

MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Lights, Camera, Activism: A Qualitative Content Analysis of
Women's Representation in Environmental Justice Movements
through Documentary Film

verfasst von | submitted by
Katharina Göricke B.Sc.

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science (MSc)

Wien | Vienna, 2026

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 855

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Geography: Global Change and
Sustainability

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Dipl.-Geogr. Dr. Simon Alexander Bunchuay-Peth

I Abstract (Kurzfassung)

English

Women have long been at the forefront of environmental justice movements – a reality increasingly reflected in their presence in modern media formats. The question of how such women are represented, however, remains more open. This study explores patterns in the representation of women in environmental justice activism through considering documentary films as a specific form of media.

In a comparative approach between film analysis and consideration of current literature, this thesis explores what contributes to shaping representations of women and considers power dynamics and intersectional identities that underpin these portrayals. Ultimately, it demonstrates that documentary films simultaneously reproduce and unsettle hegemonic, patriarchal and capitalist structures. While many films marginalise or narratively erase women, or confine them to caring roles, female activists are also depicted as strategic, confrontational political actors whose resistance destabilises gendered expectations and environmental injustices. The thesis argues that ecofeminist and environmental justice transformations depend on intersectional, locally grounded and diverse media portrayals of female activists. Narrative centrality, the mobility or locality of filmic and narrative gaze, and degrees of geographic abstraction shape if and which women appear, how deeply intersectional identities are incorporated, and whose experiences are rendered legible. While clear patterns in the representation of women emerged, they also showed to be multidimensional, eclectic and never mutually exclusive – contrasted only by the strong sidelining or entire absence of female activists in film narratives.

This research wishes to contribute to discussions on gender representation, activist visibility, and the role of documentary storytelling in constructing gendered narratives of environmental justice.

Deutsch

Frauen stehen seit langem an der Spitze von aktivistischen Bewegungen für Umweltgerechtigkeit – eine Tatsache, die sich auch in ihrer zunehmenden Präsenz in modernen Medienformaten widerspiegelt. Wie solche Frauen dargestellt werden, bleibt jedoch offener. Im Rahmen dieser Masterarbeit wird deshalb die Repräsentation von Frauen im Umweltgerechtigkeitsaktivismus anhand von Dokumentarfilmen als ein ausgewähltes Medienformat untersucht.

In einem vergleichenden Ansatz zwischen Filmanalyse und dem Zuzug aktueller Literatur untersucht die Studie, was zur Gestaltung der Repräsentation von Aktivistinnen beiträgt, und beachtet hierbei auch Machtdynamiken und intersektionale Identitäten, die diesen Darstellungen zugrunde liegen. Letztendlich zeigt sich, dass Dokumentarfilme hegemoniale, patriarchalische und kapitalistische Strukturen gleichzeitig reproduzieren und ins Wanken bringen. Während viele Filme Frauen marginalisieren, sie narrativ ausblenden oder sie auf Care- und Community-Arbeit und Rollen rundum ihre Beziehungen zu Mitmenschen beschränken, werden weibliche Aktivistinnen auch als strategische, konfrontative politische Akteurinnen dargestellt, deren Widerstand geschlechterspezifische Erwartungen und Umweltungerechtigkeiten destabilisiert. Diese These argumentiert, dass ökofeministische und umweltgerechtigkeitsbezogene Veränderungen von intersektionalen, lokal verankerten und vielfältigen Darstellungen weiblicher Aktivistinnen in den Medien abhängen. Die narrative Zentralität, die Mobilität oder Lokalität des filmischen und narrativen Blicks und der Grad der geografischen Abstraktion bestimmen, ob und welche Frauen erscheinen, wie intersektionale Identitäten konstruiert werden und wessen Erfahrungen lesbar gemacht werden. Zwar zeigten sich klare Muster in der Darstellung von Frauen, doch erwiesen sich diese auch als multidimensional, eklektisch und niemals gegenseitig ausschließend, lediglich kontrastiert durch die Marginalisierung oder völlige Abwesenheit weiblicher Aktivistinnen in Filmnarrativen.

Diese Forschung möchte einen Beitrag zu Diskussionen über die Darstellung der Geschlechter, die Sichtbarkeit von Aktivisten und die Rolle des dokumentarischen Erzählens bei der Konstruktion geschlechtsspezifischer Narrative der Umweltgerechtigkeit leisten.

II Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor Dipl.-Geogr. Dr. Simon Bunchuay-Peth. Throughout the course of my studies, your ways of teaching, approaching academia and working with those around you have been not only educational and motivating, but also a bit of a lighthouse. You've encouraged me to strengthen my interests, to allow creativity and passion to drive me, and to have courage and set sail to explore entirely new, unfamiliar areas – while also providing an anchor of realism and constructive criticism. Thank you for not only giving me the creative freedom to explore and dive headfirst into this research topic but also providing a safe haven to return to.

At times, this thesis felt like and has as a result affectionately become known as Frankenstein's Monster. In this, I was Viktor, and I fought to give life to a creature I occasionally struggled to believe in myself. Anna, Anni, Ida and Soph – you have been De Lacey to both me and to this monstrosity of a thesis. I want to thank you for your kind but honest feedback and your words of encouragement that persistently guided my path towards the finish line.

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1 Introduction

Setting the scene. Before us lies a complex, multidimensional landscape of environmental change and crises. It is the result of technological advancement and capitalism in an industrialised, globalised world. A world now faced with partially unforeseeable, but very real and globally tangible consequences (Eaton, 2021; Okpadah, 2022) – consequences which are not felt the same by everyone, which are unjustly distributed among the world. Intersectional factors like gender, race or age are crucial in who is affected by environmental change in which way, and how people act upon such pressures. Historically marginalised people tend to be first and most adversely exposed and affected (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023; Gaard, 2015; Prindeville, 2004), and environmental conflict does not distribute ‘fairly’, it does not stop at borders, no matter if physical, legislative or societal.

While climate and environmental change and the destruction of nature are progressing around the globe, they hold the potential to bring people together across the very same societal lines (Kirk, 1997) which are deepened by it, and the fact that the environment has become a key public and political concern in recent decades is underlined by media communication surrounding it. As media coverage also increasingly highlights environmental movements, it reflects not only the mounting urgency of environmental crises, but also the increasing visibility of activism and of women’s roles within it. Women, as a marginalised group, have been increasingly involved in public spheres and environmental movements, speaking up about and acting upon experiences of injustices (Ernanda, 2023). Such contribution of women to environmental advocacy is nothing new; iconic figures like Wangari Maathai (Green Belt Movement), Vandana Shiva (Navadanya), or Greta Thunberg (FridaysForFuture) have long played central roles in narratives surrounding environmental activism – how exactly such women are represented in their activism, however, and as a result seen and understood is less well known.

Modern media (albeit broadly defined and existing in many forms and formats) is essentially a public reservoir of images, meanings and definitions. This is also true for the environment and a lot, if not everything of what we learn and know about it, we have taken from some form of media (Hansen, 2011). Across diverse media landscapes, varying visualisations of environmental change exist and are raising the question which ways of knowing and learning about it have gained dominance, and which imagery and storytelling might in contrast be marginalised (O’Neill & Smith, 2014). This same question applies just the same to those working with and around environmental issues: Who is shown, and how? Though it can potentially feel distant

from the viewer, the coverage of social protest and indignation brings real life consequences for activists and the issues they work against or towards (Santillana, 2024).

This study establishes documentary films as a significant cultural site through which it becomes possible to investigate how women are part of and positioned within environmental justice activism. It deconstructs 11 modern documentary films through a qualitative content analysis to extract ideas and themes of representation reflected within. Each film is treated as a standalone unit of data, and both textual and visual components are analysed to explore societal structures of power and representation. Building on an ecofeminist and environmental justice framework, the study examines recurring narrative patterns and thematic tropes and situates them within wider scholarly discussions on gendered environmental activism. In doing so, the thesis argues that documentary films do not simply mirror reality but actively participate in constructing gendered imaginaries of environmental justice, sometimes reinforcing patriarchal and capitalist hierarchies while at other times subverting them. The subsequent chapters therefore develop the conceptual and methodological foundations of this work, present the empirical analysis of the film material, and discuss the implications of these findings for research on media, activism and ecofeminist transformation.

