Jasbir Puar y en la *violencia lenta* de Rob Nixon, sostiene que estos textos representan los efectos debilitantes de la contaminación por petróleo—aire y agua envenenados, suministro alimentario amenazado, daños reproductivos y disfunción comunitaria—como discapacidades inducidas por el medio ambiente. Este enfoque aborda la ausencia de representaciones occidentales convencionales de la discapacidad en la literatura nigeriana, al tiempo que critica las normas capacitistas y extractivas perpetuadas por las empresas petroleras y la complicidad del Estado. Las memorias de Saro-Wiwa ponen de relieve las crisis sanitarias de los ogoni y la resistencia activista a través del Movimiento por la Supervivencia del Pueblo Ogoni, mientras que la novela de Agary arroja luz sobre la debilidad de género, como los daños reproductivos a los que la pobreza, el desplazamiento y la ruina medioambiental exponen a las mujeres, infundiéndole la perspectiva *eco-crip* con agencia feminista. Empleando un enfoque de estudios culturales, este artículo responde a las valoraciones no jerárquicas de diversas formas de encarnación, haciendo hincapié en las tensiones y toxicidades presentes en los espacios y los cuerpos del Delta. Al juxtaponer el activismo de Saro-Wiwa con la narrativa feminista de Agary, se reimagina el bienestar a través de contribuciones plurales, situando la lucha del Delta dentro de los discursos más amplios sobre la justicia medioambiental en África.

Palabras clave: Teoría eco-crip, debilidad, delta del Níger, justicia medioambiental, violencia lenta.

Introduction

The Niger Delta, a lush region of rivers, mangroves, and wetlands rich in biodiversity, embodies a stark paradox: immense oil wealth that powers global economies while inflicting profound poverty, environmental devastation, and human suffering on its inhabitants. Since oil discovery in 1956, multinational corporations—often in partnership with Nigerian governments—have extracted billions of barrels, yielding vast profits but causing widespread ecological ruin and what Rob Nixon (2) has termed “slow violence”—the gradual, attritional harm that unfolds over generations.

Ken Saro-Wiwa (1941–1995), writer, activist, and founder of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), led nonviolent resistance against oil-related degradation by companies like Shell, including spills and gas flaring that poisoned air, water, and soil. His 1995 execution, along with eight other Ogoni leaders (the “Ogoni Nine”), by Nigeria’s military regime ignited international outrage and exposed state-corporate repression. Kaine Agary’s novel *Yellow-Yellow* (2006) fictionalises these realities through Zilayefa, a biracial young woman confronting identity, poverty, and environmental ruin in the Delta. The narrative links personal struggles to ecological critique, showing oil spills devastating fisheries, farmlands, and livelihoods, with gendered vulnerabilities amplifying harms such as reproductive loss and economic precarity. As an eco-feminist Bildungsroman, it traces Zilayefa’s growth from oppression toward agency, calling for shifts in patriarchal, political, and ecological systems (Ogene and Okolo 156-57, 169-70; Ashaolu 41-42).

This paper argues that Saro-Wiwa’s activism and Agary’s fiction illuminate eco-crip debility as postcolonial violence in the Niger Delta, where environmental harm produces widespread bodily impairments, disrupts Western ability/disability binaries, and enables African-centred resistance. I draw on Jasbir K. Puar’s concept of debility—the ongoing, attritional weakening of populations under late capitalism—which, in her words, addresses injury that is “endemic rather than epidemic or exceptional” (Puar xvii), and which I distinguish from what I call event-based disability (disability understood as a discrete, identifiable condition or injury that triggers medical and social intervention), as well as on Rob Nixon’s notion of slow violence—incremental, dispersed destruction that occurs gradually and out of sight, often unrecognised as violence at all—in order to frame oil exploitation as creating “debilitating ecologies,” interlinked systems of harm binding human bodies and nonhuman environments in vulnerability and potential solidarity. Oil exploitation enacts slow violence that produces debilitating ecologies, systemic, attritional harms that align with Puar’s framework while attending to Nixon’s emphasis on temporal dispersal (Nixon 2). By making visible the attritional, non-spectacular harms of oil extraction, Saro-Wiwa and Agary address what Nixon describes as the “representational, narrative, and strategic challenges” of slow violence (2),

functioning as writer-activists who challenge conventional definitions of violence itself (Nixon 2, 11).

African environmental literature scholarship has emphasised land dispossession and resource conflicts but often overlooks corporeal dimensions via an eco-crip perspective. Postcolonial ecocriticism addresses colonialism-environment intersections in works like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977), yet underexplores debility in Global South contexts, where individualistic, medicalised Western disability models miss collective, attritional extractive impacts. This study advances an African-centred eco-crip framework, stressing the interdependence of impaired bodies and degraded ecologies, as well as resistance, by moving beyond the binaries of human and nonhuman, ability and disability. Such collective debility is not merely theoretical: empirical data from the Niger Delta reveal population-level harms that affect entire communities rather than isolated individuals. For example, oil spills contaminate water with hydrocarbons, which one review of the research projects could reduce household food security by up to 60%¹ and increase childhood malnutrition by 24%²; benzene, a known carcinogen, has been found in Ogoniland drinking water at more than 900 times the World Health Organization's guideline level.³ These figures demonstrate how extractive violence produces shared, attritional disablement—not as individual medical conditions but as communal, intergenerational crises. In response to this collective debility, collective resistance has emerged: MOSOP's 1993 protests, which mobilised about 300,000 Ogoni (Saro-Wiwa 12), exemplify how affected communities organise not as discrete disabled bodies but as an interdependent populace fighting what Saro-Wiwa called an “ecological war” (147).

