

# WOMAN AND THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE IN *ERIN BROCKOVICH* FILM

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## Abstrak

Studi ini menganalisa pergerakan lingkungan untuk melestarikan alam oleh seorang ekofeminis dalam film berjudul *Erin Brockovich* yang disutradarai oleh Steven Soderbergh (2000). Studi ini focus pada karakter utama dalam film yang merepresentasikan dirinya sebagai seorang ekofeminis. Studi ini menggunakan teori ekofeminisme dari Vandana Shiva (1998) dan memadukannya dengan teori sinematografi dari Heiderich. Selain itu, studi ini juga didukung oleh teori relasi kuasa dari Foucault sebagai teori pendukungnya. Mengidentifikasi keterkaitan antara perempuan dan alam yang ditunjukkan oleh tindakan Erin Brockovich dalam film tersebut merupakan tujuan dari studi ini. Studi ini mengungkap dampak pelestarian alam yang dilakukan Erin Brockovich akibat responnya terhadap kerusakan alam yang dipicu oleh relasi kuasa antar institusi, pemerintah, dan instansi yang diwakili oleh dominasi pria. Penelitian ini menggunakan argumentasi Shiva tentang hubungan unsur-unsur tersebut dalam film. Sumber studi ini diambil dari film dan naskah film. Hasil studi ini memberikan kesimpulan bahwa alam sangat menderita akibat eksploitasi, perusakan yang dilakukan oleh pemerintah, Lembaga, dan beberapa instansi. Mereka dianggap sebagai reaksi berantai patriarki.

**Kata Kunci:** ekofeminisme, pengrusakan, konservasi, relasi kekuasaan.

## Abstract

This study analyzed the environmental movement to preserve the nature by an ecofeminist in a movie entitled *Erin Brockovich* directed by Steven Soderbergh (2000). The study focused on the main character of the film, who represented herself as an ecofeminist. This study used the theory of ecofeminism by Vandana Shiva (1998) and mixed it with the cinematography theory by Heiderich. Moreover, this study also accommodated the power relation theory by Foucault as the supporting theory. Identifying the connectedness between woman and nature shown by Erin Brockovich's actions in the film is the purpose of this study. The research revealed the impacts of natural conservation carried out by Erin Brockovich due to her response to natural destruction, which is triggered by a relation of power among institutions, government, and agencies that are represented by male domination. The research utilized Shiva's arguments on the relationship of those elements in the movie. The sources of the study were taken from the film and the script of the film. The result of this study provided a conclusion that nature is in great suffer due to the exploitation, destruction, vandalism which were done by government, institutions, and some agencies. They are considered to be patriarchy chain reaction.

**Keywords:** ecofeminism, destruction, conservation, power relation.

## INTRODUCTION

There is a relationship between nature and humans, particularly women. Essentially, women and nature are linked to each other and continually have feelings to conserve nature. They would do anything against nature destruction. This relationship was found in ecofeminism theory. According to Vandana Shiva, ecofeminists claimed that the fact that women and nature are the roots of life helps them interact more tightly with

nature. However, they would say that this connection is broader than the similarity of patriarchy, and it is possible to restore this link between women and the environment in a way that empowers them. Furthermore, for ecofeminists, the supremacy of women and nature is founded on a system of beliefs, ideas, and values, as well as the hierarchical position of women and nature under males. As a result, women have a special relationship with nature and play a vital role in ending both nature's abuse and their own servitude. This was a significant

indicator of the women's movement and its direct impact on environmental deterioration.

*Erin Brockovich* is one of the films which can be applied with ecofeminism theory. This film was directed by Steven Soderbergh in 2000 purposed to show that women and nature are connected to each other, as shown by Erin Brockovich against people who destroyed the natural environment, the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E). They polluted the water with a poison named hexavalent chromium, which also very dangerous. And it gave many diseases to Hinkley citizens who consumed the water. The film is based on a true story that was written by Susannah Grant. Furthermore, Erin Brockovich is the name of the main character in the film. This film showed about Erin as a single mother of three children who suffered all told aspects of her life; divorces, jobless, deal with social problems. Her role as an ecofeminist could be seen from her effort to preserve the nature. Therefore, *Erin Brockovich* won many awards.