So, the lights are set, the camera is rolling, ‘action’ has been yelled – but who gets to be in frame, and how?

2 Background

2.1 Women, Environmental Change & Environmental Activism

Though having been shifted through the increasing empowerment of women, patriarchal boundaries still limit and sometimes entirely restrict women’s roles (Ernanda, 2023). This direct result of the patriarchy, its gendered social roles, discrimination, as well as poverty cause women to live in and often be constrained to inequity. While in equal conditions not innately more or less vulnerable than the next person, patriarchal conditions causes women to be disproportionately vulnerable to and impacted by affected by environmental disruptions of any kind (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023; Gaard, 2015). Through differences in birthplace, race, gender, physical or mental health or socioeconomic conditions, environmental challenges are perceived and experienced differently, both across or within countries (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023; Isaacson, 2024). Gender can be interpreted as a potential second layer of vulnerability on a person, and

for a women can significantly influence her political involvement (McKinney & Fulkerson, 2015).

All around the world, women fight against environmental destructions (Ernanda, 2023), elucidating the profundity of their concern and activism (Merchant, 1981). Through this, they are challenging long-established gender roles (Ernanda, 2023) and partaking in forming a highly diverse and complex landscape of activism and engagement that is informed, affected and produced by gender identities and oppression (Mallory, 2006). Environmental activism is in following understood and defined as the organised participation in efforts related to or against environmental issues. It is usually displayed through specific actions within formal settings and through institutional structures that connect back to commitment to the environment (Marquart-Pyatt, 2012). Where pro-environmental behaviour refers to individual, often politically neutral acts (e.g. recycling, using public transport), environmental activism as inherently political action describes collective efforts aimed at transforming systems and affecting social change (Shodiya et al., 2025). For women, activist engagement is sometimes the only way to participate in the decision-making arenas in which they are minoritarian (Buckingham, 2004). Even though research is clear that socio-demographics, resources, knowledge and awareness of environmental consequences of a person directly influence their environmental attitudes and willingness to personally contribute – like engaging in environmental activism (Marquart-Pyatt, 2012) – this ‘domestic scale’ tends to be overlooked (Cousins, 2021). Involvement in environmental activism can take many forms, with increasing extent and variety within both the public and the private forum (Tripp, 2018). The main factor influencing participation is the resource-based biographical availability of a person (Marquart-Pyatt, 2012; Tripp, 2018). In this concept, whether and how women are able to participate in environmental activism is dependent on gendered and political opportunities (Isaacson, 2024). The activism of women in particular can be constrained through such biographical availability, through the gendered division of labour that pressures them into a system where they have heavier domestic responsibilities and less resources than men (Tindall et al., 2003).

The consideration of such power dynamics is crucial in tackling environmental crises in a way that is informedly feminist and antiracist (Stephens, 2024), and the analysis of power necessitates critical historical and ideological reflection. Past and present oppression of women and the natural world are continuously correlated (Eaton, 2021), connected through historical processes of colonialism, imperialism and development (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023). The gendered intersections between ecological and feminist concerns, between nature and women (Eaton,

2021) must be uncovered to understand and ultimately reduce vulnerabilities related to gender, race and social class in the context of ecological changes (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023).

2.2 Media Representations and Documentaries as Data

Since the 1960s, with the emergence and rise of environmental movements as we know them today, mass media played a central role in publicising environmental issues and the discourse surrounding them (Hansen, 2011). Through constantly providing snapshots and footage of environmental events, disasters and issues, media also persistently showcases environmental injustices around the world (Schlosberg et al., 2024). The thematic framing of such injustice can reveal values and orientations (Hansen, 2011), unveiling patterns in the representation and portrayal of those affected. A representation is no passive reflection of reality, but rather an active process shaped by systems of meaning, produced and contested by social identities and power structures (Hall, 1997).

Omnipresent, sheer endless amounts of media content available are, in the absence of first-person experiences, sourced by consumers for knowledge about issues, events, people or communities. Media representations can be considered reflections of a given socio-cultural reality (Brylla, 2018), as well as crucial to its construction and contestation (Eschholz et al., 2002; McLaren et al., 2021). The representation and perception of environmental issues within media increasingly influence and govern public understanding and opinion, alongside political decision-making (Hansen, 2011), and women at the frontlines of environmental justice movements are increasingly covered through global media (Tran, 2023). Visual representations in the physical form (be that television, film, photography or paintings) act to shape, produce and (re)make meanings about environmental change (O'Neill & Smith, 2014).

Growing in popularity over recent years, documentary films can strongly influence general media and public interest (Males & Van Aelst, 2021). They are usually designed with the specific purpose to inform and persuade the viewer in relation to a specific field of interest (Johnson, 2016), and have changed from being considered a passive experience of informal learning or entertainment to being understood as a medium for public knowledge and action. Documentaries can spark or shape debates over social issues and policy questions, influence public opinion and inform activist networks (Nisbet & Aufderheide, 2009): they harness strong potential to influence agenda-setting for the issues they advocate and promote (Males & Van Aelst, 2021), making them a feasible tool in turning public attention towards environmental issues (Okpadah, 2022; Smaill, 2023).

Mass media, such as film, are also pivotal in creating and maintaining stereotypes (Previs, 2016), representations of people different to ‘Us’ (constructed through the ‘Other’) that can create social boundaries of prejudice and discrimination (Brylla, 2018). Digital media constructs particular narratives about women’s roles in activism (Demirdiř, 2025), and images on film continue to perpetuate stereotypes, images and myths (Hammer, 2010); through language and images within the film, things, actors and phenomena are represented in certain ways (Vezovnik, 2024). Capturing and documenting such potential stereotypes, drawing comparison between patterns of representation and perhaps even uncovering how intersectional factors of oppression such as race or age further influence how women are represented within environmental movements, strongly motivate this thesis.

“Art, in and of itself, can be a living, breathing embodied manifestation of social justice in action”, write Loots and Haysom (p.2), reflecting that any and all art can be a mirror to and of society (Loots & Haysom, 2023). Film as an artform becomes a reflective surface of societal realities. Documentary film as a scientific and cultural practice produces imaginaries, and how we imagine shapes how we act (Durand-Delacre, 2022): thus, how we see and position ourselves in the world can be influenced by documentary films (Fitzgerald & Lowe, 2020). Gendered representations, in particular, are influenced and policed by what culture believes to be true about said gender. Portrayals circle back upon themselves and influence what a culture subsequently believes to be true (McLaren et al., 2021). Because, however, the effects of media cannot be inferred from analysing the contents alone (Trimble-Clarke, 2012), that is not what this thesis is researching. Rather, representations within film and literature are considered as standalone reflections of societal realities. After spanning the theoretical framework, the methods for analysis will be explained in more detail.

3 State of Research and Research Question

Inspired by the work of David Durand-Delacre (2022), which worked to uncover representations of climate mobilities within documentary films, this research looks for patterns in the representation of women within environmental movements, also using documentaries as the unit of data collection, and drawing back on current scholarship to see how they hold true compared to academic understandings.

3.1 State of Research

Research suggests that social movements, environmental movements especially, often form around the work and engagement of women (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023; Venes et al., 2023). Women often take leading roles within environmental conflicts (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016), yet in depth knowledge about their roles within them are still lacking (Venes et al., 2023).

Scholars theorise women to be generally more concerned about their environment than men. Tindall et al. describe this as an ‘ironic twist’, since this hypothesised environmental concern is likely related to women’s subordinate position within the gendered division of labour (Tindall et al., 2003) that forces them into roles of environmental risk management (Cousins, 2021). Such gendered opportunity structures are the ground upon which female engagement blossoms: countries with higher gender equality are more likely to see them participating in environmental political spheres (Hjort & Østenstad, 2025; Isaacson, 2024).