Amid climate and debility crises, recognising shared vulnerabilities is essential for sustainable futures, and this study directly engages such recognition by centring the gendered, racialised, and class-based burdens of oil extraction in the Niger Delta. Environmental justice intersects with gender, class, and race: as the primary farmers and fishers, women suffer disproportionate reproductive and economic burdens from polluted resources (Adewumi 75-76). Feminist and postcolonial lenses trace these to patriarchal structures and colonial extraction legacies. This paper will further engage with an “eco-crip” theoretical frame, which refers to the critical intersection of disability studies and environmental humanities (Ray and Sibara 17), to challenge ableist environmentalism. Environmental justice is understood here as the principle that environmental harms and benefits should be distributed equitably across all communities, with particular attention to race, class, gender, and colonial

¹ Kelechukwu Iruoma and Ruth Olurounbi, “Silent Killer: Oil Pollution Continues to Kill Nigerians in Delta Region,” ICIR Nigeria, 26 Mar. 2020, www.icirigeria.org/silent-killer-oil-pollution-continues-to-kill-nigerians-in-delta-region/. The article presents these figures as projections drawn from the Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD).

² Iruoma and Olurounbi, “Silent Killer.”

³ “UNEP Ogoniland Oil Assessment Reveals Extent of Environmental Contamination and Threats to Human Health.” UNEP, 4 Aug. 2011, www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/unep-ogoniland-oil-assessment-reveals-extent-environmental-contamination-and.

history. Finally, the essay will specifically incorporate ecofeminism, the analytical and activist tradition that links the exploitation of nature with the subordination of women, both rooted in patriarchal and colonial logics of domination. In this paper, these three frameworks converge to show how oil exploitation in the Niger Delta produces compounded, attritional violence against women's bodies, livelihoods, and ecologies—violence that demands collective, decolonial resistance.

Historical and Theoretical Contexts: Oil Exploitation in the Niger Delta

Colonial legacies laid the foundation for contemporary extractive violence, environmental injustice, and population-level debilitation in the Niger Delta. British monopolies like the Royal Niger Company extracted resources while suppressing local populations. In 1914, the Mineral Oils Ordinance vested all mineral rights in the British Crown, legally dispossessing Indigenous communities. In the 1930s, Shell secured licenses, with the first well at Oloibiri drilled in 1956. Post-1960 independence saw oil booms displacing agriculture and marginalising minorities. Joint ventures between multinationals (Shell, Chevron, ExxonMobil) and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation sustained an industry that has brought Nigeria more than \$350 billion in oil revenues since 1970,⁴ yet caused ongoing devastation. Recurrent spills contaminate mangroves, farmlands, and aquifers; gas flaring emits toxins into the air, and life expectancy in the Delta was reported in 2008 as 40 years, against a national figure of 46.7 years.⁵ In response to these compounding harms, the Ogoni people issued their 1990 Bill of Rights, demanding political control of Ogoni affairs, the control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources, and the right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology (Saro-Wiwa 68, 176). This document marks a collective assertion against what would later be theorised as slow violence and debility. These extractive histories exemplify the concept of “debilitating ecologies,” which this paper develops to name the intertwined human-environmental systems in which slow violence produces population-level debilitation.

Eco-crip theory links disability studies and environmental humanities, critiquing ableism in environmentalism and revealing the co-debilitation of bodies and ecologies. Within this framework, Puar's concept of debility provides a crucial analytic. Puar positions debility as an ongoing, attritional weakening of populations under late capitalism and extractive regimes, one that is “endemic rather than epidemic or exceptional” (xvii) and that supplements, rather than opposes, disability (xvii); I distinguish it here from conventional, event-based disability. As Puar writes: “I argue [...] for a critical deployment of the concepts of debility and capacity to rethink disability through, against, and across the disabled/non-disabled binary. I

⁴ Nnimmo Bassey, “The Oil Industry and Human Rights in the Niger Delta,” testimony before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law, U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 24 Sept. 2008, www.judiciary.senate.gov/download/testimony-of-nnimmo-bassey_pdf. Bassey states that “Nigeria has received more than \$350 billion in oil revenues since 1970.”

⁵ Bassey, “The Oil Industry and Human Rights in the Niger Delta.”

situate disability in relation to concepts such as neoliberal and affective capacitation, debilitation, and slow death" (2). Debility is thus a biopolitical process rather than a fixed state: populations are worn down through normalised, cumulative exposures (to toxins, precarity, debt, and extractive violence) from which capital profits (Puar xx, 13). In postcolonial extractive zones like the Niger Delta, debility manifests as the gradual, unspectacular erosion of bodily capacity from oil pollution, food insecurity, and chronic ill health.

Nixon's concept of slow violence complements this framework by illuminating the temporal and representational dimensions of erosive harm. Nixon defines slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight [...] an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). Unlike immediate, spectacular violence, it is "incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (2). Nixon carefully distinguishes slow violence from Johan Galtung's structural violence: structural violence describes enduring inequalities, whereas slow violence foregrounds "questions of time, movement, and change, however gradual" and the representational challenge of making invisible damage visible (Nixon 10-11). This paper argues that debility is the outcome (systemic wearing out), while slow violence is the mechanism (attritional process) that produces that outcome. The two concepts are not identical: slow violence emphasises representation and temporality; debility emphasises biopolitical population-level weakening. Together they capture how oil extraction in the Delta inflicts non-spectacular, delayed, yet systematic harm.

Bridging these theories is disability scholar Alison Kafer's attention to "bodies of nature," which foregrounds human-environment interdependence (144). Kafer critiques mainstream environmentalism's ableist ideal of the hyper-fit, autonomous body and calls for a crippled environmentalism that reads disability into formations of nature, looking to disabled bodies as "a resource in thinking about our future natures differently" (131). This perspective is vital for the Niger Delta, where the same extractive forces that debilitate human populations also degrade the nonhuman natural environment that communities inhabit relationally. An African-centred eco-crip approach thus contrasts with dominant Western disability studies that prioritise individualistic, medicalised models. For example, early social model formulations focused on individual access and rights, often overlooking collective, attritional debilitation tied to environmental racism and extractivism. By centring interdependent "bodies of nature" and population-level debility, Saro-Wiwa and Agary advance a relational, decolonial eco-crip critique.

