



Ecological Crisis in Popular Culture Construction: Natural Representation in Bong Joon-Ho's Film "OKJA"



Karimah Kinanti Putri^{*1} , Rahma Hayati Harahap² 

^{1,2}Sociology, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, 20115, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: rahmanshiny12@usu.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 24 April 2025

Revised: 15 May 2025

Accepted: 20 May 2025

Available online: 27 May 2025

E-ISSN: 2830-5388

P-ISSN: 2541-6642

How to cite:

Karimah Kinanti Putri, R. H. (2025). Ecological Crisis in Popular Culture Construction: Natural Representation in Bong Joon-Ho's Film "OKJA". Journal of Sumatera Sociological Indicators, 4(1), 358-367.

ABSTRACT

The ecological crisis has become one of the most pressing global issues, triggered by the uncontrolled exploitation of nature due to capitalism and industrialization. This research aims to analyze the representation of the ecological crisis in popular culture through the film *Okja* (2017) by Bong Joon-ho. This film depicts the relationship between humans, nature, and animals in the context of modern capitalism, which often uses nature as a commodity for economic gain. Using a conflict theory approach in ecological sociology, this research highlights how capitalism damages ecosystems and exacerbates social injustice. In *Okja*, nature and animals are depicted as victims of exploitation by a capitalist system that disregards ecological welfare. The film conveys a range of ecological messages, including critiques of industrial agriculture, greenwashing practices, animal commodification, and environmental injustice. These messages reflect real-world ecological and social conditions. This research uses a content analysis method to explore how the film communicates these themes. The results show that popular culture, especially films, has great potential in increasing public awareness of environmental issues. *Okja* not only offers criticism of capitalism and the exploitation of nature but also acts as an advocacy medium capable of inspiring social change in how society views and treats the environment.

Keyword: Ecological Crisis, Popular Culture, *Okja*

ABSTRAK

Krisis ekologis telah menjadi salah satu isu global paling mendesak, dipicu oleh eksploitasi alam yang tak terkendali akibat kapitalisme dan industrialisasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis representasi krisis ekologis dalam budaya populer melalui film *Okja* (2017) karya Bong Joon-ho. Film ini menggambarkan hubungan antara manusia, alam, dan hewan dalam konteks kapitalisme modern, yang sering kali memanfaatkan alam sebagai komoditas demi keuntungan ekonomi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan teori konflik dalam sosiologi ekologi, penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana kapitalisme tidak hanya merusak ekosistem, tetapi juga memperparah ketidakadilan sosial. Dalam film *Okja*, alam dan hewan digambarkan sebagai korban eksploitasi sistem kapitalis yang tidak peduli terhadap kesejahteraan ekologis. Konflik antara kepentingan ekonomi dan pelestarian alam dalam film ini mencerminkan realitas yang dihadapi masyarakat modern. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode analisis isi (content analysis) untuk menggali bagaimana film tersebut menyampaikan pesan-pesan ekologis yang relevan dengan kondisi nyata. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa budaya populer, khususnya film, memiliki potensi besar dalam meningkatkan kesadaran publik terhadap isu lingkungan. *Okja* tidak hanya menawarkan kritik terhadap kapitalisme dan eksploitasi alam, tetapi juga berperan sebagai media advokasi yang mampu menginspirasi perubahan sosial dalam cara masyarakat memandang dan memperlakukan lingkungan.

Keyword: Krisis Ekologis, Budaya Populer, *Okja*



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International.

<https://doi.org/10.32734/jssi.v4i1.20613>

1. Introduction

In recent years, the environmental crisis has become one of the urgent, complex, and critical issues to discuss. The complexity of this problem is fascinating in offering an ecocentric paradigm as a long-term solution to the sustainability of the environment. The ecological crisis has become an urgent global issue and impacts human life and ecosystems worldwide. From climate change to pollution, deforestation, and species extinction, this environmental degradation affects nature and triggers social, economic, and political changes.