Ecofeminism is a theory about environmental movements by women to protect nature along with their femininity. In another definition, ecofeminism is a belief system, a social movement, and a method. According to Shiva, include women as experts and information sources to accomplish the feminine concept of *Prakriti*, or awareness of nature as a living, interconnected force. Due to the introduction of *Prakriti*, which emphasizes diversity as a uniting factor, the purity of life in nature is realized through creativity, activity, and productivity. The interconnectedness of all beings demands an ethical manner of life that honors nature rather than conquering it via exploitation and dominance (Garrity-Bond, 2018). The term of ecofeminism appeared in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne. In her article, *Le féminisme ou la mort* (Feminism or Death), at intervals that the French feminist examined the environmental costs of development and known women due to the topics of modification. Moreover, the French feminist explored the environmental costs of growth and acknowledged women as the objects of the transformation. From then on, ecofeminism has permeated both feminism and ecology-related deliberations as a debate.

According to Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, the political changes toward us with ecofeminism. The first assumption is that, in the capitalist patriarchal society, the material resources of women and nature are structurally intertwined. How both financial and environmental crises are sex-gendered is clarified by ecofeminists. This philosophy of ecofeminism also deals with the relation and wholeness of theory and practice.

They immediately recognized the relationship between patriarchal aggression against women, other people, and nature, as well as the need to act to prevent ecological disaster and atomic annihilation.

Conservation refers to any behavior aimed at protecting and caring for the natural environment (Saunders, 2003). Conservation is saving nature for its own sake, and a movement centered on delivering advantages to people is not conservation (Soulé, 2013). Measures that improve the odds of habitat and species surviving in the wild are termed as conservation (William et. al, 2011). Ecofeminists pointed out how the systems that oppress women are also the structures that limit the fertility of wetlands. It is also maintained that if the twin exploitations of women and nature are not identified and addressed, both will deteriorate further (Hallen, 2000). Resource-intensive enterprises wreak havoc on the environment not only by consuming large amounts of raw materials but also by polluting the air, water, and soil. The waste produced by industry or manufacturing was one of the sources of environmental degradation. It has the potential to be disastrous for the environment and ecosystems, including communities, marine biota, soil, and water.

Power is ubiquitous, as Foucault stated, and everyone is virtually always active in some manner in attempting to influence the actions and the results of others around them. The manner in which power relations are manifested within a society, culture, or discourse and everyone might always be involved. The issue of power is important to his ideas about society, individuals groups, and institutions. According to Karen J. Warren, societies are shaped by patriarchal ideals, beliefs, education, and conduct, which justifies dominance and subordination relationships, as well as male oppression of women.

There are several scholars who There are several scholars who researchers who discussed the same issue and the same story. Those previous studies such as *The Consequences of Disobeying the Patriarchal Values in Niki Caro's North Country and Steven Soderbergh's Erin Brockovich* by Puspa, J. and Handojo, P.F (2013). The purpose of this research is to learn the consequences that Josey Aimes and Erin Brockovich endure as a result of their defiance of patriarchal values in *North Country* and *Erin Brockovich*, respectively. For the theme is patriarchal values. And the key results are patriarchal values, female roles, consequences, domestic creatures.

*On Power in the Workplace: An Analysis of the Speech Acts of Control and of Complimenting in Film Productions The Proposal and Erin Brockovich* by

Katarzyna Grzyb (2011). This research focused on language, gender, and power. The goal of this research is to show that the findings of this study are outdated and that women are now fully prepared to take managerial roles in enterprises, both in terms of education and language skills. The writer used the Speech Acts theory by Austin, Searle, Bach and Hamish, Ballmer and Brennenstuhl. Afterward, the method of this study used the data set and data processing procedure. The key results of this study are speech acts, gender, language. And *Maleficent As An Ecofeminist Protagonist: A Holistic Vision* by Palak Arora and Manshi (2020). A holistic vision is the theme of this study. This study purposed to analyze Maleficent as an ecofeminist protagonist.