In the Niger Delta, slow violence blends spectacular events (major spills) with attritional processes (persistent flaring), rooted in colonial racial/class/gender hierarchies. Women face amplified reproductive and economic risks, and class and minority status deepen poverty and disempowerment. Debilitating ecologies, this paper's own synthesising concept, frames these as systemic entanglements where human and environmental erosion mirror each other, demanding holistic resistance. Ecofeminism connects despoliation to sexist oppression, with women's bodies and

land exploited in parallel (Ufuoma 258-59; Simon 157; Ashaolu 41-42). This theoretical grounding, therefore, reframes oil exploitation not merely as environmental degradation but as a biopolitical process of debilitation, one in which colonial legacies, neoliberal extraction, and racialised hierarchies converge to produce populations marked for slow death while extracting value from their ongoing wearing out.

Debility and Activist Resistance in Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day*

Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* (1995) centres on his imprisonment under Nigeria's military regime in 1993, but the memoir directs equal attention to the environmental degradation, communal health crises, and nonviolent activism of the Niger Delta. As the leader of MOSOP, Saro-Wiwa documents his detention not as a personal ordeal alone but as an extension of systemic harms inflicted by multinational oil companies (Shell, Chevron) in collusion with the Nigerian state. The narrative weaves diary entries, speeches, poems, letters, and the full Ogoni Bill of Rights (1990). This paper reads the memoir through an eco-crip lens, which links disability studies and environmental humanities to reveal the co-debilitation of bodies and ecologies (Kafer 2013; Taylor 2024). Nixon's and Puar's frameworks help to illuminate how the writer and eco-activist's practice makes visible the non-spectacular, embodied harms of extraction while showing how debilitated communities can reclaim political agency without overcoming their impairments.

Unlike what I call event-based disability (a discrete injury that triggers medical intervention), Puar's debility captures the normalised wearing out of populations through ongoing exposure to toxins, precarity, and neglect (Puar xvii, xx). In the Niger Delta, this attritional process produces both bodily and psychic debility, the slow erosion of mental and emotional capacities through a prolonged state of terror, isolation, and humiliation. Psychic debility differs from a clinically diagnosable psychological disability (often event-triggered) in that it is collective, gradual, and embedded in structural violence rather than individual pathology. This important distinction is illustrated in Saro-Wiwa's memoir, which shows how oil extraction and state repression converge to create a biopolitical economy of slow death, while MOSOP's nonviolent resistance transforms shared debility into collective agency, an insight that resonates with disability rights activist Sunaura Taylor's argument that ecologies are "disabled by the debilitating economic and political systems that continue to demand perpetual growth and production" (114).

Pollution and Communal Health

Saro-Wiwa repeatedly documents specific bodily and communal harms. The Ogoni Bill of Rights states that "neglectful environmental pollution laws [...] have led to the complete degradation of the Ogoni environment," leaving communities without

"health and other social facilities" (Saro-Wiwa 67). The writer-activist identifies gas flaring as a root cause of his community's suffering through his poetic indictment: "The flares of Shell are flames of hell / We bake beneath their light / Nought for us save the blight" (78). Saro-Wiwa's use of "bake" to evoke heat stress renders the harm in everyday language, the kind of imaginative work that Nixon attributes to writer-activists (5, 15). The memoir spells out what the poem's "blight" implies: the atmosphere, Saro-Wiwa writes, is poisoned by "hydrocarbon vapours, methane, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and soot emitted by gas which has been flared" (95). Critically, Saro-Wiwa later specifies that "the air and water are poisoned" (147), calling the situation an "ecological war" in which "no bones are broken, no blood is spilled and no one is maimed. Yet, men, women and children die; flora and fauna perish" (147). The memoir's attention to bodily harm is also personal: his brother Owens, a doctor, set up a clinic at Bori, where "the misery all around was virtually unbearable" (12). The memoir likewise links the oil industry to threats to the Ogoni's food supply, noting that "the farmlands have been rendered infertile by acid rain" and that "marine life is gone" (95). Saro-Wiwa goes on to lament the disparity between the oil-rich Delta and northern expressways funded by petrodollars (18), and the Bill of Rights specifies "land and food shortages" (67). The Bill of Rights also warns that the Ogoni "cannot sit idly by while we are, as a people, dehumanized and slowly exterminated and driven to extinction even as our rich resources are siphoned off" (89). Extermination here proceeds not through a single act of killing but through dehumanisation, dispossession, and the siphoning of resources. Through his writer-activism, Saro-Wiwa converts the Niger Delta's long emergencies into "stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment" (Nixon 3), performing, as Nixon has theorised, the critical task of meeting the "representational, narrative, and strategic challenges" posed by the slow violence enacted on his people (2).

Detention Reflections and Bodily Vulnerability

Saro-Wiwa's prison diary examines how state repression intensifies the same attritional logic as oil extraction. His plea against road travel—"another road journey [...] will virtually kill me. I haven't travelled that much by road in a long time. Besides, I'm not in the best of health" (32)—reveals a body that has been chronically debilitated. He lists specific ailments: "a running stomach, seven boils on my left posterior, and my swollen feet" (46). Because the medicines he receives are "not efficacious" (46), these ailments amount to ongoing functional limitation rather than temporary sickness, yet they lack the spectacular quality of a broken bone. Puar's concept of debility helps to illuminate such ailments: debility is the normalised, everyday wearing out that often falls outside medical or legal recognition (xvi, 12).