The presence of technology as a derivative of the advancement of science engineering nature in the interest of fulfilling human life and technological development has led to globalization and hyperconnectedness. It does not organize socio-cultural structures but creates economic disparities and ecological crises (Yulianto, 2023). In this situation, popular culture, including film, was influential in spreading awareness of environmental threats. Through various visual and narrative representations, film can be a tool for articulating ecological crises and shaping public perception of these issues. The connection between ecological problems that threaten human existence is increasingly evident. Other sources include pollution, global warming, acid rain, population explosion, land subsidence or erosion, landslides, floods, malnutrition, germs, and viruses, New diseases of seawater contamination. Nuclear radiation. Garbage explosion. Soil pollution (Amirullah, 2015). Several factors are the reason why this ecological crisis is increasingly a critical issue. The exploitation of Natural Resource Usage is one reason. Excessive and uncontrollable use of natural resources, including liquid waste from industries such as pharmaceutical companies, can damage the climate and ecosystems of seas and rivers. The destruction of forests and other natural environments is also one of the main factors that caused the ecological crisis to become an increasingly critical issue, and we need to find a solution immediately.

This ecological crisis cannot be viewed simply as a natural phenomenon without human intervention, as humans have a very close relationship with their environment. Human survival is inseparable from the balance and dynamics of the surrounding nature. Every aspect of human life, from basic needs to well-being, depends on how the environment develops. If the environment grows and develops optimally, humans will experience positive effects that affect their quality of life, such as clean air, healthy water, and abundant natural resources.

In contrast, when disturbances occur in the environmental balance, whether in nature, climate change, or pollution, the effects are limited to humans and all other living things, such as animals and plants. These disorders can trigger imbalances in ecosystems that have a broader impact, causing changes in the food chain, weather patterns, and even the overall sustainability of life on Earth. Thus, ecological crises cannot be separated from human involvement, as humans play a role in maintaining or undermining environmental harmony.

The existence of the paradigm of Anthropocentrism also increases and becomes a factor in environmental crises. Anthropocentrism considers humans to be separate and superior to nature. It holds that human life has intrinsic value. At the same time, other entities, such as animals, plants, mineral resources, and others, are resources that can be used best for the benefit of humanity (Al Munir, 2023). Anthropocentrism is a highly instrumentalistic environmental ethical paradigm because human and natural relationships are observed only in instrumental relationships. Nature is regarded only as a tool for human benefit. This paradigm is also selfish because it only puts human interests first. The interests of other living things, as well as nature as a whole, are not a moral consideration of humans, even if they get moral consideration just because they relate to human interests.

Human behavior holds a vital role in efforts to preserve the environment, particularly amid the growing ecological crises occurring both globally and locally. Actions like excessive use of natural resources, pollution, and deforestation have caused major harm to the environment. As a result, gaining insight into human behavior and identifying strategies to encourage environmentally friendly actions is essential (Ilal Ilham & Aldri Oktanedi, 2024). In this context, popular culture and media play a significant role in shaping public awareness and attitudes toward environmental issues. Films, television shows, social media campaigns, and even music often serve as powerful platforms for communicating environmental messages and encouraging pro-environmental behavior. For example, documentaries like *Our Planet* and *Before the Flood*, or animated films such as *Wall-E*, have raised awareness about climate change,

sustainability, and the consequences of environmental neglect. These cultural products not only inform audiences but also appeal to emotions and values, which can influence social norms and inspire behavioral change on a broad scale.

Popular culture (also known as pop culture or popular culture) is the totality of ideas, perspectives, behaviors, memes, imagery, and other phenomena chosen by informal consensus within the mainstream of culture and the cultural landscape. It is particularly popular with Western culture in the early to mid-20th century and the global mainstream that emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Popular culture is often associated with the term 'mass culture,' which is mass-produced and mass-consumed through mass media. Mass culture was born because of digitized technology, similar to the present era (Aizatil, 2021). Popular culture develops in various forms we can quickly encounter daily, such as music, movies, clothing, and food. The spread of this culture is in line with the continued development of information technology. Popular culture, such as the film "Okja," has a close relationship in representing the ecological crisis as it serves as a medium that can convey complex messages on environmental issues to a broad audience in an exciting and easy-to-understand manner.

