

## **An Ecofeminism Analysis of Axie Oh's Novel "The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea"**

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### **Abstract**

This study pursues the analysis of chosen work novel by Axie Oh novel *The Girl Who Fell Beneath The Sea* through the lens of ecofeminism. The crux of ecofeminism is the relationship between nature and women. The research applies descriptive qualitative method the novel serves as the primary data and the secondary data are works similar to the theory of ecofeminism. Data were collected through library technique, including close reading and textual selection, and analyzed through Moleong in the form of words, sentences, dialogues, and thematic interpretation. This research serve a fresh perspective on sacrifice, agency, and ecological symbolism, offering new insights into how modern narratives articulate the relationship between women, patriarchy, and the environment. As the results it finds that the novel reflect women and nature are deeply interconnected from an ecofeminism perspective. Through three main aspects, the novel illustrates this connection through themes of women's interaction with nature, patriarchal dominance, and the exploitation of women, which together highlight how human proximity to nature is represented.

**Keywords:** *exploitation, ecofeminism, women, sacrifice, power*

### **Introduction**

Sacrifice is an act that manifests a high level of love and selflessness, by placing the interests of others above one's own interest (Herlina, 2017). Throughout history, sacrifice has been deeply embedded in various stories that have been compiled into myths, folklore, and literary works. Sacrifice often appears as a narrative device to resolve a problem, crisis, restore balance, or appease a higher power (Daryaei, 2021).

When we face a problem, there often has to be a sacrifice in order to solve it. In solving a problem, there will certainly be options, options where we have to choose one over the other as a solution to the problem at hand. As Wijayanti (2020) said on her website, in every choice there will always be something that must be sacrificed. When making a choice to solve a problem, we choose one direction and leave the other behind. This means that there are things that must be "sacrificed" in order for that choice to be realized. Sometimes, sacrifice is necessary to achieve greater and more important goals, such as the common good or long-term goals (Reinert, 2015).

Sacrifice based on its purpose in (Herlina, 2017) can be divided into several types, such as sacrifice to family, sacrifice to society, sacrifice to nation and state, sacrifice for truth, and sacrifice to religion. In these categories, sacrifice is often seen as a noble form of love and affection as well as a form of responsibility. However, when viewed further in cultural traditions, the depiction of sacrifice is often imbalanced, with women more often placed as the ones who must be willing to be sacrificed.

In some cultural traditions, women are disproportionately depicted as the ones who can be sacrificed, whether in the form of literal offerings to the gods, symbolic acts of

devotion, or the sacrifice of personal freedom for the sake of the survival of the family and community. Being a woman is often synonymous with the demand to willingly give up one's rights, desires, and even safety for the sake of others. This pattern shows that sacrifice is not only seen as a noble value, but also as a social burden that is specifically attached to the identity of women. Thus, the discourse on sacrifice often forms a social construct that places women as central figures and victims of a value system that demands unlimited devotion.

Much stories in myths and literary works reinforce this image. For example, in Greek mythology, there is a classic story about the daughter of a commander named Iphigenia who was sacrificed by her father, Agamemnon. When the Greek fleet was about to sail to Troy, they were stuck in Aulis because the wind would not blow. The soothsayer Calchas said that the goddess Artemis was angry and would only provide wind if Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter, Iphigenia. In the tragic version, Agamemnon ultimately sacrificed Iphigenia on the altar to appease Artemis. After that, the wind blew again and the army was able to depart for Troy (Parker, 2019). Such narratives not only reflect deep-rooted patriarchal structures, but also legitimize the idea that women's bodies and lives can be sacrificed for the collective good or male ambitions. In this way, myths and traditions play a role in reproducing the view that the sacrifice of women is something natural, legitimate, even praiseworthy.