Public perception and discourse of societal problems, such as environmental change, are recognised to be increasingly influenced by media products, including documentary films (Males & Van Aelst, 2021), which is the media format of interest in this thesis. Motion pictures are an important medium, not just because they are viewed by (potentially) large audiences (Neville & Anastasio, 2019), but also because they perpetuate divisions of power (according to class, sex, gender, race etc.) prominent in our societies (Eschholz et al., 2002). While their study and its influence on consumers is a long established part of media research (Lapierre et al., 2024), and even analysing film specifically as to the representation and roles of women is not entirely unheard of (see e.g. Inayat & Sadiq, 2020), documentary film in particular has a tendency to be overlooked in this context, despite its growing and proven influence and impact (Nisbet & Aufderheide, 2009).

Images of film can affect the viewer’s subconscious and influence personal life choices and decision-making (Hammer, 2010). Consistent imagery of women in media is likely serving as raw material for the development of cognitive and behavioural effects, making it very important to continuously study the portrayal of women in media (Neuendorf et al., 2010). Certain (types of) images have a tendency to dominate and thereby shape cultural and political discourse in a certain direction (O’Neill & Smith, 2014). Portrayals and representation within film are an important part of social constructions of reality within the general public, and as such, may perpetuate racism, sexism and other forms of systemic injustice (Eschholz et al., 2002). Ultimately, mass media can reflect back towards a society what it considers to be acceptable, normal or

desirable, also in relation to roles for men and women respectively (Hammer, 2010). Stereotypical associations of minority groups especially are perpetuated in society through media and can influence social attitudes towards such groups (Banjo & Jennings, 2017; Gálvez et al., 2019; Marr & Luchies, 2023), making it important to research whether and how women and other minorities are continuously under- or stereotypically represented in media (Marr & Luchies, 2023). This thesis aligns itself with scholarship that has been studying gender stereotyped portrayals in media for decades (Gálvez et al., 2019), the continuance of which is necessary to effectively address inequalities (Marr & Luchies, 2023).

The goal of this research is to strengthen and contribute to existing scholarship on the representation of female activists in media and further the basis for the discussion on their work (see e.g. Ernanda, 2023; Santillana, 2024). The approach is aligned with previous work that recognises and negotiates dominant themes of representation in modern media, devoting particular focus to patterns potentially reinforcing the status quo and producing power hierarchies, as well as confirming through literature consideration whether the patterns discovered are inconsistent with the proposition that most media disadvantages women and minorities (Eschholz et al., 2002; Santillana, 2024). Through working without a specific geographic focus, but within the same patriarchal world context, ecofeminism and environmental justice frame the struggles portrayed in the films as diverse yet connected through principles of woman-nature oppression/connection and a global web of resistance, allowing the identification of patterns across legislative and country borders, but within the same pool of a marginalised group: women.

3.2 Research Question

Representation biases persist within media through gender role stereotypes and unrealistic portrayals of women and minorities in particular (Aley & Hahn, 2020; Eschholz et al., 2002). Within general environmental change discourse in particular, women are often painted in one of two ways; they become powerless victims, the ones bearing the brunt of environmental consequences, kept in place at their very frontlines by structural barriers and environmental injustices (Gaard, 2015), stereotypically in silence and in suffering. In contrast, they are just as often pictured as the ultimate agents of change, central to environmental movements and fundamental to solving environmental problems (see e.g. Bezerra Guimarães, 2023; Demirdiř, 2025; Ernanda, 2023; Gorczyca & Zozulia, 2025; Martinez-Alier et al., 2016; Mensah et al., 2025; Mer-sha, 2018; Shodiya-Zeumault et al., 2025; Venes et al., 2023; Verchick, 2020).

The question is whether and how these puzzle pieces of representation connect in the dimension of resistance. If the corner pieces framing women in media are those of environmental issues and environmental movements – which seem to go entirely different routes –, how does their intersection look? What picture of representation emerges, when the puzzle comes to life?

Studying documentary film as a media format to uncover representations of women in environmental (justice) movements as formed within our patriarchal societies, the following thesis thus centres around the research question:

Research Question

How are women in environmental justice movements represented in documentary films, and how do these representations compare to existing academic literature on the intersection of gender and environmental activism?

Subquestions

(Media) Representation & Patterns

What recurring themes, stereotypes or portrayals of female environmental activists emerge in the documentary films?

(How) do narrative elements (textual and cinematographic) contribute to shaping representations of female activists in these films?

Comparison with Existing Literature

How do patterns of representation found within the analysed documentary films compare to patterns identified in past research on gender and environmental activism?

In what ways do documentary film representations of women in environmental movements reinforce or challenge themes discussed in ecofeminist and environmental justice scholarship?

What discrepancies, gaps or reinforcements exist between identified patterns of representation and academic discussions of women's role and representation in environmental (justice) movements?	To what extent do these themes in representation align with or challenge traditional gender roles and existing academic discussions of women's roles in environmental (justice) movements?
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Theoretical Perspectives (Ecofeminism & Environmental Justice)

What power dynamics could be influencing representations, or come to be through them?

How can ecofeminist and environmental justice theory help explain the representation of women in environmental (justice) movements / documentaries?	Do, and if so in what way, these representations reflect or contradict ecofeminist or environmental justice principles?
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How do portrayals differ based on the intersectional factors (e.g. race, age, disability) of ecofeminist approaches?	(How) does the intersection of gender with other socio-political identities shape the way female environmental activists are framed?
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3.3 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

Continued reflection on researcher positionality is vital for qualitative research, particularly from a feminist standpoint, since simultaneous positionality as a woman and an ideological disposition as a feminist could cause tensions (Ahrens et al., 2024). Because biographical elements are obviously relevant to discussions and understandings throughout the research process and its product (Letherby, 2002), I must acknowledge that my interest in this field is stimulated by personal experiences. Finding meaning and motivation through this work opposed to external recognition (McHugh, 2014), as well as avoiding claims of universal truth through specifically acknowledging my own position within this research project (Leavy, 2000) are my personal attempt to confront the fact that any research process is, and is allowed to be, messy (Baker, 2021).

In honoured feminist research tradition, I must first situate myself in relation to my study in terms of my own background. I am a white woman, born, raised and educated in a Western society and while I work around and towards intersectional feminist goals, I need to acknowledge that because of who and where I am, I am not only less affected than others in the grand scheme of inequities, I am also part of a large system that (re-)produces this inequality. There is natural tension between being both an insider (activist) and an outsider (researcher), because however short it may be, I have been an environmental and social justice activist for my entire adult life, and it would be futile to suggest that this does not influence my perspective. While the purpose of scientific study can be and is to zoom out, way past myself, my knowledge or personal experiences, I must recognise that they still influence and situate me. No social research can and will be separated entirely from social author identities. How people read and

interpret, be that literature, films or in this case gender as a construct itself, will have individual nuances, always. This can, at points, cause bounds to blur; my values are strong, I have a strong belief in intersectional feminism, and without this belief, I would not have cared as much for questions of gender, equality or justice – and I would not be where I am today, writing this thesis.

At the core of this thesis lies a scientific research crux that shows a clear tendency to equate sex and gender. The two are, however, separate concepts; while the biological sex of a person is broken down into primary and secondary sex identifiers, hormones and chromosomes, gender references cultural definitions and historically variable aspects of being – or feeling – male or female. People who identify otherwise are illegitimised, excluded through the cultural pressure to perform in accordance with a binary gender system (McLaren et al., 2021). As a person who wishes to respect and correctly reflect gender identities of those around her, I struggled in therefore having to ascribe sets of qualities and behaviours typically associated with being male or female as per the standards of the society I was raised in. Outside of suggesting a binary system rather than a spectrum of identity, this forces me to follow typical research fashion aligning ‘gender study’ with the study of women, and to ascribe the classification of someone as a woman based on how they present, how they are ‘read’ within cultural understandings of gender expression. It is crucial to emphasise that such gender binaries are not a reflection of reality, and that heterosexual, normative identification systems have historically and continue to marginalise nonbinary, queer, trans and/or fluid identities (Eaton, 2021). The fact that nearly all societies sort their members into a binary system of women or men, female or male, has repercussions on a multiplicity of genders. Using ‘gender’ as an idiom for when research in reality only concerns the life realities of women, or who is interpreted as such, cannot uphold the importance of comprehensive gender analysis (Eaton, 2021). This gender crux holds another dimension; emphasising the oppression of women often ignores aspects of white privilege. Women of colour do not have the privilege to separate their race and ethnicity from their gender (Kirk, 1997). Intersectionality is complex, especially in this study where factors core to it (i.e. gender, race, nationality, ...) are not explicitly mentioned in the films. Ultimately, I have to grease the wheels of a non-inclusive science and work within its realms, so as to have theoretical work I can frame my own with, and to be able to connect my findings and understandings to those of a majority – one that works within and ascribes identities in a rigid, mostly binary system.