Throughout the history of cinema, two major themes have marked important turning points. The first is the use of film as a means of propaganda, which has played a crucial role in achieving certain political or social objectives. This stems from the belief that film possesses powerful qualities—such as broad reach, realistic representation, emotional appeal, and widespread popularity. The second theme involves the rise of various artistic film movements and the development of social documentary cinema. Although these movements tend to cater to a smaller audience and emphasize realism, both still relate to the broader function of film as a medium of propaganda (Angga, 2022)

The use of symbolism in films enables audiences to emotionally engage with and grasp a glimpse of the war experience, helping shape their understanding of the related issues. Symbols are essential in expressing complex ideas and creating emotional resonance with viewers. *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), a film deeply embedded with symbolic elements, portrays the intricacies of war through its narrative. The film's director, Isao Takahata, is recognized for his skillful use of symbolism to explore profound themes. The symbols in the film evoke both hope and despair, illustrating the emotional duality of wartime experiences (Angelina & Suprajitno, 2025).

Environmental films are those that focus primarily on the natural world—whether through themes involving plants, animals, landscapes, or natural phenomena like climate. These films can be fictional or non-fictional, feature human or non-human characters, and may even take place beyond Earth. They encompass a wide range of formats, from big-budget movies and nature documentaries to short online videos. Typically, these films extend beyond human experiences, offering viewers a glimpse into environments and life forms they might not normally encounter, as seen in the BBC's *Planet Earth* (2006) series. Regardless of their form, environmental films generally share a narrative structure—that is, they tell stories or include storytelling elements, presenting a series of connected events that unfold in a dynamic world shaped by conflict, change, and resolution through deliberate actions by characters (Braddock & Dillard, 2016, p. 447). While the reasons for making such films may differ, many are created with the goal of influencing how audiences think about or respond to environmental issues (McCormack et al., 2021)

This analysis highlights the powerful role of films as tools of propaganda and mass influence, where symbolism is often used to critique war realities and draw attention to the human impact, as seen also in films like *Okja*. Bong Joon-ho's film "Okja" (2017) shows the relationship between humans, animals, and nature in the context of industrialization and capitalism. The film focuses on Mija, a young girl who tries to save a giant genetically mutated pig named "Okja," which has come to the attention of the multinational company Miranda Corporation, which wants to produce it as a source of mass food. The film's main themes are the conflict between capitalism, environmental exploitation, and individual concern for nature. "Okja" describes nature and animals as objects of human exploitation, especially in global economic systems that often ignore ecological well-being to gain material benefits.

The film also shows modern society's moral dilemma when choosing between environmental responsibility and excessive consumption. With the genre raised on important issues, "Okja" effectively reflects how ecological crises are in a form readily accessible to the broader public. The film explicitly

represents nature as a victim of capitalism-driven exploitation and environmental destruction. The film depicts how a greedy capitalist system that does not pay attention to ecological balance can damage nature through several themes and visual elements highlighting the relationship between humans, animals, and the environment.

Through powerful stories and relatable characters, "Okja" constructed narratives critical of how capitalism exploited nature and living things. The narrative serves as entertainment, and the study also aims to analyze how "Okja" represents the ecological crisis and human relations with nature in the context of popular culture. This study will explore how the film articulates environmental issues and their impact on social awareness of the ecological crisis. With this approach, a deeper understanding of the role of film as a tool for education and advocacy in the face of global environmental challenges can be found.

2. Method

This study used a qualitative approach with content analysis to examine the representation of nature in the film *Okja* (2017) as part of the popular culture construction related to the ecological crisis. An important part of a research report is the data analysis section. In both quantitative and qualitative research, this section involves organizing and processing data in a systematic and scientific manner. The analysis technique is a method aimed at transforming data into new information. The purpose of conducting data analysis is also to obtain solutions or answers to the problems addressed in the research (Rozali, 2022). This study will analyze how the film represents ecological issues in the context of capitalism and its impact on nature and animals. Analysis content is a research technique that systematically analyzes text or other communication content. This includes measuring and evaluating the presence of certain words, phrases, or concepts in the text to conclude the delivered message, as well as the audience and cultural context in which the text appears (Sitasari, 2022).

Holsti defines content analysis as a method for drawing conclusions by examining specific features of a message in an objective, systematic, and generalizable way. Being *objective* means that the process follows established procedures or guidelines, so that if another researcher applies the same method, they would likely reach the same conclusion. A *systematic* approach involves setting categories or identifying content based on consistently applied rules, ensuring that data selection and coding are done in a way that minimizes bias (Sitasari, 2022). Content analysis is especially appropriate for a journal that discusses popular culture and the environment because it allows researchers to systematically examine media texts—such as films, advertisements, or social media content—to uncover underlying messages, symbols, or patterns related to environmental issues. This method helps reveal how cultural products shape public perception and values about the environment in a measurable and replicable way.

