

## NATURE EXPLOITATION IN MOANA: AN ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstrak

Film Disney Moana telah dianalisis secara luas di banyak jurnal yang digambarkan melalui lensa studi ekologi, tetapi belum ada yang lebih fokus pada proses rekonsiliasi dengan alam. Film ini mengangkat isu eksploitasi alam yang disebabkan oleh keserakahan manusia yang tidak memikirkan dampak buruknya. Tulisan ini merupakan bagian dari studi film yang menganalisis proses rekonsiliasi dengan alam menggunakan perspektif ekokritik untuk mengkaji eksploitasi alam dan proses rekonsiliasi keseimbangan alam di Moana. Studi tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa eksploitasi alam digambarkan ketika Maui mencuri batu dari Te Fiti yang mengandung kekuatan super yang dapat menciptakan kehidupan, yang menciptakan kelangkaan sumber daya alam di setiap pulau. Lebih lanjut, studi tersebut menunjukkan bahwa Moana berada di sisi ekosentris dan menunjukkan sikap ekosentris terhadap isu-isu lingkungan terkait. Hasil penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa Moana tidak hanya peduli dengan alam tetapi juga menghargainya sebagai entitas yang memiliki kekuatan hidup. Dia memimpin proses rekonsiliasi untuk mengembalikan keseimbangan dengan alam.

**Kata Kunci:** ekosentris; ekokritik; eksploitasi alam; moana

### Abstract

Disney movie Moana has broadly analyzed in many journals portrayed through lenses of ecological study, but none of them take more focus on the process of reconciliation with nature yet. The movie brings up the issue of nature exploitation caused by human greed that does not think of the adverse impacts. This paper is a part of a film study that analyzes the process of reconciliation with nature using an ecocritical perspective to examine the nature exploitation and the process of reconciling the balance of nature in Moana. The study reveals that nature exploitation is portrayed when Maui steals the stone from Te Fiti that contains a super power that can create life, which creates the scarcity of natural resources on each island. Furthermore, the study shows that Moana is on the ecocentric side and shows ecocentric attitudes toward related environmental issues. The results of this study reveal that Moana not only cared about nature but also valued them as entities with a life force. She leads the reconciliation process to restore the balance with nature.

**Keywords:** eco-centric; ecocriticism; nature exploitation; moana

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nature has a prominent role in every aspect of human life. People use nature for their survival, ranging from places to build their houses, places for their daily activities, foods and drinks they need, to household equipment, which come from nature. On the other hand, as humans are always at their benefit, it is undeniable that nature is often at a disadvantage. Both directly and indirectly, human activities have affected nature. Excessive exploitation by humans causes the scarcity of species and objects to damage the environment and cause disasters.

Most people are not aware of this. Taking something from nature is considered a common thing. Humans consider themselves as the center of life, while nature is only considered a complementary factor. However, when humans are negligent, they can be a factor causing damage to the natural environment itself. There have been many incidents of environmental damage such as forest fires, floods, and landslides, some of which are man-made. And disasters like global warming have been increasing year by year.

Various protests are filed by environmental activists and communities who are proactive and care about the environment. Not only in the form of news articles or

demos, but the forms of criticism have also penetrated the realm of public entertainment and literary works such as songs, poems, books, and even movies. Apart from being a form of protest, the general public, especially children, also need knowledge about the values of nature to protect nature and the impact of human negligence on nature.

Ecocriticism comes from the word ecology and criticism. "Ecology can be interpreted as a scientific study of the pattern of relationships of plants, animals, and humans to each other and their environment," (Mu'in, 2016: 3). In their essay entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology* in 1996, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm tried to explain the concept of back to nature in literary works with an earth-centered approach, (Glotfelty, 1996). So, based on Geofelty's explanation, it can be concluded that ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literary works and the environment.

Ecocriticism is not only the study of nature as represented in literature. Nature here means the whole of the physical environment consisting of the human and the non-human. The interconnection between the two creates a bond that is the basis of Ecocriticism. As long as there is a harmony between the living and the non-living, there prevails a healthy ecosystem for the benevolence of mankind as well as the earth (Mishra, 2016).

In the article *Ecocriticism: A Study of Environmental Issues in Literature*, they also stated that ecocriticism underlines environmental justice as man's voracious urge to conquer nature is somewhat misleading. People believe themselves as the superior to the other life forms that inhabit the biosphere. But now we realize that nature is not a subordinate but a co-inhabitant of this earth's ecosystem. We should change our self-destructive motives. If humans try to destroy nature, they will be paid back with their coins. Our global crisis is not because of how ecosystems function. It is because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature. It requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them.