The difference between those previous studies above to this study is from the topics and the focuses of the study. Meanwhile, this study focused on the main character of the film, Erin Brockovich, who preserved the nature. This study would concentrate on the connectedness between woman and nature shown by Erin Brockovich's actions and revealed the impacts of natural conservation due to her response to natural destruction which is triggered by a relation of power. This study would be analyzed and discussed in detail using the theory of ecofeminism by Vandana Shiva, and accommodated the power relation theory by Foucault.

## METHOD

The study used the theory of ecofeminism by Vandana Shiva (1998) and accommodated the power relation theory by Foucault as the supporting theory. Ecofeminism, according to Shiva, is about the interconnection and fullness of thought and practice. It emphasizes every living thing's unique strength and integrity. Power is a set of actions on potential actions; it incites, inspires, seduces, simplifies or complicates, constrains or forbids completely. Where is power, there is always someone who resists it. The researcher used those theories to analyze the connectedness between woman and nature shown by the action of Erin Brockovich and revealed the impacts of natural conservation carried by Erin Brockovich due to her response to natural destruction.

In addition to using the theory of ecofeminism and power relation, this research used the approach of cinematography by Heiderich. According to Heiderich, the cinematography is the art of visual narrative. "Film is a visual medium, and the best shot films are ones where you can tell what's going on without hearing any of the dialogue." This research focused on mise en scene such

as the camera shot technique, lighting, angle of each scene in the film.

The data sources of this study were taken from *Erin Brockovich* film and the script of the film. The data sources were from the selected dialogue and the screenshot of the film. The analysis would be analyzed based on the actions, the personalities, the statements, and conditions. There were several steps to analyzed the data. The first step was watching *Erin Brockovich* film several times to understand the issues. The next step was reading the script and marking the several scenes which are related to the issues of this study. Moreover, marking the conversations and describing the issues and the screenshot of the scenes in the discussion so the readers can understand how the scenes are connected to the theme of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. The connectedness between woman and nature by the actions of Erin Brockovich

According to Vandana Shiva, women and nature are linked. There were several actions that Erin Brockovich did to protect the nature. From those actions, it showed that Erin Brockovich, as a woman, was connected to nature. Shiva stated that both women and nature reproduce life. Shiva also said that women not only naturally produce and reproduce life but also through their societal duty of providing sustenance. Based on Shiva's statement above, Erin Brockovich became a bridge to link the nature and humans by gathering the victims to sue the PG&E company and asked them to sign a petition so the company would be responsible and provided compensation. Erin Brockovich's actions were her efforts against the PG&E company that polluted the water with a poison named hexavalent chromium in Hinkley.

Erin: "Roy, do I know how you feel. First time I heard that number, I said you got to be kidding me. Forty God damn percent?"



**Figure 1. 1** Erin Brockovich, 2000  
(58:54 - 59:40)

In figure 1.1, the scene above used a medium shot which showed how closed Erin to the camera when having a conversation with the victims in Irvings's house. Along with conserving the water which got poisoned, Erin Brockovich could not be separated from her femininity which is supported the theory of ecofeminism. Shiva asserted that ecofeminist's experience indicated that ecology and feminism could join in the recovery of the feminine principle, which could intellectually and politically reconstruct and transform maldevelopment (Shiva, 1980). Shiva continued that women are more concerned, close, and friendly to nature because of the similarities in personality and character of women and nature. In the film, Erin Brockovich showed her personality as a woman. It could be seen from the bold statement that Erin said she knew how Roy and others' feeling. Erin showed her caring and empathy to both Hinkley citizens who were the victims, and the water contamination in Hinkley. It was not only to the natural environment, but she cared to the humans too.