4 Theoretical Framework

As established in research outside of this thesis, climate and environmental change are symptoms of the patriarchal, capitalist systems dominating present times, caused by the behaviour of people around the world who benefit from the concentration of wealth and power to their favour (Loots & Haysom, 2023; Stephens, 2024). Both theorems upon which this thesis is built work to understand and counter such disbalance: ecofeminism and environmental justice.

4.1 Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a far from homogenous concept, but rather a rich tapestry of diverse, sometimes internally contested sets of discourse, specialties, topics and concerns (Eaton, 2021; Sturgeon, 1999). Woven throughout and in general agreement amongst theorists, the red thread of ecofeminism is the principle of connection among all things and beings: a spiritual, sociocultural and political understanding exploring the consequences of patriarchal and economic systems operating in our world (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023).

Nature/Woman Nexus of Domination and Oppression

Centred around the ‘feminine principle’ that identifies both nature and women as producers of life, ecofeminism demonstrates similarities between the subjugation of women and nature, and interpret this as an inheritance of western societies and industrial culture (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023). In the patriarchy, the domination of man over both women and nature, and their consequential suffering are in parallel (Bell, 2016; Ducre, 2018; McKinney & Fulkerson, 2015); women and the environment represent twin dimensions linked through their exploitation under capitalist and patriarchal structures (McKinney & Fulkerson, 2015). Through these linkages, environmental degradation is understood to be especially consequential for women, and their status is uniquely affected by, and reciprocally has the potential to enhance, environmental conditions (McKinney & Fulkerson, 2015). Male-dominant paradigms of the patriarchy are designed, administered and controlled by men, but also organised according to privileged associations towards masculine characteristics (e.g. rationality, domination, objectivity or toughness). They produce oppressive, controlling and undeniably destructive behaviour towards women, nature and other subordinated groups (Mallory, 2006).

Historically speaking, the equalisation in the valence of women and nature is part of human power relations established over nature that are, and always have been, pronounced by male participation and domination in economic growth, consumerism and commercialisation of

nature – all oppressive processes of exploitation, continually fortified by capitalism and its idealisation of development and progress (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023). Where men were seen as connected to culture, women were seen to be connected to nature, and because nature was considered to be subordinate to culture, it was thus inferred to be feminine (‘Mother Nature’, ‘Mother Earth’, ...), and women were understood to be inferior to men, ostensibly legitimising their mutual and simultaneous subordination (Eaton, 2021; Mallory, 2013). It goes back and forth.

Because ecofeminism perceives the relationship between humans and nature to be marked by power, it centres around its critical analysis, and that of power relations between dominant and marginalized groups. It intends to expose how certain groups – such as men, Whites or humans in general – uphold their superior status through subordinating and dominating women, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) and the natural world respectively, and constitute the relations among different human groups (Mallory, 2006). The processes connecting gender, racial and ecological oppression also play into ecofeminist analysis because, even though people of all genders can be and are affected through ecological degradation, women’s lives are in many ways more deeply impacted (Mallory, 2013), because it is a highly intersectional dimension.

Intersectionality – the interrelationship and integration of varying social, environmental and personal issues – is a central theme across ecofeminism (Lahar, 1991). It is crucial in depicting a more holistic version of reality that sees and acknowledges various systems of oppression, like gender, race, or social class as interconnected (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023; Mallory, 2006), and even more so: as mutually reinforcing. Racism, sexism and classism entrench themselves into a bed of exploitation and oppression that blooms with the realization that one cannot be resolved without the other. Neither the salvation of nature nor the liberation of women is possible in isolation – each depends on ending the oppression of the other (Gaard, 1997), by uprooting values of domination, exploitation and control (Mallory, 2006).

Historical Development

Ecofeminism builds on long-standing connections of women and nature embedded in patriarchal cultures and histories (Eaton, 2021), and is deliberately situated within earlier feminist and environmental struggles and theories that continuously shape it (Lahar, 1991). Due to the concurrent rise of environmental and women’s liberation movements in the 1960s, the exploration between the connections and implications of nature and women, ecology and feminism grew, ultimately leading to the systematic linkage of the two in the 1970s (Merchant, 1981). Ecology

and feminism were merged into the umbrella term ecofeminism, a new and unique social theory and movement that encompasses historical and contemporary ideas and practices associating gender and women with the natural world (Ducre, 2018; Eaton, 2021; Lahar, 1991; Mallory, 2013). Contemporary ecofeminism works to advance and enrich theories through a stronger integration of intersectionality and both global and contextual work, which strives for more culture specific approaches (Eaton, 2021).

In the Northern Hemisphere, together with public concern about environmental destruction, ecofeminist approaches grew alongside the anti-nuclear and peace movements of the 1970s and 1980s, whereas in the Southern Hemisphere, it was additionally concerned with processes of colonisation, dispossession of ancestral lands, the commodification of seeds and exclusive development. Differences in ecofeminist debate can still be seen between the two nowadays, with the northern part of the globe focusing mostly on resources, lands and rights being taken from others to enable productivism and overconsumption (capitalism), whereas ecofeminist debate of the southern hemisphere often revolves around basic human rights, such as food security, clean water or livelihood protection (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023). Ecofeminism is not only a theoretical position, but also a political movement in and of itself, combining feminist theory with ecological activism (Mallory, 2006; Ryman, 2021). Ecofeminism as a movement is looking to transform power relations in ecologically sound, socially just ways (Mallory, 2006), and takes a clear stance that without simultaneous revolution in social, economic and sexual structures dominating women and nature, the realisation of ecofeminism cannot succeed (Merchant, 1981). The bedrock ecofeminist woman-nature-connection thus also relates to women's participation in environmental movements, and sees them as integral to solving environmental issues (Ernanda, 2023).

Dualism and Hierarchical Thinking

Hierarchal dualism describes ways of perceiving the world in binaries, opposites or dualisms (Eaton, 2021) and has justified and promoted the exploitation of both women and nature (Sturgeon, 1999). A dualism, in short, is a conceptual pairing premising the radical separation of and opposition between members of the disjunction. Often, one side is considered superior through and simultaneous with the subordination of the Other. We see this, for instance, in the dualisms of male/female, culture/nature, white/coloured, reason/emotion – the list goes on infinitely. This dichotomous nature of dualisms is often associated with the pairings being gendered: when the first term is associated with masculinity and maleness, the subjugated second is thereby identified as female (Mallory, 2013). Such structures also make claims towards the superiority of the

Self: by essentially manifesting differences between the Self and the Other and through the implication that the Self possesses full humanity, it must be inferred that the Other supposedly lacks this (Gaard, 1997).

The dualism of humans and nature is based on Anglo-European, Western traditions of patriarchy, science and ideology that constructed 'nature' and 'culture' to be radically separate, hierarchically dualistic categories (Mallory, 2013; Sturgeon, 1999). This same value system associating women with nature has also historically regarded people of colour to be 'closer to nature' (Mallory, 2013); who and what is associated with nature is continuously impacted by a long history of colonization through Western cultures (Gaard, 1997). The ideological framework of hierarchal systems constructed by Western thought and dualisms is reinforced by economic structures based on profits over needs (Gaard, 1997; Kirk, 1997). The mutual exclusion accompanying conceptual dichotomies could, for example, make one believe that violence against women and the destruction of ecosystems could be analysed as own, separate issues. In ecofeminist understanding, they are not, and considering such dichotomies as maintaining conditions of interlocking oppressions is key to ecofeminist analysis (Lahar, 1991).