In the analysis of the relationship between human beings and their natural environment, one of the approaches that have produced the most empirical progress from a psychosocial perspective corresponds to the investigations carried out by the group of Paul C. Stern (Stern & Dietz, 1994; Stern, Dietz, & Guagnano, 1995; Stern, Dietz, & Kalof, 1993). This approach is similar to the expectancy-value of attitudes and beliefs, which contemplates the cognitive elements of attitudes. Thus, this approach analyzes environmental concern from the

framework of beliefs about the consequences that environmental deterioration could have for oneself, for others, or for the biosphere—the nonhuman elements of the planet. Beliefs (Amérigo et al., 2007).

Authors such as Thompson and Barton (1994), when analyzing the motives or values that underlie environmental concerns, identified a profile of anthropocentric individuals who value the natural environment because of its contribution to the quality of human life, and a profile of eco-centric individuals who value nature. Both ecocentric and anthropocentric individuals express positive attitudes toward environmental issues—the difference in these two orientations is in the reasons given for supporting conservation (Ash, 2010). Both ecocentric and anthropocentric shows environmental concern and an interest in maintaining natural resources, but their motives for this interest are distinguishable. Anthropocentric espouses conservation because human comfort, quality of life, and health can depend on the preservation of natural resources and a healthy ecosystem. For example, air pollution can lead to difficulty on health problems; destruction of the rain forests may foreclose the possibility of developing new medicines that could save human lives, and the depletion of fossil fuels may result in a decreased standard of living. Eco-centric, on the other hand, espouses environmental issues because they see nature as worth preserving regardless of the economic or lifestyle implications of conservation (Ash, 2010).

Reconciliation is realized when both parties exert effort to assist in rebuilding a damaged relationship (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), and it connotes a desire to settle issues that led to the disruption of the relationship (Freedman, 1998) so the relationship can be restored to vitality (Aquino et al., 2001; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). There are three dominant tactics that an offender can use in attempting to reconcile a relationship that has been damaged by a trust violation: the type of apology offered by the offender, the duration of time elapsed after the violation for the offender to take restorative action, and the sincerity of the restorative actions taken by the offender (Tomlinson et al., 2004).

This paper investigates a movie titled *Moana*. As we know, the movie is often representing moments in real life. Through movies, people can get many things apart from the entertainment function itself, such as education, knowledge, and information on the latest issues adapted into a movie, and so on (Basri, 2019). And some of the values of nature we need to know have been portrayed in the Disney *Moana* movie.

Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker, the Moana movie was released on November 23, 2016. It is an American 3D computer-animated musical fantasy-adventure film produced by Walt Disney Animation Studio. The story of the movie follows the journey of a spirited teenager named Moana. Since her island is gradually dying, she embarks on a quest across the ocean to find Maui and put back the stolen heart of Te Fiti to its place to save the world and her tribe on the island of Motunui. In the previous studies, with the title *Study of Ecocriticism in The Movie Doraemon & Nobita and The Green Giant Legend* by Ayumu Watanabe, Syaiful Qadar Basri uses a qualitative method to figure out how the form of ecocriticism is represented in the depiction of nature in the movie mentioned. Using anthropocentric and ecocentric approaches, Basri (2019) argues that the issue in the movie is a form of criticism of what happened to the earth like illegal logging, garbage disposal, forest burning, and so on. In his paper, he stated that in the movie mentioned, it is explained that two perspectives emerged namely anthropocentric and ecocentric. The characters in the movie show an anthropocentric perspective, namely, those who think that humans are the center of life and nature are the supporters, then those who think that nature is the center of human life, animals, and all creatures on earth, are eco-centric ones.

Meanwhile, Putri & Retnaningdyah's study of *Frozen II* (2021) examines how women attempt to preserve nature. The writers use a thematic analysis based on Gaard's theory of ecofeminism, and it shows the dominant patriarchal system, in which the king is considered the controller of everything and everyone must obey the King's orders that lead to environmental issues in the movie.

While the previous studies mention character's perspectives on nature in the movie *Doraemon & Nobita and The Green Giant Legend*, and how female characters in *Disney Movie Frozen II*, have feminine values to restore the existing natural destruction using ecocriticism and ecofeminism framework, this study will use one of the literary works that come from the movie titled Moana. This paper argues that the nature exploitation portrayed in the movie brings such an adverse impact that is the scarcity of natural resources, that the main character Moana has to lead the reconciliation process to restore the balance with nature which has been exploited by human greed.