3. Result and Discussion

Okja as a representation of the world's natural conditions exploited by technology

"Okja" became a representation of nature and animals in today's life by raising essential issues concerning animal exploitation, environmental destruction, and how modern capitalism uses nature for profit without considering its effects. Many of the events depicted in the film "Okja" related to the environment also occur in real life. Although the film uses fictitious animals such as "super pigs," the issues it raises about environmental destruction, animal exploitation, and large corporate practices are relevant to reality.

In the movie, we see Mija, who lives in a beautiful mountainous South Korea with her elderly grandfather and their giant "super pig" Okja. The family was told to raise Okja by the agrochemical company Mirando Corporation as part of a project to sell new super pig species to solve world hunger. When the company decided to take Okja back for a major launch in New York, Mija decided to save her friend. As such, he was entangled with corporate marketing plots and animal rights activists. The chase takes Mija from Korea to New York and Mirando Corporation's hideous animal slaughterhouse. Eventually, Mija buys back Okja with her dowry—a golden pig given to her by her grandfather. He rescued Okja and a super piglet, returning them to Korea's beautiful mountain slopes.

Although the film appears light entertainment at first glance, some crucial moments convey an ironic optimism about modern technology. In some scenes, messages about how technology is expected to solve various global problems illustrate people's tendency to rely on scientific solutions without considering ethical and long-term environmental impacts. The film begins with a presentation by CEO Lucy Mirando, who represents a large company that promises new solutions through technological innovation. In the presentation, Lucy revealed her company's new core values: "Environment and Life." and a polished media campaign filled with cheerful imagery and promises of sustainability, the corporation embodies a technologically progressive and socially responsible brand. However, this facade is quickly dismantled as the film reveals the harsh realities behind the scenes—where the super pigs are not treated as innovative solutions, but as commodified, genetically engineered animals bred solely for mass slaughter. This sharp contrast between the company's marketing and its exploitative practices exposes the superficiality of its technological optimism, suggesting that the so-called innovations are driven not by genuine concern for the environment or humanity, but by the pursuit of profit. This duplicity highlights the film's critique of how modern technology, when guided by corporate interests, often serves to mask ecological harm and ethical violations behind a veil of progress.

In contrast, their actions were far from the principles of sustainability. The company's greenwashing is evident through the use of too broad and unspecific jargon as if the company was more concerned with positive images in the public eye than actually holding a commitment to environmental sustainability. In one of the subsequent presentations, the audience was introduced to the core argument that biotechnology could be the primary solution to address the growing scarcity of natural resources. Greenwashing, as described by Becker-Olsen and Potucek, refers as the act of misleadingly promoting an organization's environmental initiatives or investing more in marketing a green image than in genuinely adopting environmentally responsible practices. Essentially, greenwashing involves spotlighting a single positive effort or a small part of operations while concealing broader environmentally harmful activities, thereby presenting a false image of sustainability. In the fashion industry, this is evident when brands claim to be eco-friendly by making minor adjustments—like improving only a small portion of their product lines, using downcycled rather than fully recyclable materials, or launching take-back programs that encourage continued consumption without meaningful impact. Other forms of greenwashing include promoting synthetic fibers as sustainable or using recycled PET as a supposed solution, despite limited environmental benefits. Eco-labels and certifications are also frequently used to bolster consumer trust, acting as symbols of quality, value, and a sustainable lifestyle. Research on consumer behavior indicates that these labels strongly influence perceptions, linking sustainability claims to product desirability and brand credibility (Adamkiewicz et al., 2022)