The identification and articulation of racism, colonialism, gender issues and environmental degradation as connected and mutually reinforcing (Mallory, 2013) is a focal point connecting ecofeminism to environmental justice, which is strongly concerned with the same intersectionalities that ecofeminist theory works around. The two are so similar that since the end of the 1990s, the two movements have been converging (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023). With an ecofeminist approach to analysis, the connectedness of women and environment, the intersectionality of oppressions, as well as the integration of a gender perspective into decoding patterns of representation of women as a marginalized group will be at the centre of this research. Understanding environmental justice as closely connected to ecofeminist approaches to activism, and as a convergence of theory and practice, will greatly inform approaches to and consideration of environmental movements as part of the research design. To better reflect upon the representation of women within movements fighting for environmental justice through media narratives, an ecofeminist perspective can help to shed light on the intersections between gender, nature and power in documentary film narratives.

4.2 Environmental Justice

In its essence, environmental justice is concerned with the structure of our world system, which benefits few – at the expense of many (McKinney & Fulkerson, 2015). It constitutes a diverse,

multi-disciplinary field and addresses some of the most difficult structural challenges that social movements build around (Schlosberg et al., 2024). The concept evolved significantly within the last thirty years, growing alongside the environmental disruptions it covers and expanding to try and better understand and incorporate power and social norms as central in creating environmental injustice through capitalism, racism and colonialism (Schlosberg et al., 2024). Instead of ‘only’ theorising about equity in the distribution of environmental issues or the responsibility of their causes with liberal states (Schlosberg et al., 2024), questions of environmental justice are concerned with injustices resulting from privilege and uneven power relations across all scales (Bond et al., 2020). It is now a broad and global, critical and intersectional discourse (Schlosberg et al., 2024).

Distributional, Procedural, Substantive Injustice

The distributional aspects of environmental justice refer to the unequal and unfair allocation of environmental problems, as well as the intra- and intergenerational distribution of environmental access (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023). Simply put, distributional inequality refers to the fact that those bearing the consequences of environmental issues (be that climate change, more generally, or a local issue such as a polluting oil rig) are usually not those that initiated or caused it, let alone the ones benefitting from it (e.g. financially).

The procedural dimension of environmental justice relates to accessing decision-making processes governing the distribution of environmental benefits and losses (Buckingham & Kulcur, 2009). Gendered procedural injustice shows, for example, that while women constitute the majority of those involved in environmental justice movements at the grassroots, community and membership level, they are less likely to have control over environmental decisions in a decision-making sphere generally dominated by men (Bell, 2016).

Both procedural and distributional injustice can severely impact the physical and mental health of a person affected – and the stronger they are, the stronger their effect, culminating in what can be called substantive injustice (Bell, 2016).

Causes of Environmental Injustice: Capitalism, Patriarchy

McKinney and Fulkerson (2015) describe a global hierarchy through which benefits flow upwards, towards wealthy, more powerful nations, whereas land and labour are exploited in a downward projection, towards structurally inferior positions in the system. The increasing number of ecological conflicts can be attributed to the growing and unevenly distributed flow of energy and materials, accessory to the economic growth of industrial economies (Martinez-

Alier et al., 2016). The causes of environmental injustices are thus, in short, with capitalism and the patriarchy. Within a capitalist society, class division favours some lives while marginalising others, and because within such a system there is no rational way to prioritize how commodities are allocated, benefits and costs are ultimately distributed according to purchasing power (Bell, 2016).

Within any and all processes of capitalism, there lies the patriarchy, and together they facilitate gender-based environmental (in)justice: with gender as the basic organising principle in the allocation of rights, rewards, power and duties, women are systematically disadvantaged. Where men, unrestricted by responsibilities surrounding reproduction, have moulded capitalism in a patriarchal fashion along gender lines, women suffer exploitation both at home and in the workplace, and are, through the gendered division of labour, devalued as a part of society. And with women's choices restricted, their ability to shape society according to their needs is undermined and they become more vulnerable to environmental problems (Bell, 2016).

Intersectionality & Gender

Much like ecofeminism, environmental justice focuses on intersections of bias that perpetuate environmental issues (Verchick, 2020), such as race, class, queerness, colonisation or capital (Bell, 2016; Martinez-Alier et al., 2016; Schlosberg et al., 2024). While these social categories contain relatively balanced numbers of men and women, gender is a distinct, yet frequently overlooked driver of injustice uniquely shaping outcomes for women (Bell, 2016). A woman's gender identity is inseparable from other intersectional factors; it is never a neutral element in her social positioning (Kirk, 1997). You are never 'just' a black woman, a disabled woman, an Indigenous woman, a young girl, without gender being a core factor to your position in society. Deeply rooted capitalist and patriarchal processes further marginalise women, often silencing their voices within the very structures causing environmental harm, as well as arenas challenging it (Bell, 2016). An environmental justice framework focussed only on singular constituents of the construct of environmental justice (e.g. only gender, only race), instead of understanding it as intersectional, would fall short of actually understanding, capturing and addressing its dimensions (Bell, 2016; Buckingham & Kulcur, 2009). While gender continues to be a relatively small part of the debate (Bell, 2016), there is consensus that in alignment with ecofeminism, environmental justice can only be achieved with an understanding of the interconnection of gender and the environment, alongside other structures of injustice at all scales (Buckingham & Kulcur, 2009).

Activism

Where a disproportion of environmental consequences is dealt according to gender, race and class (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023), and the wealthy are benefitting at the expense of the poor, fights for environmental justice are challenging traditional environmental policy (Verchick, 2020).

Though slightly outdated, but nonetheless relevant, research by Kirk (1997) suggested that the majority of local activists making up environmental justice organisations are, in fact, women. This is underlined by the fact that the participation of women in such environmental justice organising in general is indispensable (Verchick, 2020). Another characteristic of environmental justice movements is that they often centre around the close relationship of people of colour to their land, labour, and related environmental health issues (Prindeville, 2004). Historically, this emerged as a response to patterns of locating and enforcing hazardous industries among communities of colour and/or poor neighbourhoods (Ducré, 2018).

The environmental justice movement is considered global because, while mostly fighting in situ conflicts and targeting locally specific grievances, they all belong to classes of conflict that regularly occur everywhere else in the world as well, or alternatively because they purposefully transfer their local conflict issue to the global level (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016). We will be able to see this in the documentary movies analysed, which either address local concerns of environmental injustice or environmental justice as a moment of global resistance.

4.3 Rationale for Framework Selection

Having settled on ecofeminism and environmental justice to provide the theoretical outline for this thesis, a few words on why this choice was an easy one to make. Ecofeminism and environmental justice have long been recognised as connected (Kirk, 1997). When taking climate change as an example for environmental disruption, one that has local repercussions but remains embedded in a global context, this close connection can be visualised quite simply. Climate change is an intersectional, interdisciplinary issue, deepening systematic inequities and intensifying injustices across all scales. It is a symptom of capitalism and patriarchy, and it necessitates systemic and radical change (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023). Environmental justice is essentially a future trajectory of and in synergy with ecofeminism. The film selection encompasses a broad scale of environmental injustices and movements, forming a diverse landscape to study that remains connected through the concept of environmental justice. Because of this, ecofeminist theory can transfer across multiple contexts. While not strictly identified as part of the

environmental justice movement, ecofeminism clearly shares a large number of characteristics with it and through this, compounds evidence showing how gender is disproportionately connected to experiencing disadvantages relating to environmental issues (Buckingham, 2004).

Environmental justice as well as ecofeminism movements have worked to point out and criticise how ‘traditional’ environmental movements shared a tendency to assume universal impacts of environmental disruptions on everyone, in the same way (Buckingham, 2004). In contrast, the environmental justice movement as a seminally feminist movement, focuses on the patriarchy and other intersections of bias (causing racism, classism, ageism and so forth) that surround and permeate environmental issues (Verchick, 2020). It shows impacts to be diverse across even a single given society. The environmental disruptions that environmental justice is concerned with are a tangible dimension of the (dis-)connection of humans and their environment ecofeminism is based on.