Women's sacrifice in myths and cultural traditions are resonates with ecofeminist perspectives. Women who are sacrificed are closely connected to ecofeminism arguments, which claim that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are interconnected systems rooted in patriarchal ideology (D'Eaubonne, 1974) and (Shiva, 1991). Ecofeminism highlights how women are often symbolically associated to the natural world, both being subjected to domination, control, and sacrifice. As explained by Tong and Botts (2024), ecofeminism provide a framework to analyzing how gender based power dynamics intersect with ecological and cultural narratives, especially in texts where female figures are tied to nature and spirituality.

The novel written by Axie Oh that Publish in 2022 by Feiwel and Friends Publisher in NewYork, (*The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea*) can be read as a reinterpretation of ecofeminism ideas. The story begins with the sacrifice of a young girl, Mina, to the Sea God in order to save her village from never ending storms. In the novel, Mina replaces her brother's girlfriend, Shim Cheong, who was originally chosen as the offering to appease the deity to the Sea God. Mina's actions embodies both sacrifice and resistance to patriarchal expectations. Through Mina's journey, the novel not only explores questions of duty, love, and destiny, but also tells a story that challenges the traditional portrayal of women as passive victims of sacrifice. Furthermore, Mina's decision to offer herself and replacing Shim Cheong highlights women's courage, resilience, and the possibility of restructuring the relationship between humans and the spiritual world.

Therefore, this study uses an ecofeminist lens to analyze how the novel *The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea* critiques the logic of patriarchy in sacrifice and reimagines women's roles in myth inspired narratives. In many myths, women are often placed as the last line of defense, which illustrates women's central role in the struggle. They are not only involved in passive or symbolic actions, but are faced with a decisive position in defending their land and nature (Iswan Afandi, 2025). In (Mulyati et al., 2024), women and nature are intertwined, and this connection gives women a significant role in environmental conflicts, particularly in their ability to recover after conflict situations, commonly referred to as resilience. This reaffirms the role of women in ecofeminism as

protectors of nature who are also actively involved in the fight against external forces that destroy the environment.

Thus, this study aims to reveal how this novel articulates an alternative vision in which women and nature are not objects of domination, but rather sources of empowerment and harmony. The significance of this research lies in its attempt to expand the discussion of ecofeminism into the realm of contemporary literature, while highlighting how works of fiction can serve as a medium for social and cultural criticism. Ecofeminism emphasises environmental justice to a far greater degree than deep ecology (Garrard, 2004). In addition, this study also opens up space for new readings that position women not merely as figures of sacrifice, but as transformative agents capable of changing the power relations between humans, nature, and spirituality.

## **Method**

This research is used the type of descriptive qualitative. The type of research employed in this study is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive qualitative research emphasizes data acquisition in the form of words, expressions, and textual interpretation rather than numerical data (Rusandi & Muhammad Rusli, 2021). The main focus of this research is to explore the relationship between women and nature through the lens of ecofeminism as reflected in Axie Oh's novel (*The Girl Who Fell Beneath The Sea*). This research applies a literary ecofeminist approach, which is concerned with the interrelation between woman and nature environment.

### **Data and Source of the data**

The data sources were divided into two parts; primary and secondary data. The primary or main source is *The Girl Who Fell Beneath The Sea* by Axie Oh, published in 2022 by Feiwel and Friends Publisher, as an American publishing company in Broadway, New York in form of paragraphs, sentences, and words from the novel. Secondary data include scholarly articles, journals, and books on ecofeminism and literary criticism.

### **Method and Technique of Collecting Data**

The data collection technique in this study uses a library technique that is carried out by searching, collecting, and studying books, articles, or research related to the subject and object of the research. The data collection techniques carried out by the researcher are as follows:

- a. Researcher reads Axie Oh novel " *The Girl Who Fell Beneath The Sea*" thoroughly.
- b. Researcher classifies the collected data then marks data that related to ecofeminism, which in this case is sacrifice of women and deconstruction.
- c. c. Researcher analyze, compare, and consolidate the results of the research as a whole so that it becomes a complete and complete unit.