This phenomenon is central to the critique presented in *Okja*, where the fictional Mirando Corporation employs greenwashing to maintain a façade of sustainability and ethical innovation. The company publicly promotes its genetically engineered super pigs as a solution to global food insecurity, cloaked in a narrative of environmental stewardship. Through corporate slogans like "Environment and Life" and carefully crafted public events, Mirando constructs an image of itself as a green, responsible enterprise. However, as the film reveals, this narrative is a deliberate cover-up for unethical practices including mass animal exploitation, industrialized slaughter, and ecological harm—all driven by profit motives. The film exposes how greenwashing can function as a powerful corporate tool to mislead the public, suppress criticism, and enable continued exploitation under the guise of sustainability. By paralleling Mirando's actions with real-world industries—especially those in fashion, food production, and biotechnology—*Okja* critiques how corporations manipulate environmental discourse to maintain consumer loyalty while avoiding meaningful reform. The film emphasizes the ethical and ecological consequences of this deception, challenging viewers to look beyond surface-level claims and question the integrity of "sustainable" branding. Just as the fashion industry may use recycled materials or eco-labels to mask broader unsustainable practices, Mirando uses technological spectacle and green rhetoric to justify the commodification of life and the destruction of ecosystems. This layered critique highlights the urgency of ecological awareness in a media-driven world and reinforces the role of popular culture, such as film, in exposing and resisting corporate greenwashing.

Genetic manipulation technology, featured in developing new organisms such as "super pigs," is promoted as a scientific breakthrough that can solve urgent global environmental problems, such as ever-increasing food needs amid the resource crisis. However, behind this optimistic narrative, the film implicitly shows how the technology initially presented as a solution could deepen the existing problems. Genetic

manipulation and the production of new living things, such as "super pigs," were not only promoted as an effort to address environmental problems but also as a pledge of revolution in the global food industry. The film depicts how a process initiated from a genetic laboratory can develop into mass production involving Okja's large-scale animal slaughterhouse, a "super pig" developed through genetic manipulation and used as a commodity for mass markets worldwide. The animals no longer live as living things but as products that can be produced and sold. Capitalism is described here as a system that reduces nature and living things into commodities that only serve to meet market needs and maximize profits.

In *Okja*, Bong Joon-ho draws powerful parallels between the fictional "super pigs" and real-world issues of animal exploitation and environmental destruction caused by industrial agricultural practices. The film centers on the Mirando Corporation, which develops genetically modified super pigs under the guise of solving world hunger, mirroring real-world practices in the meat industry such as factory farming, genetic engineering, and mass slaughter for commercial gain. These animals are treated as mere commodities, echoing how livestock in concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) are raised in confined, inhumane conditions to maximize efficiency and profit. The film also exposes greenwashing, as Mirando markets its operations as environmentally friendly while engaging in unsustainable practices like overbreeding, excessive resource use, and large-scale waste production that lead to water pollution, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Furthermore, the industrial meat production chain depicted—spanning from rural farms to automated slaughterhouses—reflects how global agribusiness marginalizes small-scale farmers and rural communities, such as Mija's, in favor of profit-driven mass production. By showing the brutal realities behind corporate food systems and the ethical implications of genetic manipulation, *Okja* critiques the environmental and moral cost of industrial agriculture and urges viewers to question their role within it.

Although "Okja" is a fictional film, many of the elements depicted are directly related to the natural environmental problems we face today. From animal and natural exploitation by large corporations to greenwashing, environmental crises caused by the food industry, and the role of environmental activism, the film reflects the global reality related to human relations with the environment and animals. As in the film, real life suggests that while technology and innovation are often considered solutions, more fundamental human actions, such as changes in consumption patterns and cessation of natural exploitation, are needed to prevent more comprehensive environmental destruction.

Analysis of Okja Film (2017) by using Conflict Theory in the glasses of Ecological Sociology

Conflict theory is an antithesis of functional, structural theory, in which functional, structural theory strongly emphasizes regularity in society. Conflict theory sees conflict and conflict within the social system. Conflict theory sees that it will not always be in order in society. The evidence in any society must have experienced conflicts or tensions. Then, conflict theory also saw dominance, cohesion, and power in society. Conflict theory also speaks of different authorities. These different authorities resulted in superordination and subordination. The difference between superordination and subordination can lead to conflict due to differences in interests (Tualeka, 2017). One of the best-known figures in his theory of conflict is Karl Marx. Karl Marx argued that class conflict has taken as the central point of society. Conflicts between capitalists and proletarians are central to society. All sorts of conflicts assume a form of increased consolidation against chaos. Capitalists have classified the population as only a handful of people. The bourgeoisie have created the productive power of (Tualeka, 2017).