Amidst the complex interconnection of the oppression of women and socio-ecological crises in the patriarchal systems operating our world, it is necessary to give voice to the narrative and stories of women in the political arenas silencing them. Literature reflects on particularly on the political realm of activism: women all around the globe have been defending themselves and their territories against pollution, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, nuclear energy, climate changes and the like (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023). Such environmental conflicts were the exact fields of interest when looking at environmental movements, and thus also provided a concrete list of topics to consider for the movie selection. Multiple publications speaking on ecofeminism as an ‘engaged theory’ due to its close connection to practice and political activism, as well as ecofeminism essentially being understood as both a theory *and* a movement maintain the strong and mutual relationship between two areas (Lahar, 1991; Mallory, 2006). When environmental issues are considered through the lens of gender, the variety of oppressions of women and nature, entangled and reinforcing as they are, surface (Mallory, 2006): the systemic analysis of domination of ecofeminist theory specifically contains the oppression of women, as well as environmental exploitation (Lahar, 1991), making it highly appropriate to analyse the nexus of women and environmental conflict.

Environmental justice and ecofeminist activism can be found in many countries, across rural and urban spaces alike, and ecofeminism sheds light on dimensions of interrelation between ecological crises and gender inequalities – representation being one of them (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023).

5 Research Design

The following chapter will detail the methodological framework for this research, with the primary methods being a literature review and qualitative content analysis (QCA). It will outline the systematic literature review process and its role in the construction of theoretical and methodological bases, followed by a brief introduction into QCA as a method and a more in-depth exposition as to its practical, individual application to this thesis in three phases: preparation, organisation, and reporting.

5.1 Literature Review

The literature review sitting at the foundation of this thesis serves a dual purpose. First was 1) laying the theoretical and methodological groundwork, to identify key debates and approaches in the study of media representations of women, ecofeminism, environmental justice and gendered power dynamics of environmental movements. This initial knowledge development phase included looking at how previous research has applied (QCA) both generally and in relation to (media) representations of women. Since a core aspect of this thesis is to compare its findings to current academic scholarship, 2) comparison is the second purpose for literature review. By mapping dominant themes in the representation and the roles of women within environmental movements as presented by previous studies, this research assesses whether the documentary films analysed reinforce, challenge, or diverge from existing academic narratives, allowing current scholarship to serve as a reference point against which the findings of this thesis can be evaluated.

All phases of the literature review were conducted through systematic keyword searches in the Web of Science Core Collection, sometimes snowballing from key literature pieces and central points to further deepen conceptual understandings. Where pieces were unavailable through Web of Science Core Collection, the University of Vienna academic library platform u:search, and online library catalogues of other universities were utilized. The precise search strings used in the phases described below can be found in the *Literature Search Phases* table (*Table 15*) in the annex.

Literature Review Phase I

This first phase at the very beginning of the thesis project consisted of a semi-strategic literature review to gather literature for the disposition and thesis outline. The emphasis in literature search was on past studies of gender representation in media and film specifically, on documentary film analyses and on qualitative content analysis approaches. Using relatively loose search

strings with central keywords, this phase built the theoretical and methodological approach bases, and had a topical focus on women in environmental movements, as well as the representation of women in media and film.

Literature Review Phase II

While not initially part of the outline, this second literature phase came to be out of necessity, as getting a grasp and concrete understanding of QCA as a method would prove more difficult than expected. This phase consisted mostly of screening pieces related to the methodological framework, as well as some works that could inspire the positionality of the researcher section, to help frame the research project before delving deeper into the data collection and analysis phase. This second literature review phase was ongoing and continuous alongside the research and methodology development stage.

Literature Review Phase III

The third and final literature review phase was carried out after the independent analysis, to ensure that the coding and interpretation of the documentaries would be done relatively objectively, without allowing themes emergent from literature to guide the process entirely and instead focussing on generating insights with the theoretical framework in mind. To dynamically integrate past research with new insights from the documentary analysis of this thesis, findings from its QCA are actively reflected against reviewed literature in the discussion chapter.

5.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

The following methodology as planned and carried out was a Frankenstein's Monster-¹type effort, inspired by, pulling from and patching together a number of publications (see e.g. Assarroudi et al., 2018; Banjo & Jennings, 2017; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Eschholz et al., 2002; Gilpatric, 2010; Johnson, 2016; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Lapierre et al., 2024; Matuku & Mishra, 2024; Mayring & Fenzl, 2019; Myerson et al., 2007; Neuendorf et al., 2010; Trimble-Clarke, 2012; Vears & Gillam, 2022; Wei et al., 2024; White & Marsh, 2006).

5.2.1 Defining Qualitative Content Analysis

While multiple and nuanced definitions of qualitative content analysis (QCA) exist, it can be broken down as the subjective interpretation of content through the identification of themes or patterns within it (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to uncover underlying meanings (Renz et al., 2018).

¹ See: Mary Shelley (1998): *Frankenstein, or, The modern Prometheus*: The 1818 text.

Within the field of qualitative research, QCA is a widely used and well established methodology (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Renz et al., 2018), focused on creating a picture of a certain social phenomenon as embedded within its own particular context (White & Marsh, 2006). The goal of QCA in itself is to conceptually describe (rather than explain) the phenomenon it researches (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Leavy, 2000), and as such, extract independently existing themes from cultural products (Leavy, 2000; Myerson et al., 2007) which can then later be used to generate inferences about human behaviour (Renz et al., 2018).

The units of analysis in QCA are most commonly text-based data (Cho & Lee, 2014; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Mayring & Fenzl, 2019; Prior, 2014; Renz et al., 2018; Vears & Gillam, 2022), but it can be applied to a wide variety of data sources, including audio or visual content (Cho & Lee, 2014; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Vears & Gillam, 2022). This thesis focuses on text transcripts of documentary films, while also considering and incorporating the visual material itself.

The QCA of cultural products, such as a documentary film, is highly useful, because the material or data is in itself noninteractive, automatically reducing risks in contaminating its validity. Simultaneously, it still embodies the discourse of the society from which it emerges, as well as of its producers and the production process (Leavy, 2000). QCA is particularly useful in the identification of clichés or stereotypes (Brylla, 2018) and aids the understanding of the social reality of a given phenomenon (Cho & Lee, 2014). The intent of QCA is not finding relationships between categories, or building new theories like other qualitative methodology such as grounded theory do, but to instead extract categories, patterns and themes from the data through a systematic coding process (Cho & Lee, 2014). This process can take many forms within QCA.

The inductive, sometimes called conventional approach to QCA references a study design aimed at describing a phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and understanding the meaning(s) of dataset contents (Vears & Gillam, 2022), characterised by a search for patterns (Graneheim et al., 2017). In this, the analysis is built inductively, and coding categories derived from the data itself (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vears & Gillam, 2022). Through looking for similarities and differences in and among data, which is described in categories and/or themes, the researcher can move from the data to a theoretical understanding (Graneheim et al., 2017) and produce a summary of the content in a dataset (Vears & Gillam, 2022).

Deductive, or directed QCA on the other hand starts off with a theory or findings of past studies as a guide for initial codes to approach new data with (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The goal: test, validate or conceptually extend upon a pre-existing theoretical framework or theory, which can help focus the research question of a project (Cho & Lee, 2014; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Graneheim et al., 2017; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

To counter the divide between inductive and deductive methodology for QCA, a third path is to combine both according to individual needs and research design. Sometimes called an abductive QCA, this mixed approach moves back and forth between working in- and deductively, and is employed for a more concrete understanding of the data and phenomenon at hand (Graneheim et al., 2017). In the end, the purpose of the given study determines which approach is useful (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) – advice which was taken to heart and cemented the foundation upon which the applied methodology was structured.