**Figure 1.2.** Erin Brockovich, 2000  
( 1:43:44 - 1:45:55 )

According to figure 1.2, the camera used a medium long shot which the shot between the long and close shot. The dominant in figure 1.2 is the character of Erin. This shot focused on Erin Brockovich and it blurred the citizens who were in front of her. This shot made Erin's emotion looked neutral. This scene depicted another Erin's effort to protect the nature by gathering the citizens to sign a petition. Erin Brockovich had the power to make the meeting as the ecofeminism theory said that women are thought to have contributed to environmental protection activities. Women's attitudes toward them have a significant impact in attempts to protect the environment. Shiva addressed environmental issues and catastrophes, concluding that there is only one solution for people to save the environment and nature: reclaiming feminine ideals and values such as respect for nature (Hosseinnezhed, 2017). By showing her caring, patience, and empathy, Erin managed to make the

citizens decided to come to the meeting even though she was rejected by them.

According to Jokar and Mirdamadi (2010), they concluded that there are substantial correlations between environmental awareness, environmental interest, environmental attitudes, involvement, the usage of instructional videos, and environmental protective behaviors. Erin had the points above that she had aware of natural destruction and ready to make environmental protection. She even came directly to collect more evidence to the location in Hinkley.

*Erin:* "Dr. Frankel, it's Erin Brockovich. Tell me something if I wanna find as much evidence of hexavalent chromium contamination as I possibly can, what should I do?"

*Dr. Frankel:* "Well, what you have to remember is, if you have hexavalent chromium in the water, you have it in anything that lived off the water."

*Dr. Frankel:* "What I'd do is start a collection. Anything that existed in water, on water, under water... anything that had water flow over or under it."



**Figure 1.3.** Erin Brockovich, 2000  
(1:06:23 - 1:07:00)



**Figure 1.4.** Erin Brockovich, 2000  
(1:06:23 - 1:07:00)

The color of the scenes in figure 1.3 and the dead frog portrayed that the water is contaminated by poison in Hinkley. That's showing the environmental degradation. In figure 1.3, the shot that the cameraman used in this scene was an extreme close-up shot. The camera zoomed to show Erin's hand picked up the dead frog. And figure 1.4, the cameraman used a long shot, which showed Erin Brockovich's entire body lied on the

ground to take the contaminated water. Both of scenes used the high angle which took above the objects. Touching the dead frog and the contaminated water is a form of interaction with the nature that Erin did. She did not care whether she touched them or not. In her environmental protective behavior, it's obviously attracted the Hinkley citizens attention.

Environmental destruction in *Erin Brockovich* is water contamination. According to Shiva, the Community Environmental Bill of Rights contains key aspects of water democracy, including rights to clean industry; to safety from harmful exposure; to prevention, to knowledge, to participation, to protection and enforcement, to compensation, and cleanup. As all Erin Brockovich's efforts to protect the water and the citizens, she was brave to take arbitration to get the compensation for the victims, although all of them were against it because there was no jury in arbitration. Those actions have supported the theory of ecofeminism and it proved that Erin Brockovich has linked to the nature.

## 2. The impacts of conservation that Erin Brockovich received

It was not easy for Erin Brockovich to conserved the environmental destruction in Hinkley. Erin Brockovich's response to the natural destruction is triggered by a relation of power among institutions, government, and agencies which are represented by male domination. The impacts such as subordination and woman oppression by men. They are considered to be patriarchy chain reaction. According to Shiva, subordinate societies, disadvantaged groups, and women become victims of environmental harm and must face the weight of the suffering in the power relationship. Furthermore, this case is supported by Foucault's argument about the power relation theory that he stated power is everywhere, in individuals, group, institute, or state.

### 2.1. Subordination

One of the impacts that Erin Brockovich received is subordination triggered by a relation of power among an institution by male. Based on Vandana Shiva, masculine groups, primarily patriarchal society, dominate worldwide science and technology advancement. The subordination had done by male in *Erin Brockovich* could be seen in the scene below:

Mr. Baum: "250, 000 is all I'm authorized to offer."

Mr. Baum: "Mr. Masry, before you go off on some crusade, you might want to remember

who it is you're dealing with here. PG&E is a 28- billion dollar corporation."