### **Method of Analyzing Data**

The analysis was conducted in the form of words, sentences, dialogues, and interpretations of the issues being examined. According to Moleong (2021), qualitative research aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as actions, motivations, perceptions, and behavior in a comprehensive manner using descriptive accounts expressed through words and language in natural settings, and employing various natural methods. To interpret the data, the researcher applied theories from Val Plumwood's ecofeminist critique of dualism and Vandana Shiva's ecological

feminism, examining how Mina's actions resist patriarchal traditions and reframe human-nature relations. The data were analyzed thematically, with particular attention to the representation of sacrifice, female agency, and the symbolic role of nature.

## Results

The findings of this study reveal that Axie Oh's *The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea* offers a nuanced rearticulation of ecofeminism concerns, particularly in relation to sacrifice, female agency, and the interconnectedness of women and nature. At the outset, the novel situates women as sacrificial victims of patriarchy, echoing a pattern observed across myths and traditions in which women's bodies are offered to appease natural or divine forces. These following are the results of data research in the novel *The Girl Who Fell Beneath The Sea* by Axie Oh that related to ecofeminism.

### Women as Sacrificial Victims of Patriarchy

*"When the overwordly storms rise from the East Sea, lightning breaking the sky and waters ripping up the shore, a bride is chosen and given to the Sea God."*

*"Every year, the storm begin, and every year a girl is brought to the sea". (pg.1)*

The tradition of female sacrifice in the novel *The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea* is evident from the beginning of the story. This quote confirms how women are positioned as objects of sacrifice. In the world of literature, women are often portrayed as victims, where's in male-dominant societies, women and nature exist as inferior and subordinate beings (Ikea, 2024). In the context of ecofeminism, this practice reflects the relationship between patriarchy and nature, both of which are controlled through the logic of domination. As explained by Vandana Shiva (1991), patriarchal domination is rooted in social constructs that place women and nature as resources that can be exploited for the benefit of the community or men.

The figure of women in literature that portrays women as victims, apart from in the story *The Girl Who Fell Beneath The Sea*, can be compared to other Indonesian literary works. How Pramoedya Ananta Toer, in *Yang Sudah Hilang* (What Has Been Lost), depicts three women (Mrs. Kin, Bunda, and Babu) who remain in the domestic sphere of women. Not to be forgotten is WS Rendra, who depicts Maria Zaitun in his poem *Nyanyian Angsa* (Song of the Swan), a portrait of a woman who is forced into prostitution and contracts syphilis (Sumartini et al., 2025). Similar narratives show how women's bodies are reduced to a medium for resolving external crises. Thus, Axie Oh's novel not only displays a tradition of fiction, but also reflects a universal pattern in which women are victimized in patriarchal systems.

### Women as Agents of Resistance and Choice

*"I may not be the chosen bride, but is it too much to hope that a girl like me, a girl with nothing but herself to give-could be the Sea God's true bride." (pg.19-20).*

The quote above indicates that Mina did not passively accept her fate, but consciously offered herself to replace Shim Cheong. Mina rejected the patriarchal logic that only placed women as instruments of sacrifice. Although women were initially placed as victims, the character of Mina presented a different narrative. The theme of feminism is not new in the world of literature. Feminist literary criticism was born out of theoretical thinking. This theoretical thinking covers four aspects of social literary theory, as explained by (Lestari, 2015). Social literary theory connects at least four aspects of

theoretical thinking, namely social thinking, literature, history, and philosophical thinking, which are interrelated. The term “women's emancipation,” pioneered by RA Kartini, stems from history, which has always evolved with the changing times. However, this has not changed the image of women in the world of literature, which has always portrayed women as victims. It is undoubtable that this is due to the oppression and injustice suffered by women. Especially when male writers talk about women, they often express their contempt for women. In modernist projects, feminists are still committed to applying science to achieve a better future. This is in line with the statement by Ritzer & Smart (Ritzer & Smart, 2021) in (Kurniawati et al., 2018).