5.2.2 Rationale for Method Selection

With documentary films as the unit of data collection and looking at women in environmental movements within them as a unit of analysis, a few words on why this method was chosen out of the plethora of qualitative research frameworks out there. QCA is used across disciplines and has been adapted to the unique needs of many research projects, making it a highly flexible and autonomous research method (Graneheim et al., 2017; Hidalgo & Matusitz, 2025; White & Marsh, 2006).

Previous studies that consider the visual effects, composition and meanings of imagery have also used content analysis approaches (O'Neill & Smith, 2014), underlining that it is a method very suitable visual and film analysis. Combined with an analysis of textual elements, it can increase understandings of prominent themes within a film (Hidalgo & Matusitz, 2025). The analysis of transcribed film dialogues has been shown to enable a thorough examination to identify and classify themes related to the representations of women (Ernanda, 2023).

Cultural artifacts, such as documentary films as pieces of modern media, embody, reflect and mediate the views of the very society from which they emerge (Leavy, 2000). Most people would not consume a piece of media and walk away untouched by the images and storylines they are met with; to some extent, we all incorporate the representations of people and things within such media into our own knowledge bases. As it is, biased representation of social, gender, race and class stereotypes not only exist but are prominent within media, and research shows that this reinforces common stereotypes within the consumer society (Eschholz et al.,

2002). Such identifiable themes in representations are independent of any research process and exist within a cultural artefact prior to and regardless of it; analysis can be the instrument to extract them (Leavy, 2000). Qualitatively analysing content is core to the verification of a narrative and its academic interpretation (Prior, 2014), making it a highly useful method in uncovering patterns of representation within film and stringing these back to compare with current academic discourse.

The methodological choice for QCA as the appropriate method can further be argued through its practical advantages that allow the researcher to step away from focusing strictly on variables, frequencies or casual connections, and instead connect their research back to an actual lifeworld (Prior, 2014) – in this case, to that of women in their activism, whichever form that may take. Because the data collection process can, but does not have to involve direct contact with the persons studied, QCA can also be an entirely unobtrusive method (Cho & Lee, 2014). Further, it allows the researcher to handle large amounts of data (Cho & Lee, 2014; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Mayring & Fenzl, 2019), which were expected to arise.

5.2.3 Performing QCA

With the research intention being the analytical deconstruction of documentary films to extract themes of representation through QCA, the plan for data collection and analysis consisting of three phases: 1) preparation, 2) organisation and 3) reporting. This process is condensed in *Figure 1* below, as well as elaborated in the following subchapters.

Methodological Tools

A number of technological tools were used throughout the course of research. Microsoft Word was used for drafting and revising thesis chapters, managing comments and tracking changes. Goodnotes was the primary application for reading, annotating and organising literature. The citation software Zotero was utilised to manage and cite literature. The transcription interface aTrain was applied to generate initial transcripts of the documentary films, which could then be corrected, edited and analysed in MAXQDA. The free tool by Haberl et al. (2024) provides transcript files that can be directly imported into qualitative analysis software (Haberl et al., 2024), and gave the textual basis for subsequent coding and analysis. For data management and QCA, MAXQDA was used to import and organise all transcripts, apply and refine the coding scheme, as well as organise codes into categories and themes to support interpretation. In an assistive function, MAXQDA helped structure a large volume of material, keep track of decisions across coding rounds through memo notes, and retrieve relevant segments during the

writing process. For translatory and vocabulary assistance throughout the writing process, the online dictionary dict.cc was consulted.

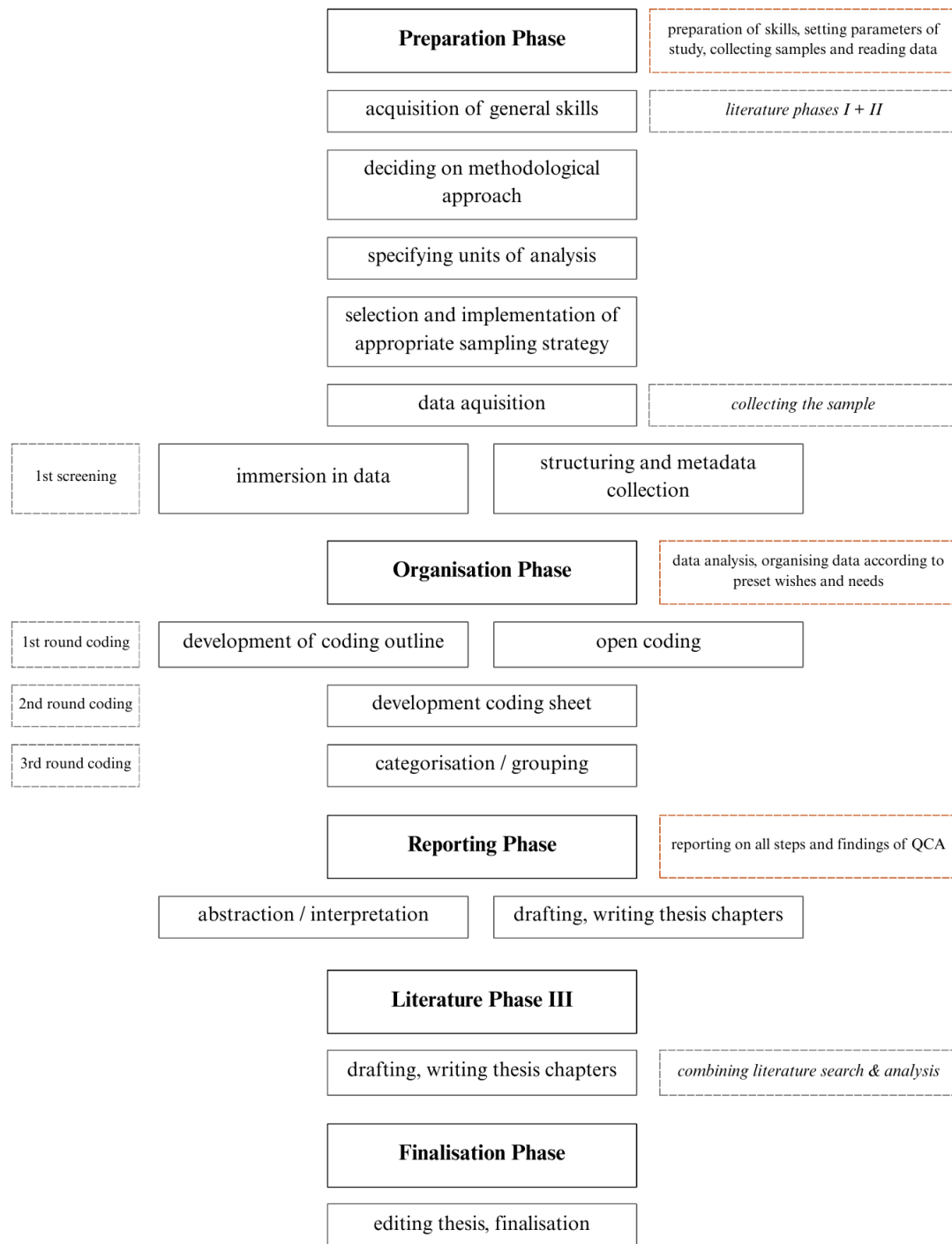


Figure 1: Steps and Procedures of QCA. Inspired by Assaroudi et al. 2018, Elo & Kyngäs 2008, Kleinheksel et al. 2020 and Vears & Gillam 2022.

Phase 1: Preparation

The preparation phase began with acquiring general and necessary skills for the research project through the literature phases I and II, which were introduced in the *Literature Review* chapter

and also served to build the theoretical foundation. Next came setting the study parameters. Documentary films as the units of data collection, the medium to be researched, were examined at the narrative and compositional level for female activists as the units of analysis. The Sample Selection and Acquisition subchapter below describes the identification and collection of data in more detail. For the visual side of things, key moments and scenes, their framing, symbolism and interactions were of interest. Given that downloading full-length films is often restricted (*see Ethical and Security Challenges*), the visual analysis relied on the original sources. In cases where a particular scene was significant beyond individual frames, detailed scene descriptions and contextual notes were used in the transcript to capture narrative and cinematographic meaning.