The prison's filthy conditions—"the stench from the window next to me" (40), "Bedbugs, fleas and insects" (40), an infirmary "leaking like a sieve [...] only a bucket latrine" (225)—mirror the Delta's contaminated ecology. Saro-Wiwa calls attention to the overrepresentation of Ogoni inmates (one-third of 1,200 prisoners) "dumped

there on minor charges, forgotten”, thereby framing their incarceration as collective, attritional catastrophe (227). Within this collective, psychic debility emerges, as the inmates’ mental health slowly erodes as a result of their isolation, humiliation, and uncertainty. Saro-Wiwa writes of “the turmoil in my soul” (40). He describes his captor’s casual humiliation: “Having thus humiliated me, he now casually informed me that he still had no further orders” (195). Unlike a psychological disability diagnosed following a discrete trauma, psychic debility is a population-level, gradual condition produced by the duration of state violence. Saro-Wiwa’s psychic debility is a predictable outcome of state repression that sought to silence a movement against extraction. Yet he resists passive victimhood. His diary, written while he was “always busy either writing or reading” (40), is itself an act of resistance, and visits from Ogoni supporters—“offering us solidarity, comfort and, wait for it, money!” (197)—provide communal care. This collective dimension is crucial: Saro-Wiwa does not overcome his impairments but endures within them, supported by networks that embody the interdependence Kafer describes (144) and that, in her words, “recognize and refuse the intertwined exploitation of bodies and environments” (158) in a collective resistance.

Nonviolent Activism as Resistance

MOSOP’s nonviolent activism shows how communities subjected to slow violence can mobilise politically. Saro-Wiwa writes that the Ogoni “had been sleepwalking their way towards extinction” and that “it had fallen to me to wake them up” (17). The 1993 protest march, during which participants went “to symbolically take over the oilfield with its flaming gas flare” at Bomu (124), transforms the flare—a weapon of slow violence—into a stage for political visibility. Saro-Wiwa captures the shift: “The empowerment which had enabled them to stand up to their oppressors at long last was the issue of the day” (124). This is not an overcoming of physical debility; marchers remained sick. Rather, it is a political reclamation of agency from *within* debility.

The Ogoni Bill of Rights abjures violence (90) and demands political control of Ogoni affairs, the control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources, and the right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology (68, 176). Nonviolence is not merely tactical but epistemological: it operates on the same temporal scale as slow violence—“for as long as is necessary” (90)—refusing the spectacular terms that would render debilitated bodies invisible. Saro-Wiwa’s text articulates this philosophy: “Our opponents are given to violence and we cannot meet them on their turf, even if we wanted to. Non-violent struggle offers weak people the strength which they otherwise would not have” (193). He refuses the ableist binary that strength must mirror the opponent’s capacity, instead building a politics of endurance, patience, and moral witness. MOSOP’s response—providing medicine for the wounded after the Biara shootings (156), deploying Owens’s clinic ambulance during the march (12), and relying on the “Ogoni bush radio” (140)—distributes agency

across bodies, vehicles, and airwaves. Deploying an eco-crip insight, organisers reveal that capacity is not individual physical prowess but communal, networked endurance. Saro-Wiwa's defiance in the face of imprisonment—"neither prison nor the threat of death nor death itself could ever deter me" (170)—detaches the movement's success from his own bodily survival. The words reported as his last, "Lord, take my soul, but the struggle continues" (Agary 34), complete the transference: the struggle was never located in his body alone but in the distributed network of Ogoni resistance.

Saro-Wiwa's memoir shows that slow violence produces debility as a profit-driven, biopolitical process, while simultaneously demonstrating how debilitated communities can reclaim agency through nonviolent, communal, eco-crip strategies that refuse ableist norms of capacity. By converting poisoned air, chronic illness, and carceral neglect into visible testimony, Saro-Wiwa performs the writer-activists' essential task: making attritional harm legible as violence and modelling resistance that begins not from overcoming but from enduring together.

Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*: Gendered Debility, Feminist Agency, and Communal Care

Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006) extends the eco-crip critique of debilitating ecologies by centring gendered debility, the specific, attritional weakening of women's bodies through the entangled forces of environmental pollution and patriarchal exploitation. Unlike Saro-Wiwa's focus on collective political resistance, Agary's protagonist Zilayefa navigates a landscape where slow violence manifests as reproductive harm, chronic pain, and economic precarity, yet the novel simultaneously models forms of feminist agency that reclaim capacity from debilitated bodies. Building on Puar's debility as population-level wearing out (xvii), Nixon's slow violence as incrementally dispersed harm (2), and Kafer's emphasis on human interdependence with nonhuman nature (144), this section examines how Agary portrays women's bodies as sites of both exploitation and resilience. The novel also reveals the limits of survival strategies that remain detached from sustained political engagement, a tension that speaks directly to environmental justice. Following Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality (2) and Taylor's argument that ecologies are disabled by economic and political systems that demand perpetual growth (114), I demonstrate how Agary's novel makes visible the embodied, gendered, and reproductive dimensions of slow violence that purely economic or political frameworks often miss.

The novel functions as an eco-feminist Bildungsroman, tracing Zilayefa's trajectory from rural vulnerability to urban migration. Read through an ecofeminist lens that links the exploitation of nature and the subordination of women, Agary's text explores how oil extraction and gender oppression converge on female bodies. The recurring motif of "yellow-yellow" skin, which refers to Zilayefa's light complexion, inherited from an absent Greek sailor, symbolises the debilitated, interstitial

subjectivities produced by extractive capitalism. The protagonist's hybrid body is neither fully Nigerian nor European, neither wholly healthy nor completely disabled, but exists in a zone of ongoing, attritional vulnerability that Puar identifies with the biopolitical condition of debilitated populations (xvii). In Port Harcourt, as Zilayefa observes, "being yellow defined my interactions" (73-74), and she is one of an entire "crop of yellows" born of the oil sector's foreign workforce (74). The stigma attached to her skin is therefore social rather than medical, and it testifies to the long entanglement of oil with the bodies and families it brings into the Delta.