In the perspective of conflict theory, nature is only an object that humans can exploit. Nature is a commodity, and people are the subject. In ecological sociology, conflict theory sees that human beings who are subject can exploit nature, which is both an object and a human being, always prioritize short-term plans and accept and prioritize economic growth that is highly profit-oriented or profit-oriented. Conflict theory also sees humans as a paradigm of Anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism is the idea that places humans at the center of the universe and its contents. In ethical contexts, Anthropocentrism is the belief that humans have intrinsic value, whereas other creatures have only instrumental value in serving humans.

The fundamental beliefs or viewpoints of some Western philosophies that are anthropocentric or human-centered, where they give intrinsic value only to humans or give more excellent intrinsic value to humans than other creatures, result in the protection or promotion only of human interests. Humans are at the expense of other creatures (Al Munir, 2023). The Anthropocene understands that there will be events that are

ready to shape human relationships with technology. In fact, from political and corporate discourse to popular culture, the Anthropocene is envisioned as a stage for several "Anthropocene technologies." Indeed, because these geophysical problems are numerous and very complex, the technology envisioned to handle itself is diverse and very complex (Nielsen & Andersen, 2022).

Conflict theory in the sociology of human ecology sees how conflicts between groups affect the use of resources and the environment. In this context, conflicts can arise from competition for limited resources, often exacerbating social and environmental injustice. The primary source of power conflict in environmental issues is often the root of disputes over the mastery of natural resources and their use, which can affect various social groups. This conflict often arises when there is injustice in the distribution of resources, which can cause tension between groups with power and those without power. For example, groups with access to natural resources often take advantage of their position to optimize economic profit. In contrast, more vulnerable groups are often marginalized depending on those resources for everyday life.

In the film "Okja," we can see that Mirando Corporation acts as a group that manages or has the power to access resources. Using technology, Mirando manipulated the public with a greenwashing method that ultimately harmed vulnerable groups, namely Mija and her grandfather and other farmers. This conflict is increasingly complex when economic interests conflict with environmental conservation efforts. One of the most potent elements of criticism of capitalism is the use of greenwashing by the Mirando Corporation. The company promotes self-care for the environment and well-being through green and sustainable technology. In contrast, they care only for profit and a positive image in the public eye. It illustrates how capitalist companies often use sustainability rhetoric to justify practices that damage ecology and exploit natural resources. In the case of "Okja," Mirando Corporation's policy of encouraging their economic growth by creating super pigs can cause adverse effects on the environment, threatening the sustainability of natural resources. Although their initial "goals" were to make these super pigs a helper to the resource crisis, they were instead a source of destruction and destruction of the environment and resources.

When applied policies and practices tend to benefit groups with power, more vulnerable groups, such as Mija and her grandfather, are often forced to accept the negative consequences of environmental damage, including losing access to vital resources necessary for survival. In the context of the film "Okja," Okja herself also belongs to a vulnerable group, and Okja is already part of Mija and her grandfather's life. He did not know or realize that he was merely an object of the greed of the capitalists of the Mirando Corporation. Furthermore, the conflict in "Okja" is also closely related to social and ecological injustice issues. The impact of environmental degradation is usually more severe for groups that do not have sufficient power or resources to protect themselves from the damage caused, like Mija, who can only surrender when Okja is taken by Mirando to be used as an object in their company's greenwashing activities. This injustice created a dangerous cycle in which more vulnerable groups were further marginalized while those with power and resources, such as Mirando, continued to benefit from environmental exploitation.

The film also deals with the topic of resistance to capitalism. There was a conflict between environmental and animal activists, Animal Liberation Front (ALF). Activist groups in the film attempting to save Okja and expose Mirando Corporation's lies are symbolic of its resistance to capitalism and its exploitative system. ALF represents the real-world movement of environmental and animal rights against global capitalism and its environmental exploitation. The film voices the importance of resistance to destructive capitalist structures, albeit through sometimes radical means. The film also hints that the legal system and government are often ineffective in challenging large, damaging corporate practices. Capitalism in the film operates with almost unstoppable power, placing gains above laws or ethical values. It reflects criticism of real-world legal systems that often fail to control the power of large corporations in natural exploitation.

