

FEMALE LEADERS IN NATURE AND INDUSTRY IN THE MOVIE *PRINCESS MONONOKE* (1997)

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian berjudul “*Female Leaders in Nature and Industry in the Movie Princess Mononoke (1997)*” bertujuan mendalami hubungan antara pemimpin perempuan, alam, dan industri dalam *Princess Mononoke (1997)*, yang disutradarai oleh Hayao Miyazaki. Film ini menampilkan hubungan yang kompleks antara lingkungan hidup dan industrialisasi melalui karakter San (*Princess Mononoke*), seorang pejuang yang dibesarkan oleh serigala dan berjuang untuk melindungi alam, serta Lady Eboshi, pemimpin Iron Town yang berupaya mengembangkan peradaban manusia melalui kemajuan industri. Di antara kedua pemimpin perempuan tersebut terdapat seorang tokoh laki-laki, yaitu Ashitaka. Alur cerita menempatkannya sebagai jembatan yang menghubungkan konflik antara kedua pemimpin perempuan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif yang berfokus pada dialog-dialog antar tokoh. Dengan menerapkan teori ekofeminisme (Shiva, 1988; Warren, 1997) dan kajian gender (Butler, 1990), penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana film tersebut menantang peran gender tradisional sekaligus membahas dilema etis dan ekologis yang muncul akibat modernisasi. *Princess Mononoke (1997)* menantang stereotip gender tradisional dengan menempatkan perempuan sebagai pengambil keputusan yang berpengaruh dan berperan penting dalam menentukan jalannya konflik sosial dan lingkungan. Pada akhirnya penelitian ini menemukan bahwa dua tokoh pemimpin perempuan dalam *Princess Mononoke (1997)* mencapai kesepakatan yang melahirkan sebuah kesempatan yang mungkin untuk diwujudkan secara berdampingan yaitu keberlanjutan ekologis dan pemenuhan kebutuhan perempuan untuk berdaya melalui bidang industri. **Kata kunci:** ekofeminisme, kajian gender, pemimpin perempuan, alam, industri.

ABSTRACT

This research titled “*Female Leaders in Nature and Industry in the Movie Princess Mononoke (1997)*” aims to explore the relationship between female leader, nature, and industry in *Princess Mononoke (1997)*, directed by Hayao Miyazaki. The film presents a complex interplay between environmentalism and industrialization through the characters of San (*Princess Mononoke*), a warrior raised by wolves who fights to protect nature, and Lady Eboshi, the leader of Iron Town who seeks to expand human civilization through industrial progress. Between the two female leaders there is a male character: Ashitaka. The plot makes him as a bridge for the conflict of two female leaders. This research uses qualitative method which focusing on dialogs between characters. By employing ecofeminist theory (Shiva, 1988; Warren, 1997) and gender studies (Butler, 1990), this study examines how the film challenges traditional gender roles while addressing the ethical and ecological dilemmas of modernization. *Princess Mononoke* challenges traditional gender stereotypes by positioning women as influential decision-makers who shape the course of social and environmental conflicts. Finally, this research finds that the two female leaders in *Princess Mononoke (1997)* reached an agreement that resulting to an opportunity that is possible to coexist side by side, which are ecological sustainability and fulfilling women's needs to be empowered through the industrial sector. **Keywords:** ecofeminism, gender studies, female leader, nature, industry.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Princess Mononoke (1997), directed by Hayao Miyazaki and produced by Studio Ghibli, is a Japanese animated movie with complex characters and profound environmental themes. The year of the movie release is in the same timeline as the first phase of ecocriticism is introduced in Japan in the early 1990s to 2000s (Masami in Garrad, 2014). Among its most compelling features is the portrayal of powerful female figures who challenge traditional gender roles and embody contrasting yet equally significant forces within the narrative. This literary research focuses on the representation of female power in *Princess Mononoke*, examining how the film positions women at the center of the conflict between nature and industry. Through characters such as San, the fierce warrior raised by wolves, and Lady Eboshi, the pragmatic leader of Iron Town, Miyazaki subverts conventional depictions of women in fantasy and animation. These characters are not relegated to passive or secondary roles; instead, they wield influence, command respect, and drive the story's central moral and philosophical dilemmas.

The movie presents female power in diverse and often opposing forms: San symbolizes the wild, spiritual force of nature, fiercely protective of the forest and its ancient gods, while Lady Eboshi represents human progress and industrialization, using technology and social reform to build a thriving community. Despite their opposition, both characters are depicted as complex and morally ambiguous, blurring the lines between heroism and antagonism. By situating women as leaders of both nature and industry, *Princess Mononoke* offers a nuanced exploration of power, responsibility, and the potential for coexistence. This study aims to analyze how female power is constructed and expressed in the movie, and how these portrayals reflect broader themes of environmentalism, gender roles, and the balance between humanity and the natural world.