The Contaminated River and Gendered Debility

The contaminated river provides the novel's most powerful image of how slow violence becomes embodied as gendered debility. Zilayefa reflects:

How many more times could I bear the pain like a hundred razor blades slashing my private part because the river water that washed it was the same water that received the waste rejected by my body in its attempt to cleanse itself? The 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. (39)

This passage is significant for three interconnected reasons. First, it demonstrates how slow violence operates not as a spectacular event but as a durational, embodied condition. The repetition of "the same water" links excretory waste, oil pollution, and drinking water into a single toxic circuit, illustrating Nixon's claim that slow violence is "incremental and accretive" (Nixon 2). Second, the passage genders this harm explicitly: the "razor blades slashing my private part" locates environmental injury in the most intimate female body, revealing how extractive capitalism exploits reproductive capacities as sites of profit and pain. Third, this gendered debility is structural: Puar argues that "debility is profitable for capitalism" (13), and Agary's river, which carries oil wealth "into the pockets of the select few," materialises that economic logic. Zilayefa's body echoes Kafer's "expanded view of health that looks beyond the boundaries of the body" (146): the river's pollution becomes her internal condition, collapsing any distinction between environmental health and bodily integrity. Understood through Alaimo's trans-corporeality, the "movement across bodies" that reveals "the interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures" (2), the river and the body are co-constitutive: the water that carries the oil's streaks of blue, purple, and red is also the water that enters and leaves Zilayefa's body. Agary extends this ecological-reproductive metaphor:

Farming and fishing, the occupations that had sustained my mother, her mother, and her mother's mother no longer provided gain. I had witnessed lands claimed by massive floods during the rainy season, the earth slowly melting into the rivers. Women rowed their canoes farther and farther away to find land for farming. In addition, every year it was harder to catch fish, as though the water spirits had tied the fishes' wombs, until people barely bothered to cast their nets. (39)

Through the metaphor of the water spirits who “had tied the fishes’ wombs,” Agary voices the river’s declining fertility in the idiom of the spirit world, treating the loss of the fish as the work of agents with intentions. This animist framing refuses the Western distinction between natural processes and political violence, presenting ecological decline as a moral and metaphysical matter rather than a merely technical one. The water spirits add a spiritual register to the economic and political forces that damage the river, suggesting that slow violence has become part of the Delta’s metaphysical order. The passage also emphasises intergenerational continuity and debility whereby “the past of slow violence is never past” (Nixon 8): the occupations of “mother, her mother, and her mother’s mother” are foreclosed; Zilayefa’s generation inherits not only polluted land but also the impossibility of traditional female livelihoods.

The same attention to the body structures the novel’s opening, in which an oil spill destroys Zilayefa’s mother’s farm: “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” (3). Rather than narrating the rupture, Agary focalises the event through Zilayefa’s sensory experience: the mother returns with legs “stained black” (3), and Zilayefa experiences nausea, “Then there was the smell. I can’t describe it but it was strong—so strong it made my head hurt and turned my stomach. I bent over, and retched so hard I became dizzy” (3). Nixon argues that slow violence evades representation because it lacks “instant sensational visibility” (2). Agary’s response is not to make the spill spectacular but to focus on its embodied aftermath: stained skin, nausea, dizziness—symptoms that are undeniable yet non-spectacular. By centring the body’s involuntary responses, Agary makes slow violence legible through somatic testimony. The oil company denies compensation, claiming “sabotage by the youths” (4), and denies liability while continuing extraction. In so doing, the denial acts as a biopolitical mechanism that naturalises debility as the cost of doing business.

The spill’s aftermath also reveals the gendered economics of slow violence. The community’s failed attempt to secure compensation exposes the structural impunity that enables debility to be profitable, in particular by debilitating women, for whom this economic precarity cascades into intensified vulnerability. Zilayefa’s mother, deprived of her farm, must find alternative livelihoods. The novel suggests that women’s migration to Port Harcourt is driven not by choice but by the attritional erosion of rural subsistence economies. These are not spectacular forms of violence, but they are no less debilitating, and they illustrate the “representational challenges... posed not just by imperceptible violence but by imperceptible change” (Nixon 11). The displacement of women from land and livelihood is thus the first, quiet stage of gendered debility in *Yellow-Yellow*: it leaves them dependent on the very economy that has dispossessed them, a dependence that the novel’s later scenes of transactional intimacy make plain.

Polluted Bodies and Reproductive Harm

Agary's most searing contribution lies in her depiction of reproductive harm as the embodied endpoint of extractive violence. Whereas Saro-Wiwa documents how slow violence wears down activist bodies, Agary reveals a more intimate form of debility, the self-induced miscarriage that follows when a young woman's reproductive capacities become entangled with the economic dependence and patriarchal privilege that oil money sustains. The novel frames reproductive harm not as an exceptional tragedy but as a normalised outcome of gendered debility. Zilayefa's relationship with Admiral, a retired senior naval officer and friend of Lolo's father, culminates in a pregnancy that he treats as a problem to be removed, an episode that illustrates Puar's claim that debility is profitable and operates through the medical-industrial complex (13, 16). The termination "pays" in several senses: it spares Admiral the costs and obligations of paternity and preserves his comfortable life, while the risk, secrecy, and cost fall on Zilayefa alone. Admiral's directive—"Go to Island Clinic and ask for Dr. George. Tell him you need a pregnancy test, and if you are pregnant, he will help you get rid of it" (161)—is clinically brutal. He does not ask "whether I wanted to keep the child or not" (161); instead, he treats her body as a problem requiring a technical solution. Healthcare becomes a mechanism for managing inconvenient bodies. In this system, a child would create friction, but the termination restores Admiral's capacity to continue extracting without entanglement. Zilayefa refuses this route—"Dr. George was out of the question" (161)—and ends the pregnancy herself, but she does so within the narrow terms set by Admiral's indifference and by her fear of being sent packing by Sisi (161).