Therefore, it is crucial to understand that power conflicts in environmental issues are not just resource disputes but also reflect a broader dynamic between power, rights, and justice. Efforts to resolve this conflict require an approach that considers social and ecological justice, in which all voices, especially from marginalized groups, are heard and recognized in decision-making related to the use of natural resources. Thus, resolving the conflict can lead to a more sustainable and inclusive solution for all members of society. Just like in the movie "Okja," that power conflict is a significant issue in environmental issues. Okja is part of the "nature" that Mirando objects to exploit.

Okja Film Becomes Environmental Conservation Advocate

Movies such as "Okja" play a role in creating awareness of ecological crises that are often not seen in everyday life. Popular culture can raise environmental issues and communicate them to audiences who may need to be exposed to scientific literature or reports related to environmental crises. In this regard, the film is an effective communication tool to convey the impact of environmental destruction caused by global capitalism and natural exploitation. Through powerful stories and relatable characters, "Okja" constructed narratives critical of how capitalism exploited nature and living things. The narrative serves as entertainment and conveys a moral message about the importance of maintaining ecological balance and rejecting the unsustainable use of natural resources.

In "Okja," super-pig animals such as Okja become natural symbols treated as commodities by the capitalist system. This intelligent and affectionate visualization of animals evokes empathy, making the audience better understand and feel the effects of animal and environmental exploitation. Nature is described as a vulnerable victim in a system concerned only with economic benefits, a powerful metaphor for a broader ecological problem. Popular culture uses visual and narrative elements to elicit emotional responses from audiences. For example, Okja's suffering in the film manifests the widespread suffering of nature under the pressure of capitalist industries. By engaging the audience's emotions, popular culture can motivate social action or at least create a deeper understanding of the ecological crisis.

The "Okja" not only pointed to environmental destruction but also criticized the global capitalist system as a significant cause of the ecological crisis. Capitalism is a system that views nature solely as a resource that can be exploited for maximum benefit, regardless of the long-term impact on ecosystems. The film helps audiences understand how capitalism operates on a global scale and its impact on the environment. The film highlights the role of large corporations, such as Mirando Corporation, which represents actual companies involved in environmental destruction through agricultural industrialization, pollution, and exploitation of natural resources. Through corporate characters in popular culture, audiences can see how policies that prioritize profits influence human, natural, and economic relationships.

It serves as entertainment and an educational tool that conveys important messages about human responsibility to nature. Popular culture can inspire social change subtly but effectively, triggering conversations in public spaces and encouraging individuals to consider their action's impact on the environment. Popular culture can encourage real action among its audiences. "Okja" inspired audiences to rethink their consumption choices, especially regarding meat and animal products, and to question the livestock industry's impact on the environment. By showing animal suffering and environmental destruction, the film encourages audiences to become more environmentally conscious and join the environmental advocacy movement.

Ecological crises often involve various scientific, economic, and political factors. Movies such as "Okja" help simplify these issues through easy-to-understand stories and exciting visuals, allowing a broader audience to understand the deep-rooted problems surrounding environmental exploitation. In addition to criticizing the problem, popular culture has also frequently raised debate about solutions that can be taken to overcome the ecological crisis. The film "Okja" opened room for discussion on the role of technology, economic policy, and personal responsibility in preserving the environment. It combines elements of popular culture with serious debate about the future of the Earth and its ecosystem.

The film also shows that the ecological crisis affects not only nature but also weaker and more vulnerable groups. In the film, Mija, a young girl from rural South Korea, represents an individual often harmed by global capitalist forces. The film shows how social inequality and economic exploitation contribute to environmental destruction and how ecological crises worsen social injustice. Popular culture such as "Okja" places the issue of natural rights parallel to human rights, reminding us that the ecological crisis is also humanitarian. The film encourages us to consider the global impact of environmental exploitation on underprivileged populations and how societies should work together to protect nature for future sustainability.

Popular culture generally plays an essential role in representing ecological crises in a creative and accessible way to the broader community. It can frame environmental issues in strong emotional and visual forms, create awareness, spark debate, and even motivate collective action against environmental protection. As influential mass media, films such as "Okja" serve not only as entertainment but also as environmental advocacy and social change tools.