On the other hand, this novel highlights the difference between women who are chosen by local customs and the elders, and women who choose themselves to become Sea Brides:

*“Some brides are chosen, but then there are those who choose to be brides.”  
(pg.49).*

This statement serve a critique of society's perspective, which often fails to acknowledge the presence of female behind their choices. Society tends to frame women merely as objects shaped by social structures and tradition, while in reality the is awareness and courage that inform their decisions. Their perspective alight with Saleem et al., (2021), who emphasize that ecofeminism not only highlights women's suffering under patriarchal oppression and environmental exploitation but also underscore their role as agents of social and spiritual transformation.

Thus, Mina represents a paradigm shift; from women as passive objects to women as active subjects who possess the power to choose and act. Mina's decision shows that women do not only carry out culturally inherited roles, but can also negotiate new meanings of sacrifice. This attitude challenges the old stereotype that women's sacrifice is merely an obligation or destiny that must be accepted. Instead, Mina shows that sacrifice can be a form of courage, independence, and even resistance against a restrictive system. At this point, in ecofeminism readings, women are not only in a space of suffering, but also in a space of change, where they are able to reshape the relationship between themselves, society, and nature.

### **Beauty is a Curse under Patriarchal Ecofeminism Lens**

*“Shim Cheon might be the most beautiful girl in the village, but her face is a curse.” said Mina.  
(pg.3)*

The quote above emphasizes that beauty is not a gift, but rather a wound that binds women to the role of sacrifice. Shim Cheong's beauty led to her being chosen as the Sea God's bride, making her body and face symbols that could be “sacrificed” to appease nature's wrath and protect her village. From an ecofeminist perspective, this reflects how patriarchy commodifies women's bodies, just as nature is exploited because it is considered beautiful and useful.

Val Plumwood, in her writing *Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism* (1991), explains that patriarchal rationalism constructs a dualism that separates masculine–feminine, culture–nature, and reason–emotion. Within this framework, women and nature are placed on the inferior side, associated with aesthetics, emotions, and the body, and then positioned as objects that can be used (Cahya, 2024). This view is clearly evident in the character of Shim Cheong, where beauty which is usually associated with aesthetic value and femininity does not bring freedom, but rather traps her in sacrifice. Accordingly, this quotation illustrates

how, within the patriarchal system, beauty serves as both a tool of control and a means of subjugating women, in line with Plumwood's critique of rationalism that normalizes the subordination of women and nature.

### **Nature's Emotional Connection**

In addition to highlighting women, the novel also shows the emotional side of nature through its depiction of the Sea God:

*"There's such loneliness there and a deep, unbearable sadness ...  
Is it you that makes the world cry, or the world that makes you cry?"  
(pg.18).*

Nature in here is not only positioned as a fierce, destructive force that must be conquered, but also as an entity capable of feeling loneliness, sadness, and vulnerability. In this way, Axie Oh shifts the conventional perception of nature, which is often seen only as a utilitarian object for humans. Within the framework of ecofeminism, this depiction can be understood as a form of *resacralization of nature*, an effort to reframe nature as a living being that has intrinsic value rather than reducing it to an object of exploitation (Husniah et al., 2019). The Sea God embodies the idea that natural world possesses subjectivity and emotional depth, which resonates with the ecofeminist to recognize the interconnectedness of all life.

The emotional bond between Mina and the Sea God shows that human relationships with nature can be built on empathy, not domination. The sadness felt by the Sea God reflects the suffering of nature that is often ignored by humans. When Mina tries to understand the Sea God's emotional wounds, she is actually learning to recognize the suffering of nature itself. Like Val Plumwood (2003), she disagrees with the dichotomy that regards nature as the ruled and humans as the rulers. This novel supports this view by describing that the suffering of nature is in line with the suffering of humans. In this perspective, the restoration of humans and nature cannot be done separately, but must be done through a reciprocal relationship based on recognition and empathy, not unilateral domination.