The self-induced miscarriage is harrowing:

I lay curled up in the foetal position on the cold tile floor until my sweat and the blood that gushed from between my legs drenched my clothes, and I began to shiver from the cold and the pain. I begged God for forgiveness and called on all my mother spirits for comfort. Even so, I had to bite down on a towel to keep from screaming as my body pushed out blood and clumps of tissue that had been forming a little person inside me for almost three months. (177-78)

This passage is significant for four reasons. First, Agary transforms abstract "reproductive debility" into visceral, embodied testimony, meeting the representational challenges that Nixon associates with slow violence. Second, the passage reveals the isolation of gendered debility: Zilayefa keeps the pregnancy from Lolo (174) and bears the pain alone—"I could take care of my problem myself" (175). This isolation matters to my argument because it shows that debility is lived by individual women in privacy and silence, outside the collective networks and public protest that sustain Saro-Wiwa's resistance; an eco-crip reading that attends to diverse embodiments must therefore attend also to bodies whose suffering is hidden and gendered. Third, her appeal to "God" and her "mother spirits" registers a spiritual dimension that echoes the water spirits of the river passage: Zilayefa seeks forgiveness and comfort from ancestral and divine powers rather than from the state or the clinic, which suggests that the Delta's ecological and reproductive losses are

experienced as moral and spiritual ruptures as well as physical ones. Fourth, the passage shows reproductive harm exceeding conventional disability categories: Zilayefa emerges without a stable, identifiable disability, yet she is marked by the same attritional pressures—economic precarity and patriarchal exploitation, set within a damaged ecology. Taken together, these four points show why *Yellow-Yellow* matters to African environmental justice discourse. By following oil's damage into a young woman's most private experience, Agary shows that environmental injustice in the Niger Delta is distributed unequally by gender and class, endured in silence, and largely invisible in the public record of spills and settlements. The novel thereby widens the scope of African environmental justice beyond collective protest, such as Saro-Wiwa's, to include the intimate, feminised costs of living in a poisoned landscape, and it asks that eco-crip attention to diverse embodiments be extended to the bodies that bear those costs.

Feminist Narratives of Survival

Amid gendered debility, Agary reveals feminist resistance through migration, communal care, and embodied reclamation. Zilayefa's mother exemplifies adaptive resilience: after an oil spill destroys her farm, she rows daily to new farmland "with unwavering determination" (10). This is ordinary persistence, the slow, attritional labour of surviving within a debilitating ecology. Zilayefa's migration to Port Harcourt reframes mobility as agency available to debilitated subjects. Her "master escape plan" (17-18) and her pleasure in clothing reveal the agency of a crip feminist: "I liked how the bodice caressed my breasts and the way the skirt brushed my hips when I walked" (17). The protagonist reclaims her body as a site of sensation and choice. Such sensory reclamation can be read as a political act: it refuses the assumption that debilitated bodies are entitled only to pain. Compare Kafer's insistence on "the possibility of pleasure" for disabled bodies (65).

Communal networks sustain this agency. Mama Ebiye, the village neighbour and closest friend of Zilayefa's mother, exemplifies interdependence without idealisation: their quarrels "never lasted for more than a few hours," and the home remains open (16). In Port Harcourt, Sisi, the boutique owner who takes Zilayefa in, offers mentorship that reframes debility as opportunity, not by denying harm but by insisting that Zilayefa build capacity within constraints: "We are all workaday girls here, so you, too, have to pull your weight" (67-68). Other examples include sisterly care, provided by Lolo, Sisi's daughter, who treats Zilayefa as her "little sister" (50), and rituals like libation, which blend ancestral bonds with everyday resistance (43-44). These networks preview the interdependence that eco-crip politics requires, yet they also reveal its fragility: care is personal, contingent, and vulnerable to the same extractive logics that produce debility.

Risks of Entrenchment and Sustained Political Engagement

Despite these affirmations, Agary's novel reveals the limits of survival strategies that remain detached from sustained collective political engagement: the comfort of Lolo's circle numbs awareness (99); state repression silences dissent ("No one wanted to be the next Ken Saro-Wiwa," 137); and ethnic conflicts fanned by the head of state displace accountability (108). Zilayefa's own position illustrates these limits. She is "sheltered by the comforts that living with Sisi provided" (99), and she registers the gap between private contentment and public crisis: "Inside me was my personal turmoil over Plato and outside was the turmoil of a nation; somewhere in between was the contentment of life provided for me by Sisi and Lolo" (108). The same distance from the sources of power appears in the scholarships that the oil companies announce over the radio, which were "useless to us because no one in my village knew how to get them" (11): a gesture of corporate benevolence that remains, for those it claims to serve, tokenistic, and that echoes Saro-Wiwa's rebuttal of Shell's claim that its community assistance is "not cosmetic or token" (164-65). In this context, Zilayefa's guilt about her own opulence marks the limit of care-based survival: "I felt guilty [...] I was part of the crowd that was greedily wolfing down pieces of the national cake" (121-22). The gendered economics of entrenchment appear in Zilayefa's consideration of sex work (42) and the structural impossibility of reproductive futurity with transient figures like Sergio, a white timber-business man with a family in Spain, whom Zilayefa meets in the village and who reappears in Port Harcourt (167-72). His importance to this argument lies in the fact that he may have fathered her pregnancy (172), and that she rejects the idea of bearing his child: "I could not bring Sergio's child into my world [...] he 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" (172). Sergio's transience symbolises entrenched debility at the level of kinship. Like Admiral, Sergio is an extractive subject: he appears, consumes intimacy, and disappears. Zilayefa's decision not to bear his child is simultaneously an act of agency (refusing to bring a child into a debilitating ecology) and a symptom of debility (the impossibility of reproductive futurity within extractive capitalism). Other critics have read the absent father figure (Plato Papadopoulos) as a displaced subject mapped onto the men Zilayefa meets in Port Harcourt, such as Admiral and Sergio, who embody a patriarchal impunity that mirrors the oil companies' exploitation (Chukwumah 49-50; Ogene and Okolo 162-63). Zilayefa's dependence on these men for comfort and security keeps her agency partial. The novel sets this dependence against the memory of Saro-Wiwa, whose reported last words, "Lord, take my soul, but the struggle continues," and the slogan "Aluta continua" (Agary 34) point to an organised struggle as a different model of agency. Agary thereby diagnoses the trap: survival strategies that fail to evolve into political engagement risk reproducing the very debilitating ecologies they seek to endure.