Princess Mononoke (1997) has been the subject of extensive scholarly analysis, particularly concerning its portrayal of female characters and environmental issues. Researchers have employed various theoretical frameworks, including ecofeminism and gender studies, to explore the complex dynamics between the movie's

central female characters and the broader environmental themes. Specific research on gender discusses how the film challenges traditional female gender roles through its richly textured female characters, each embodying traits typically associated with masculinity (Olowu, 2013). This deconstruction of gender norms suggests a deliberate effort to subvert conventional stereotypes and present a more nuanced portrayal of femininity and power.

Sierra et al., (2015) provide a close reading of the characters San and Lady Eboshi through an ecofeminist lens, suggesting that the portrayal of San and Lady Eboshi reflects subconscious anxieties about women in positions of power, thereby recreating troubling archetypes related to women's connection with nature. Similarly, Bailey (2023), examines how the movie depicts gender by portraying men as masters of nature, exemplified by characters like Ashitaka and Jigo. This research highlights the underlying message that those who differ from these traits are perceived as unnatural, thereby reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies.

While on the historical study, (van der Linden, 2023), addresses the movie's depiction of the relationship between humanity and nature as inherently cruel and brutal throughout history. This perspective challenges romanticized notions of a lost harmony between humans and nature, suggesting instead that conflict has always been an integral part of this relationship. In line with Gregor (2020), the research discusses how the film portrays the encroachment of industry upon nature as a curse that spreads and annihilates the natural world. On the other side, human needs to be aware of this nature destruction that in the future it will harm human itself (Fadli, 2022). These analysis underscore the movie's environmental warnings and critiques of industrial expansion at the expense of ecological balance.

Collectively, those studies above contribute to a deeper understanding of *Princess Mononoke's* complex narrative, particularly regarding the interplay between female power, environmental ethics, and industrialization. They highlight the movie's multifaceted approach to these themes, offering valuable insights into its cultural and philosophical implications.

Research Problems

Previous research has not sufficiently explored how the interaction between these two female characters contributes to the film's message regarding balance and coexistence between human development and environmental preservation. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how *Princess Mononoke* (1997) constructs female leadership through San and Lady Eboshi and how their dynamic relationship reflects the necessity of maintaining harmony between humanity and the natural world.

The research problems in this study are as follows:

1. How does *Princess Mononoke* (1997) portray female characters as central figures in the conflict between nature and industry?
2. How does the female characters dynamic reflect the necessity of balance between humanity and the natural world?

Objective of the Research

The objective of this research is to analyze the portrayal of female power in *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and its relationship with the conflict between nature and industry. By applying ecofeminism (as developed by scholars like Vandana Shiva and Karen Warren) and gender theory (Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity), this study aims to explore how the film challenges traditional gender roles and dominant narratives surrounding environmental and industrial conflicts.

Ultimately, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how *Princess Mononoke* presents a nuanced vision of female power, challenging rigid binaries of nature versus industry, femininity versus masculinity, and destruction versus preservation. By doing so, it contributes to broader discussions on gender, environmental ethics, and the role of media in shaping socio-political discourse.

Theoretical Framework

Ecofeminism, a critical framework developed by scholars such as Vandana Shiva and Karen Warren, argues that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are interconnected, both rooted in patriarchal systems of domination. Shiva (1988) emphasizes that industrialization and capitalist expansion disproportionately harm both women and the environment, as both are seen as resources to be controlled and exploited. This perspective is highly relevant to *Princess Mononoke*, where Lady Eboshi's industrial ambitions threaten the sacred forests, mirroring real-world historical patterns of environmental destruction in pursuit of economic gain. San, as a warrior aligned with nature, embodies resistance to this system, representing the ecofeminist ideal of defending both the natural world and marginalized groups.

Warren (1997) extends this idea by arguing that patriarchal dualisms—such as culture vs. nature and male vs. female—have been used to justify both ecological destruction and gender inequality. In *Princess Mononoke*, these dualisms are disrupted by the female characters. San, although aligned with nature, is not portrayed as a passive nurturer but as a fierce, autonomous warrior. Similarly, Lady Eboshi, despite leading industrialization efforts, does not fit into the traditional male-dominated model of destruction; instead, she prioritizes social progress by empowering outcast women and lepers. By analyzing the film through Warren's ecofeminist lens, it becomes clear that Miyazaki does not merely reinforce these binaries but instead complicates them, showing that female power can manifest in multiple, often conflicting ways.