4. Conclusion

The journal examines the ecological crisis within the framework of popular culture through the representation of nature in Bong Joon-ho's film *Okja*. This study pays particular attention to how capitalism and industrialization have resulted in the exploitation of nature and animals, as well as the role played by popular culture, especially film, as a tool for education and advocacy aimed at raising public awareness of critical environmental issues. The film *Okja* features a deep conflict between capitalism's principles and efforts to preserve nature. In the film, animals and the environment are seen not only as part of the ecosystem but also as commodities used for economic gain. This underscores how profit-oriented economic systems often ignore the intrinsic value of life and ecological sustainability. By presenting a moving narrative, "Okja" touches the audience's emotions and encourages them to consider the impact of economic interest-driven actions on living things and the environment.

Furthermore, the journal examines the relationship between ecological crisis and social injustice and the approach of conflict theory in ecological sociology. These studies show that the harmful effects of environmental crises are often uneven, with more vulnerable groups—such as local communities and animals—bearing a heavier burden. In this context, "Okja" is a reflective mirror to the reality of this injustice, in which powerless individuals and communities are often marginalized and have no voice in decision-making that impacts their environment. In conclusion, popular culture, such as the movie "Okja," has significant potential as a tool for advocating environmental preservation. By delivering a solid and touching message, the film educates audiences on ecological issues and encourages social action and collective awareness about the importance of preserving the environment. Through deep and emotional representations of the relationship between humans, animals, and nature, "Okja" challenges us to question the values underlying the capitalist system and inspire more sustainable changes in how we interact with the world. Thus, the journal seeks to broaden its understanding of the role of popular culture in shaping our views on environmental issues and striving for ecological justice.

References

- Adamkiewicz, J., Kochańska, E., Adamkiewicz, I., & Łukasik, R. M. (2022). Greenwashing and sustainable fashion industry. *Current Opinion in Green and Sustainable Chemistry*, 38, 100710. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogsc.2022.100710>
- Aizatil, L. (2021). *Budaya Populer dan Budaya Massa*. Forum Diskusi IAIN Kediri.
- Al Munir, M. I. (2023). Corak Paradigma Etika Lingkungan: Antroposentrisme, Biosentrisme dan Ekosentrisme. *JURNAL YAQZHAN: Analisis Filsafat, Agama Dan Kemanusiaan*, 9(1), 19. <https://doi.org/10.24235/jy.v9i1.10000>
- Amirullah. (2015). Krisis Ekologi: Problematika Sains Modern. *Lentera*, 17(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21093/lj.v17i1.425>
- Angelina, J., & Suprajitno, S. (2025). Symbolic Representation of War in Grave of the Fireflies (1988). *K@ta Kita*, 13(1), 68–75. <https://doi.org/10.9744/katakita.13.1.68-75>
- Angga, D. M. P. (2022). Analisis Isi Film "The Platform." *Journal of Digital Communication and Design (JDCODE)*, 1(2), 127–136.
- Ilal Ilham, & Aldri Oktanedi. (2024). The Dynamics of Human Environmental Behaviour: A Behavioural Approach to Nature Conservation Efforts. *Journal of Sumatera Sociological Indicators*, 3(2), 308–317.

<https://doi.org/10.32734/jssi.v3i2.18715>

- McCormack, C. M., K. Martin, J., & Williams, K. J. H. (2021). The full story: Understanding how films affect environmental change through the lens of narrative persuasion. *People and Nature*, 3(6), 1193–1204. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10259>
- Nielsen, E. B., & Andersen, G. (2022). The Cruel Optimism of Anthropocene Technologies: Suspicion and Fascination of Technology in *Okja* , *What Happened to Monday* , and *Geostorm*. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 55(4), 735–754. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.13148>
- Rozali, Y. A. (2022). Penggunaan Analisis Konten Dan Analisis Tematik. *Penggunaan Analisis Konten Dan Analisis Tematik Forum Ilmiah*, 19, 68.
- Sitasari, N. W. (2022). Mengenal Analisa Konten Dan Analisa Tematik Dalam Penelitian Kualitatif. *Forum Ilmiah*, 19, 77.
- Tualeka, M. W. N. (2017). Teori Konflik Sosiologi Klasik Dan Modern. *Al-Hikmah : Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, 3(1), 32–48.
- Yulianto, J. (2023). *Lebih Empati pada Ancaman Krisis Ekologi*.