**Figure 2.1.** Erin Brockovich, 2000  
( 50:30 - 52:20 )

The scene in figure 2.1. used an over-the-shoulder shot which showed the angle behind Mr. Baum's shoulder. It also showed clearly Mr. Baum subordinated Erin Brockovich and Ed Masry by saying that PG&E is a big company that they had power so they could avoid the problem and took the benefit, yet it was unfair for Erin and Ed as the bolded statement above. That was supported by Shiva's statement, in the environmental discourse, there is an unequal power relationship, and there is a dominance relation model that is identical to the women's discourse. She also stated that ecofeminism is to achieve justice for future generations, which she believed must be based on a subsistence economics perspective. As the statement from Shiva above, Erin Brockovich wanted to achieve justice for the victims by negotiating to got the proper compensation with Mr. Baum, the representative of the PG&E company.

Mr. Corbin: "... we would enter into binding arbitration-- judge, no jury-- with a settlement to be between 50 and 400 million dollars."

Mr. Corbin: " The plaintiffs have to agree to it unanimously. And they're barred from ever discussing their settlement with anyone."



**Figure 2.2.** Erin Brockovich, 2000  
( 1:34:30 - 1:38:00 )



The cameraman used long shot in figure 2.2. The key light on the scene above is Erin and Ed's side since they used light by the sun behind them. In other hand, the fill light is on the right side. It showed the entire conference room with Erin Brockovich, Ed Marsy, Theresa, and Mr. Corbin, the PG&E's lawyer, while talked about the agreement that the PG&E made. In the scene showed that there is a distance between the camera and the actors. It could make the viewer know about the situation on the scene.

According to Foucault, domination relationships are asymmetrical power relationships in which subordinate people have limited movement and limited options. Thus, Erin Brockovich's action was limited by the PG&E that could only took arbitration for this case so Erin Brockovich could won and got the compensation for the victims. In addition to his theory, power originates from the structuring of interactions, which reproduces itself over time until the appearance of a system with strategic goals and organization emerges. Based on the scene above, PG&E company knew that they would be lost a jury trial, so they planned a strategy and organized it with Erin Brockovich and Ed Marsy with the victims' agreement by taking arbitration and gave 50-400 million dollars to the victims.

## 2.2. Woman oppression

Beside subordination, Erin Brockovich was oppressed by her partner in her workplace, Ed Masry. This impact was also triggered by power relations. Oppression is defined as a form of injustice perpetrated against others by individuals or groups. According to Johnson, it is a system of social inequality in which one group is positioned to control and profit from the exploitation and subjection. From the scene in the film, as a woman who could not be separated from her feminine nature, Erin Brockovich also got oppressive treatment from Ed, her partner whose position is higher than Erin. As seen in the scene:

Ed: "You're emotional. You're erratic. You say any God damn thing that comes into your head."



**Figure 2.3.** Erin Brockovich, 2000  
(1:42:37 - 1:42:52)

Woman oppression could be seen in the figure 2.3. The cameraman used a close-up shot, which showed Ed's face was closed. This shot made the viewer could see the emotion from Ed and Erin. As what Ed's told to Erin, he underestimated Erin's capability. He thought that she could not win the case because of her personality by telling her that she was emotional and erratic. Women are portrayed as weak, sensitive, and emotional (Tyson and Johnson, 1998). Vandana Shiva stated that ecofeminism is a continuation of feminism's effort to end male tyranny over women, as well as the struggle to end male dominance over nature. She continued that ecofeminism is a movement that examines the link between environmental exploitation and degradation and women's oppression and subordination. From those cases, men believed they were in a better position than women, resulting in an oppressive culture. Women are often compared to nature and have been subordinated by a patriarchal culture.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis, this study revealed the connectedness between woman and nature in *Erin Brockovich* film through Erin Brockovich's actions and personality as the ecofeminism theory said that women and nature are intertwined to each other because of the similarities in personality and character of women and nature. Beside that, this study found that the film used different camera shots as the film technique. Furthermore, doing natural conservation made Erin Brockovich got some impacts which was triggered by a relation of power among the institution, government, and agencies which were represented by male domination. They are considered to be patriarchy chain reaction. By virtue of the way women have traditionally been oppressed, a bond between women and nature. The result of this study showed that nature is in great suffer due to the exploitation, destruction, vandalism which were done by government, institutions, and some agencies. This study proved that women and nature are connected.

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