### **Symbols of Women and Nature**

The novel also uses cosmological symbols to reinforce women's connection to nature. One example is a statement from Mina's grandmother:

*"My grandmother always said that although the sun brings warmth and light, the symbol of our great emperor, it is the moon that guard women and the night. She is the mother that protect us all." (pg.241).*

Here, the moon is not simply portrayed as a celestial body, but as a maternal and protective force intimately tied to the feminine. By describing the moon as "*the mother that protect us all*," the narrative situates femininity as a cosmic principle of care, guardianship, and resilience. This maternal imagery emphasizes the moon's role as a nurturer who safeguards women during moments of vulnerability, especially in the darkness of night, which is traditionally associated with danger and uncertainty. Instead of reinforcing fear, the moon becomes a beacon of safety and spiritual presence, suggesting that femininity itself contains the power of protection.

This symbolism elevates the moon as a sacred guardian, positioning femininity in alignment with natural and cosmic forces. It resists the patriarchal reduction of women and the cosmos into passive or secondary roles, reminding the reader of a long-standing yet often suppressed spiritual connection between women and the universe

In addition to the moon, the novel also symbolizes the Red Thread (pg.11), which emphasizes humanity's connection to the universe through destiny and love. In (Meliala & Sembiring, 2024), the Red Thread theory has the meaning of destiny and the bond between humans. This theory developed in East Asia and originated from Chinese mythology and culture. In one myth, the Red Thread of Destiny also binds a person to their soulmate. Some people believe that this thread binds us to someone we like or someone we desire. Since birth, it is believed that each person has their own red thread of fate that binds us to our soulmate. In this perspective, these symbols break down the dichotomy of culture–nature and male–female, because they show a complementary connection, not a dominant one.

When combined, these two symbols; the moon as a protective mother and the red thread as a bond of destiny, it constructs a cosmology that challenges patriarchal dualism. In other words, these symbols oppose the logic of dualism, such as culture versus nature or men versus women, by offering a vision of balance and complementarity. Rather than placing women and nature as subordinate, the novel imagines them as centers of cosmic harmony, continuity, and sustainability. This alternative cosmology not only disrupts narratives that marginalize women and suppress their connection to the universe, but also proposes a vision of life in which femininity, ecology, and the universe are deeply and inseparably intertwined.

## Conclusion

The complexity of the issues in this study focuses on the relationship between women and the underwater world, which are closely related. Nature has potential resources that can be utilized, which, according to ecofeminism, is similar to the nature of women. The relationship between women and nature shows that both can support each other in their survival. The discussion of ecofeminism explains that women and nature have similarities and a reciprocal relationship, which is reflected in research showing that women and nature have an emotional closeness, and women are expected to be supporters and drivers of nature conservation. The essence of the ecofeminism movement is to address environmental issues from a feminist perspective, eliminating the destruction of nature and exploitation by irresponsible humans in their use of nature, which is then linked to the position of women.

The results of the study explain the form of ecofeminism in the novel *The Girl Who Fell Beneath The Sea* by Axie Oh classifying the data into five sub-theme of discussion in the study. Researchers provide an overview of ecofeminism contained in the Axie Oh's through five main aspects: women portrayed as sacrificial victims of patriarchy, women represented as agents of resistance and choice, beauty framed as a curse under patriarchal systems, the suffering of nature connected with human acts, and symbols that emphasize the relationship between women and nature.

This research is limited to the study of ecofeminism with the object of study from Korean novels that tell stories about women and nature in the novel *The Girl Who Fell Beneath The Sea* by Axie Oh. Therefore, Researcher expect that further study will be able to give a more thorough explanation and include more extensive and thorough findings when examining ecofeminism in the story's content and other areas.

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