In addition to ecofeminism, Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity provides another valuable framework for analyzing *Princess Mononoke*. Butler (1990) argues that gender is not an inherent trait but rather a socially constructed performance shaped by societal expectations. This theory challenges the essentialist notion that women must conform to predefined roles, such as caregivers or passive figures in need of protection. *Princess Mononoke* actively subverts these expectations by presenting female characters who wield power in ways traditionally associated with masculinity.

San, for instance, defies the conventional role of a princess; rather than being a damsel in distress, she is an independent and aggressive warrior who rejects human civilization entirely. Lady Eboshi, in contrast, assumes the leadership position typically

reserved for men, making strategic decisions, wielding military power, and challenging patriarchal authority. By applying Butler's theory, we can interpret these characters as embodiments of gender fluidity, resisting traditional frameworks that confine women to subordinate roles. Miyazaki's depiction of female power in both nature and industry thus reflects a broader rejection of rigid gender norms.

By integrating ecofeminism and gender theory, this research highlights the complexity of female power in *Princess Mononoke*. The film does not present a simple binary between nature and industry, nor does it depict women in one-dimensional ways. Instead, it reveals how female characters navigate structures of power, resistance, and transformation. While San and Lady Eboshi may appear to be opposites, they both challenge patriarchal systems in different ways—San by rejecting human dominance over nature, and Eboshi by restructuring industrial society to uplift marginalized groups.

Ultimately, the film suggests that neither nature nor industry can exist in isolation; balance and coexistence are necessary. In this sense, *Princess Mononoke* aligns with Shiva's (1988) call for an alternative development model that respects ecological sustainability while recognizing the agency of marginalized voices, including women. Through this lens, the film serves as a commentary on the ongoing struggle for both environmental preservation and gender equity in a world shaped by industrial expansion.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this paper is a qualitative method. This research is designed as a textual analysis of *Princess Mononoke*, focusing on dialogues, character interactions, and visual symbolism. By analyzing key scenes and quotations from the film, this study explores how Hayao Miyazaki portrays female power in relation to environmental and industrial conflicts. The analysis is informed by the theoretical frameworks of ecofeminism (Shiva, 1988; Warren, 1997) and gender performativity (Butler, 1990).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of female power in relation to nature and industry in *Princess Mononoke* (1997) can be deepened through key dialogues that reflect the ideological conflict between San and Lady Eboshi. These quotations not only define their characters but also reinforce the film's broader themes of gender, environmental ethics, and industrial progress.

San and the Power of Nature: Ecofeminist Resistance

San, as the film's embodiment of nature and resistance against industrial domination, frequently expresses her disdain for human destruction. One of her most defining statements is when Ashitaka tries to convince San to join forces with Eboshi's employees in the middle of chaotic conflicts between animals, human, and nature. San with her strong-headed traits refuses:

"I hate all humans!" (1/55/05)

This quote encapsulates San's identity crisis—though born human, she rejects humanity due to its destructive tendencies. From an ecofeminist perspective, her hatred symbolizes the way patriarchal industrialization has historically exploited both women and nature. Ecofeminism theory argues that women, like nature, are often commodified and treated as expendable in systems of economic growth (Shiva, 1988). San's rejection of humanity mirrors the ecofeminist belief that industrial civilization, dominated by patriarchal structures, is inherently violent toward the environment and those who live in harmony with it.

However, despite her initial hostility toward humans, San's relationship with Ashitaka introduces the possibility of reconciliation. When Ashitaka was about completely unconscious tells San:

"You (San) are beautiful." (55/27)

San reacts with visible discomfort. This moment signifies her struggle with identity—she is seen through the male gaze as a beautiful woman, yet she has defined herself through her connection with nature and her wolf family. Her discomfort challenges traditional femininity, reinforcing Judith Butler's (1990) argument that gender identity is socially constructed rather than innate. San does not conform to the idealized feminine role of a nurturing or passive woman; instead, she actively resists human civilization and fights to protect the forest.

Lady Eboshi and the Power of Industry: A Challenge to Patriarchal Norms

On the other end of the spectrum, Lady Eboshi wields power through industry and human progress. She is a rare example of a female leader in an industrial setting, defying conventional gender roles. Her authority is evident in her direct challenge to the male-dominated world of warlords and samurai, as demonstrated in her confident assertion:

"I'm going to show you how to kill a god." (1/52/03)

This statement encapsulates Lady Eboshi's ambition and belief in human superiority over nature. Rather than accepting the gods of the forest as sacred, she sees them as obstacles to industrial expansion. This aligns with ecofeminist critique of patriarchal domination, where industrial progress is often framed as a battle against nature (Warren, 1997). Lady Eboshi, however, complicates this reading unlike typical patriarchal figures, she uses her power to uplift marginalized women and the disabled, offering them protection and social status within Iron Town.