## METHOD

This paper is part of a film study that looks into scripts, dialogues, and monologues of the characters and also the behaviors of the characters that can be seen from the scenes. In this paper, the writer examines the nature exploitation that leads to natural destruction portrayed in the movie, and how Moana resists the exploitation and restores the balance. Each topic will be analyzed further based on words, phrases, sentences, and visuals that represent the eco-centric side of the female character Moana, and how she represents the spirit to restore balance by reconciling with nature which has been exploited by human's greed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Nature exploitation

As depicted in this movie, nature exploitation is portrayed symbolically. The first minute of the movie, shows a character of a mother island named Te Fiti. She has the power to create life. The power she has comes from a green stone as well as her heart which contains great divine power. Some believe that whoever has the green stone will possess the most incredible power of all. Soon after, the heart of Te Fiti became a treasure that everyone wanted to get.

Picture 1. Te Fiti in Moana



Until one day, the bravest of them all, Maui, a demi-god who can change his shape into any living and non-living creature, succeeds to get the heart of Te Fiti. But soon after, a hideous lava monster known as Te Ka comes out. She attacks Maui and tries to snatch the green stone he took from Te Fiti. The scene shows Te Ka who strikes Maui down to the ocean and then ends with Maui and the stones disappearing into the sea. In minutes 00:02:15 - 00:02:30, we see Te Fiti and the island begins to crumble. The ashes of Te Ka poisoned the water and island by island for a long period.



Picture 2. Maui in Moana

Nature exploitation occurs when Maui steals the stone that belongs to Te Fiti. This scene can be interpreted as natural exploitation. Those who use their power to take natural resources and claim them as their entitles, use them without any idea of restoration, and reduce the adverse impacts, are exploiting nature.

## 2. Shortage of Natural Resources

The extensive misuse of natural resources caused by human greed has brought us to the edge of a brink. It cannot be denied that the rainforests are cut down, the fossil fuel is fast decreasing, the cycle of the season is in disorder, ecological disaster is frequent now around the globe and our environment is at the margin (Mishra & Mishra, 2016). This also happens in the movie Moana, that shortage of natural resources can happen while we manage our natural resources as well as we can.

The scene starts when the people of Motunui are in a difficult situation to get the main natural resource such as fish and coconut on their island. Moana as the new tribal chief tries to help her people who are experiencing crop failure. Following a man approached Moana and her father to show the fish that was caught continuously decreasing. They tried every way but the fish is gone.



Picture 3. Crop failure in Motunui island

Villager : "Traps in the eastern lagoon, the catch keeps decreasing".

Moana : "Then we'll rotate the fish trap".

Villager : "We have, there's no fish".

Moana : "Oh, then we'll go fishing far aside from the alleys".

Villager : "We've tried".

Moana : "The upwind side?"

Villager : "We tried the whole lagoon, they (fish) just gone."

The lives of the people of Motunui depend on the island they live on, starting from a place to live, a livelihood, and their foods are also from the island. They go fishing in the lagoon, and plant coconuts and other crops which they can harvest. This interconnection between the people and their surroundings portrayed in Moana creates a bond that is the basis of Ecocriticism. But even though they managed to nurse their natural resources, they came to the end. As long as Te Fiti's stone was not put back in its original place, Moana's small island of Motunui following other islands started to die.

## 3. Eco-centric Vision

Visions are often deprecated as utopian daydreams ungrounded in reality, 'vision' in the sense of Figurative language is an expression of the author's soul that is a component to add the beauty of language so that it becomes an interesting object, seeing-forward, or seeing-into-being is integral to human history (Curry, P. & Crist. E, 2020). On the other hand, the differences between ecocentric and anthropocentric attitudes involve valuing the environment for the environment itself, anthropocentric attitudes involve valuing the environment for its benefits to people (Thompson & Barton, 1994).

In the movie, the place and the setting of the movie revolve around nature and present people who love nature, especially the people of Motunui. The main character Moana lives on the island of Motunui with her tribe. She is portrayed as a teenage girl who loves her island, her people, and the ocean. As she grew, as the daughter of a chieftain she had a responsibility to serve her people. At a very young age, she was always drawn to the ocean even though her dad forbids her to get too close to the ocean, but she cannot help it. It feels like the ocean is calling her. She also loves animals. She has a pig as her pet named Pua. One day when she walked towards the water she saw a turtle who was attacked by a big bird and she helped the turtle to get away from those birds. At that small moment, she was so happy, and the ocean gives her a gift in a form of a seashell, and the green stone was given to Moana.