Communal Care, Interdependence, and Critiques of Resistance

Both Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day* and Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* position care networks as essential responses to debilitating ecologies, yet they also expose how care can become a form of accommodation when it operates without structural transformation. Gendered debility can be defined as the specific, attritional weakening of women's bodies through the convergence of environmental toxicity, patriarchal control, and economic precarity; it differs from a feminist-crip framework, which focuses on how disabled women resist ableist norms. Debility emphasises the *production* of weakness as a biopolitical strategy (Puar xvii, 13), while eco-crip emphasises resistance from within that weakness. The two are not opposed but operate dialectically: debility is the condition that extractive capitalism produces, and eco-crip is the collective response that refuses to let that condition be the final word. Where debility is profitable for capitalism (Puar 13), the care practices in these texts work to make debility *not* pay—or at least to ensure that its costs are shared rather than privatised. In *Yellow-Yellow*, Agary portrays interdependence as a feminist strategy that sustains life within contaminated environments. Zilayefa's bonds with her mother, Mama Ebiye, Sisi, and Lolo form a web of support that compensates for the state's absence and the oil industry's predation. Her mother's post-spill resilience—farming inherited land and rowing daily to new sites—embodies another example of ordinary persistence within compromised environments. Kafer's crippled environmentalism looks to disabled bodies not as obstacles to ecological thinking but as “a resource in thinking about our future natures differently” (131). In the Niger Delta, where oil contamination produces chronic illness, Agary and Saro-Wiwa's texts reframe care, not as charity but as a political practice that challenges ableist assumptions that only “healthy” bodies can build movements: Zilayefa's mother rows despite debility; Saro-Wiwa organises from a cell despite physical deterioration.

This care is neither romantic nor seamless: the relationships among Zilayefa's mother, Mama Ebiye, Sisi, and Lolo are marked by quarrels, obligations, and class differences, and Sisi's “workaday girls” ethic offers mutual obligation rather than rescue. This is an ethics of debility: the recognition that all bodies in this economy are worn down, and survival requires distributed labour rather than heroic capacity. Yet the same networks can also enable complacency. Agary records that “Lolo and her friends were making enough money to be comfortable, and their comfort numbed them and inured them to the realities of the poverty and oppression around them” (99). Lolo, who uses her family name to win contracts from the oil companies (58), is comfortable precisely because of the economy that impoverishes the Delta, and her comfort cushions her and her friends from seeing it. Zilayefa herself admits that she was “also removed from it all, sheltered by the comforts that living with Sisi provided” (99). This paradox is the novel's most searching critique: care without political engagement becomes a buffer that protects the comfortable from seeing what their comfort costs.

Saro-Wiwa's memoir positions communal care as explicitly political. Owens's clinic, operating amid "the misery all around" (12), links individual health to collective organising: on the day of the march, its ambulance was "the only vehicle available to take care of any emergency cases" (12). This is not charity but infrastructure for resistance: a debilitated activist cannot march, but a clinic returns him to the struggle. Owens's clinic can be read as standing against the logic of the medical-industrial complex that Puar describes (16), since it places care at the service of a collective struggle. In detention, Ogoni visitors bring "solidarity, comfort and, wait for it, money!" (197), and Saro-Wiwa takes note of the many Ogoni inmates "forgotten by the police and the judicial system" (227). Evoking what Eli Clare has termed "brilliant imperfection," a way of living with disability that is "rooted in the nonnegotiable value of body-mind difference" and that "has emerged from collective understandings and stubborn survivals" (xvii), the communal care networks in both texts make the invisible harm of slow violence visible through mutual aid. Saro-Wiwa does not wait for a just world to arrive; he builds care within the unjust one. The Ogoni Bill of Rights, which complains of communities left without "health and other social facilities" (67), refuses to "sit idly by while we are, as a people, dehumanized and slowly exterminated" (89). Here, care becomes demand: communal well-being is not a gift from the state or Shell but a right that extraction has violated. Shell's own insistence that its community assistance is "not cosmetic or token" (164), which Saro-Wiwa dismisses as "negligible and [...] most insulting when quantified and placed side by side with what the company has taken out of the area or the harm it has caused the environment" (165), confirms that without structural change, corporate care remains a mask over ongoing harm.

Paradoxes of Resistance

Both texts expose a central tension: the same strategies that enable survival can also entrench the conditions that make survival necessary. In *Yellow-Yellow*, Zilayefa's defiance (42) and embodied empowerment (17) challenge pathologising norms, yet urban complacency, ethnic conflicts fanned by the head of state (108), and pressure to end her pregnancy (161) perpetuate cycles of debility. Zilayefa's guilt, discussed above, is not resistance, but its presence signals that the protagonist has not fully surrendered to accommodation. Agary leaves her at this impasse: aware but not yet organised.