Despite her destruction of the environment, Lady Eboshi is not portrayed as a villain. She is a revolutionary figure who provides agency to outcasts. When she states: *Look around. These are the women I rescued. Who else would take them in but me?* It highlights her defiance against a patriarchal system that typically subjugates women. Unlike San, who aligns herself with nature, Lady Eboshi challenges oppression from within the system by reclaiming industry as a space where women can wield power. Judith Butler's gender theory helps explain this dynamic—Eboshi's leadership role is an example of how power is not biologically assigned to men but rather performed

and socially constructed (Butler, 1990). By taking on traditionally masculine traits of leadership, strategy, and technological mastery, she blurs gender distinctions and asserts female authority in an industrialized world.

The Tension Between Nature and Industry: Towards a Balance

The core conflict between San and Lady Eboshi represents the struggle between nature and industry, but neither woman is depicted as entirely right or wrong. Ashitaka, serving as the bridge between both worlds, famously declares:

"Why can't the humans and the forest live together? Can't you see there's no future if we keep fighting?" (1/20/45)

This plea for coexistence aligns with deep ecology (Naess, 2008), which argues for a balance between human progress and ecological preservation. San and Eboshi ultimately symbolize the need for this balance—San acknowledges her humanity despite her alliance with nature, and Lady Eboshi, after witnessing the destruction caused by her own actions, expresses willingness to rebuild Iron Town in a more sustainable way.

By the film's conclusion, neither nature nor industry emerges victorious, reinforcing Miyazaki's belief that rigid dichotomies must be reconciled. The movie's final moments, when San tells Ashitaka:

"You mean so much to me, Ashitaka. But I can't forgive humans for what they've done." (2/07/41)

demonstrate that while peace is possible, the wounds inflicted by industry on nature are not easily healed. This resonates with modern environmental struggles, where the push for sustainability often conflicts with economic growth. Ecofeminism offers a final insight: the future depends on recognizing the interconnectedness of human and ecological well-being, rather than viewing them as opposing forces. (Shiva, 1988) The ending of the movie, indicates both two female leaders reconcile in their own ways. San stays unforgiving the humans for what they have done by staying in the forest to

protect its nature and creatures, while Eboshi finally understands that she needs to rebuild a better town. Looking deeper to San's unforgiveness of human's mistakes is to understand as a leader she makes strong boundaries for protecting the nature as it is no chance for other options of not taking sustainability choice for ecological well-being. While San makes this boundaries, she also recognizes the needs of women to be empowered to fit the modern society. As this ending offers the potential of mutual recognition of ecological well-being from both female leaders, *Princess Mononoke* (1997) breaks the dichotomy of "nature vs human" and the needs for co-existence.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This study examined the portrayal of female power in *Princess Mononoke* (1997) through the characters of San and Lady Eboshi. The findings show that both women serve as central figures in the conflict between nature and industry, representing two contrasting yet equally powerful forces. San embodies the spiritual and protective power of nature, dedicating herself to defending the forest and its inhabitants from human exploitation. In contrast, Lady Eboshi represents human progress, industrialization, and social reform, using her leadership to create opportunities for marginalized people and strengthen Iron Town.

The analysis reveals that neither character is portrayed as entirely heroic nor villainous. Instead, the film presents them as complex and morally ambiguous leaders whose actions are driven by different responsibilities and values. Through these portrayals, *Princess Mononoke* (1997) challenges traditional gender stereotypes by positioning women as influential decision-makers who shape the course of social and environmental conflicts.

Furthermore, the dynamic between San and Lady Eboshi highlights the necessity of balance between humanity and the natural world. The ending of the film demonstrates a shift toward mutual recognition and understanding. While San remains committed to protecting the forest, Lady Eboshi acknowledges the importance of respecting nature and expresses her intention to rebuild Iron Town in a better and more sustainable way. This resolution suggests that coexistence between human development and environmental preservation is possible when both sides recognize their interconnectedness and responsibilities. Therefore, *Princess Mononoke* presents female power not only as a source of conflict but also as a means of achieving harmony and sustainable coexistence.

Suggestion

This research suggests that audiences and scholars should recognize the movie's message regarding the importance of balancing human progress with environmental sustainability. The portrayals of San and Lady Eboshi demonstrate that lasting solutions to social and ecological conflicts require cooperation, mutual respect, and a willingness to seek balance rather than domination. These themes remain highly relevant in

contemporary discussions about environmental conservation and sustainable development.

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