Picture 4. Moana as a kid

Based on the ecocentric and anthropocentric attitudes theory, which is developed by Thompson and Barton (1994), Moana shows the ecocentric attitudes. “Moreover, if a child chose a picture about protecting animals, using recycling bins by understanding what recycling is, and wanting to turn off the light to spend less electricity for the protection of the world, the codes were decided as ecocentric” (Thompson & Barton, 1994). Also, the ecocentric vision in the character Moana, as argued by Curry, P & Crist. E (2020), that it is the fundamental paradox of ecocentrism: to survive and flourish ourselves, we humans must learn to love the Earth for its own sake and change our lives accordingly.

#### 4. Reconciliation Process

The concept of reconciliation calls out to an imaginary wilderness coupled with nostalgia and evokes reconnecting with nature among those alienated from it, geographically, cognitively, or emotionally (Miller, 2005). In the movie, since Moana was a little girl, Moana's grandmother always talked about the legend of Maui, who stole the stone that belongs to Te Fiti, and the adverse impact that it made.

From the very beginning, Moana's grandmother evokes Moana's awareness. That the only way to save the island from the invisible threats, that are on their way, that anyone cannot see, is only putting back the heart of Te Fiti in its original place. Only by putting back Te Fiti's heart, the balance of nature be restored. Moana's grandmother explains that one day there will be a hero among future generations who will find Maui, take him across the ocean and return Te Fiti's heart to its original place. Those words from Moana's grandmother are always remembered by Moana. She got her courage up and quietly sailed through the reef to look for Maui, and fulfill her grandmother's wish.

On the journey to restore the heart to Te Fiti, Moana and Maui face many challenges, starting from fighting against the little pirate monster Kakamora, the giant crab

monster Tamatoa from Lalotai, the place of the monsters, to finally fighting Te Ka.



Picture 5. Moana and Te Ka in Moana

From these events, we know that Reconciliation is realized when both parties exert effort to assist in rebuilding a damaged relationship (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Maui who was starting the conflict in the end chooses to help Moana to put back the stone in its original place. As Moana realized that Te Ka and Te Fiti are one, Moana walked toward her and put back the stone in its place. Soon after, Te Fiti appears as the form of Te Ka begins to crumble. As Tomlinson et al., (2004) stated, reconciliation may be viewed as a behavioral manifestation of forgiveness, defined as “a deliberate decision by the victim to relinquish anger, resentment, and the desire to punish a party held responsible for inflicting harm” (Aquino et al., 2001: 53).



Picture 6. Te Ka transformed into Te Fiti in Moana

Te Fiti has come back, and the dying islands are back to life. Te Fiti also gives Maui a new hook as a gift. He apologizes for what he has done in the past. Maui's past sins are also redeemed. Since Te Fiti has come back to her old self, and the balance of nature has also restored as it was. The reconciliation of nature in Moana has been successful.

The writer finds that excessive exploitation by humans causing the natural resources and environments being endangered, and causing disasters from island to island

which is linked by ocean. Moana as the main character in this movie is accompanied by Maui success to do the reconciliation by bringing back the stolen heart of Te Fiti which is in a form of a green stone to its original place.

## CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the nature exploitation and nature restoration in movie *Moana*. It also reveals how nature exploitation has affected the people of the island and the other island. Furthermore, the paper also reveals that Moana as the leader of doing reconciliation, is showing that she is on the ecocentric side and showing ecocentric attitudes. And in attempting to reconcile with nature Moana and Maui take a restorative action.

The natural exploitation is portrayed symbolically with Te Fiti as the mother nature that has an immaculate power to create life, but unfortunately, the power she has have been removed from her by a demi God Maui. Soon after, Te Fiti lost her power and cause the island and ocean begin to die. One thousand years later a girl named Moana, the daughter of a tribal chief of Motunui people, who loves her family, people, and her island with the courage inside her heart embarks a journey to find Maui and with him, put back the heart of Te Fiti to its original place. Many challenges they are facing, and at the final they have face Te Ka a lava demon that soon after we know as the other form of Te Fiti.

At the end they finally succeeded. When Moana put back the stone, Te Ka transformed into Te Fiti. The comeback of the mother island here symbolize that the balance of nature has been restored ever since the heart of Te Fiti is put back to its place. It is proven when the islands that dying are back to life. Following Moana come back to her island bring her success to her people of Motunui.

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