Saro-Wiwa offers a different resolution. Nonviolence transforms debility into collective eco-crip agency through MOSOP marches (123-24) and the election boycott (155). Personal ailments become fuel for mobilisation rather than reasons for withdrawal. When Saro-Wiwa, from detention, affirms that "we have chosen the path of non-violent struggle" (193), he practises care at a distance—leadership that depends on distributed trust rather than physical presence. The paradox here is that state repression intensifies even as resistance grows: soldiers wound eleven protesters at Biara (155), and the state later executes Saro-Wiwa despite (or because

of) his nonviolence. Yet the words reported as his last—"Lord, take my soul, but the struggle continues" (Agary 34)—affirm that care networks survived his body's destruction. These tensions reflect slow violence's attritional nature, as it fosters bonds of necessity while also reinforcing the hierarchies that require those bonds. Without structural change—resource control, cleanup, accountability—care becomes a palliative rather than a cure. Agary and Saro-Wiwa do not celebrate resistance uncritically. They show that care can numb, that survival can accommodate, and that even the most committed struggle cannot prevent all harm. What remains is the insistence on continuing—"Aluta continua" (34)—not because victory is certain but because the alternative is extinction.

Juxtaposing Saro-Wiwa's activist resistance with Agary's feminist narrative reveals complementary strategies for confronting debilitating ecologies. Together, the two texts model a plural vision of well-being: one that moves beyond individual recovery to demand structural transformation while insisting that care, interdependence, and political organising are mutually necessary. Saro-Wiwa's memoir positions MOSOP's struggle against what he calls "ecological war" (147), a conflict where the weapons are pipelines, gas flares, and denied compensation rather than bombs. The journalist and activist reframes environmental degradation as deliberate violence, not unfortunate accident. His demand for Ogoni autonomy is not separatism but a prerequisite for survival: without control over resources and environmental governance, debility will continue to be produced as a profitable outcome of extraction. For his part, Agary genders his critique by centring reproductive harms (177-178) and hybrid "yellow-yellow" identities (7, 74) as sites not only of injury but also of reclamation. Where Saro-Wiwa shows how communities organise *against* debility, Agary shows how debility is *lived* in female bodies that must continue to labour, bear children, and care for families even as the conditions for that labour are systematically eroded.

Saro-Wiwa prioritises nonviolence and collective solidarity as the engine of political change (193), while Agary highlights migration and communal networks as feminist survival tactics. Read together, these are not opposing choices but sequential or simultaneous necessities: one cannot organise politically if one cannot survive materially, and survival without political engagement risks entrenching the conditions that require survival in the first place. The shared vulnerabilities across both texts—contaminated rivers (Agary 39; Saro-Wiwa 73) and corporate impunity (Saro-Wiwa 165; Agary 4)—ground this complementarity in the material reality of the Niger Delta, where no strategy, however well-conceived, can fully escape the attritional logics of extraction. Reimagining well-being beyond debility requires a politics of repair: not the restoration of an original, undamaged state, which Clare treats with suspicion (14-15, 187), but a practice, in the spirit of what Clare calls "brilliant imperfection" (xvii), that builds liveable futures from compromised presents. In the Niger Delta, this means decolonial ecologies: resource control, environmental cleanup, and governance systems that prioritise communal health over corporate profit. Ongoing spills and litigation, such as the Bodo and Ogale cases,

where communities have secured settlements from Shell but face incomplete remediation, underscore the need for participatory governance rather than top-down compensation models ("Shell-Bodo;" "Shell Faces"). An eco-crip lens reveals that governance without attention to bodily impairment and ecological interdependence remains incomplete. Participatory governance must include accessible healthcare for chronically ill populations, remediation that restores both land and bodies, and recognition that debility is not a deviation from normal functioning but a predictable outcome of extractive capitalism.

Future interdisciplinary work on this corpus could integrate Indigenous knowledges, such as the water spirits that populate Agary's spiritual landscape, with eco-crip models. A crippled environmentalism requires attending to bodies of nature, not as resources to be managed but as entangled, vulnerable, and mutually constituting. The water spirits that "tied the fishes' wombs" (Agary 39) are not superstition but epistemology: they name the reproductive debility that science measures but cannot, on its own, make intelligible as injustice. An eco-crip politics adequate to the Niger Delta would therefore hold together Saro-Wiwa's collective organising, Agary's gendered care networks, and Indigenous cosmologies, refusing to choose between them because debility itself refuses to operate along a single axis.

Conclusion

Saro-Wiwa's memoir and Agary's novel together expose oil exploitation in the Niger Delta as a form of slow violence that produces debilitating ecologies, where environmental degradation systematically weakens bodies, communities, and landscapes in ways that exceed conventional disability frameworks. Read through an eco-crip lens, these texts reveal attritional harms—poisoned air and water, threatened food supplies, reproductive loss, economic dispossession, and communal erosion—as biopolitical mechanisms of control rooted in extractive capitalism, colonial legacies, and state-corporate collusion. At the same time, they foreground resistance: Saro-Wiwa's nonviolent activism through MOSOP transforms shared vulnerability into collective agency and demands for autonomy, while Agary's feminist narrative traces individual and communal strategies of survival, migration, and care amid gendered burdens.

Communal networks in both works affirm human-nature interdependence while highlighting paradoxes, which include risks of entrenchment, complacency, and incomplete structural change without sustained political engagement. The texts' insistence on mutual care, whether through MOSOP's solidarity networks or Agary's female kinship webs, models a form of resistance that refuses the ableist demand for individual overcoming and instead distributes agency across debilitated bodies, shared resources, and damaged lands. These literary representations challenge ableist and profit-driven norms, making visible the casualties of incremental violence and meeting the representational challenges of slow violence. They advocate plural, decolonial visions of well-being that integrate diverse embodiments and ecologies,

holding together collective organising, gendered care, and Indigenous cosmologies. By centring African experiences within global environmental justice discourses, Saro-Wiwa and Agary urge holistic resistance that bridges impaired bodies, degraded environments, and collective futures beyond extractivism, a resistance that begins not from overcoming debility, but from enduring and repairing together.

Submission received 24 February 2026 Revised version accepted 26 October 2026

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