Sample Selection and Acquisition

The research sample, which after a lengthy sampling and selection process consists of 11 documentary films varying in length from 20 to 99 minutes, was collected through a purposeful online database keyword search between April and May 2025. The *Sample Collection Approaches* table (*Table 17*) in the annex provides details on the continually readjusted process.

The sample identification (= film selection) of films as a medium was understandably different to that of scientific literature, but still used a clearly structured keyword search, followed by a manual relevance check. With following an entirely systematic approach proving to be impossible for the scope of this research, a nonetheless purposeful sampling strategy worked out in a trial-and-error manner and still allows for reproducibility and justification as to which films made the cut, how and why. Through screening titles, descriptions and, at later stages, the films themselves, a solid selection was made.

The sample search identified potentially relevant films through predefined keywords or search strings across multiple open-access platforms (Google Advanced Search, IMDb, FilmsForAction and YouTube), set up according to what the search parameters of the respective websites allowed. These search strings iteratively mutated a core set of activism and environmental justice keywords across different platforms, formats, and lengths, adding and recombining phrases for documentaries and full films while excluding non-film content such as interviews, panels, and trailers. Evaluating the films basic eligibility against predetermined criteria (*see Table 1 below*) was a multi-phased process, dwindling down an initial result pool of 69 films and videos to the final sample of 11 documentaries on environmental justice.

Table 1: Data Selection Overview.

Inclusion Criteria		
Release Timeframe	<i>Predetermined timeframe to ensure current relevance</i>	2015 – 2025
Platform	<i>Publicly accessible video streaming platforms</i>	
Language	<i>Language barrier and translation avoidance</i>	English, English Subtitled, German, German Subtitled, German dubbed
Topical Focus	<i>Correlating to keyword search</i>	Environmental (In)Justice, Environmental Conflict, Environmental Activism
Exclusion Criteria		
Production Type	<i>Non-documentary productions</i>	fictionalized accounts, panels, interviews, lectures etc.
Unavailability to Researcher	<i>Paywalls, known limit to public access</i>	
Views	<i>Minimum view count to ensure relevance</i>	> 100

One task of media analysis is to show that communicative power is, as any other power, unequally distributed in society, and critically examine whose voices and framings dominate versus whose are marginal or absent. Environmental media is the product of competing interests with varying amounts of money, access or influence (Hansen, 2011). That is why this study looks at anything between well-resourced productions and smaller, grassroots films to allow different actors with different levels of narrative power in general discourse to present their stories of environmental (in)justice, so long as a minimum view count ensured the films to have some form of societal relevance and resonance. Striving for a balance between depth and manageability, and a thorough analysis rather than a high quantity of films, the initial goal for sample size was to include 5 to 15 documentaries, depending on film length. Each film could be considered equivalent to multiple interview participants in a qualitative interview study format, as it was likely to contain multiple voices.

The final sample of documentaries eligible for analysis consisted of 12 films originally, all of which made it through to the coding phase. However, on November 4th, 2025, one of the films (*'We are the People 2.0'* (2017)) was removed from YouTube and became inaccessible, reducing the sample to 11 films totalling at roughly 507 minutes runtime. Their full details, including links, are recorded in the Annex. Narrative summaries of the film's contents and core characters, as well as persons relevant to analysis, can be found in the results section (*see Narrative Summaries: About the Films and their Women*). Table 2 briefly introduces the final sample.

Table 2: Final sample: Documentaries selected for analysis.

Film ID	Film Title	Year of Release	Found through	Available through	Length (min:sec)
01	Abandoned: Greed, Neglect and Environmental Injustice in Adel	2022	YouTube	YouTube	35:03
02	DISOBEDIENCE: The Fight for Climate Survival	2023	YouTube via Google	YouTube	40:57
03	I Am Greta	2020	IMDb	ARD media library	97:00
04	L'EAU EST LA VIE: From Standing Rock to the Swamp	2019	IMDb	Vimeo	24:00
05	Not On Our Soil – A Climate Justice Reality	2021	YouTube via Google; YouTube	YouTube	20:10
06	On the Fenceline: A Fight for Clean Air	2020	YouTube	YouTube	25:22
07	Planet of the Humans	2020	YouTube via Google	YouTube	99:57
08	Re: Environmental Activism. The Last Generation Movement	2022	ARTE media library	ARTE media library; YouTube	32:16
09	Targeted: Environmentalists in danger	2022	YouTube via Google	YouTube	51:55
10	The Burning Question	2016	YouTube	YouTube	30:03
11	The Troublemaker	2020	YouTube via Google	YouTube	55:32
12	We the People 2.0	2017	YouTube via Google	YouTube	91:22

Data Immersion: Data Structuring and Meta-Data Collection

Following sample collection, the final step of preparation before analysis is the immersion in the data. In this process of becoming intimately familiar with the content, typically when transcribing or repeatedly reading the texts, the researcher can familiarise themselves with the data and its scope. This can give initial ideas about potential concepts and constructs in the data and helps starting the analysis process with a holistic approach (Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Vears & Gillam, 2022). For this thesis, the final sample of films was processed according to the following procedure: 1) First Screening of films (incl. documentation of first impressions, affective experiences), 2) Transcription / Correction of Transcripts, 3) Data Structuring and Metadata Collection, 4) First Reading (of Data).

All films eligible for analysis were documented using Basal Documentary Meta-Data (Table 3) and Documentary Content Collection Sheets (Table 4), aligning with previous applications of qualitative film content analysis (see e.g. Hammer, 2010; Johnson, 2016; Luyt, 2011; Wei et al.,

2024). The purpose of these tables was to gather all relevant documentary data and core content characteristics, including spatial scales and film foci, to simplify later summarisation and contextualisation. These descriptive tables provide context for the overall analysis and facilitate comparison between different themes and patterns potentially uncovered in the analysis. Their respective versions filled out in all detail can be found in the annex (*see Table 12 and Table 14*).

Table 3: Basal Documentary Meta-Data Collection Sheet.

Film ID	<i>Number assigned in alphabetical order (01-11)</i>
Film Title	
Year of Release	
Country of Production	
Production Company	
Length	<i>minutes:seconds</i>
Source	<i>platform & link</i>
Language Options	<i>Incl. subtitles</i>

Table 4: Documentary Content Collection Sheet.

Film ID	<i>Number assigned in alphabetical order (01-11)</i>
Spatial Scale	<i>Local (covering single location)</i>
	<i>National (spanning multiple locations within a country)</i>
	<i>Regional (multiple countries within same region)</i>
	<i>Global (spanning multiple regions)</i>
Region	<i>Arctic, Antarctic, Asia, Africa, South America, North America, Europe, Oceania</i>
Country	
Specific Location(s)	<i>City, village, province, state, ...</i>
Character / Film Focus	<i>e.g. whole movement, subgroup, individual, ...</i>

Inspired by multiple publications analysing the representation of women in media and film (see e.g. Eschholz et al., 2002; Luyt, 2011; Neuendorf et al., 2010), it was defined before analysis which women would be of interest for analysis through defining primary characters. Descriptive characteristics and variables addressing the specific needs of this research project were then collected in a Primary Character Attributes Collection Sheet. With the goal to capture general demographic, physical and role characteristics (Eschholz et al., 2002; Gilpatric, 2010; Neuendorf et al., 2010), all variables (gender, age, race) were operationalised based on physical

characteristics and/or verbal cues within the film, reliant on author assessment (Eschholz et al., 2002), and recorded on each character considered relevant for the film and the research question. The tabular format and systematic collection enabled gathering relevant data and consistencies throughout the study progress (Hammer, 2010), which could be referred back to during analysis and interpretation.

A primary character is hereby defined as a woman that is significant to the analysis of the given film with at least once instance of being visibly and audibly clearly identifiable to the viewer. She would have to be seen and heard clearly and identified as an activist either through the film (caption, narration or by themselves), or the author's knowledge and interpretation of her being situated in an activist context (e.g. protest action, organisational setting, belonging to organisation/initiative...). Film narrators and information on them were recorded in the same table due to their narrative prominence and usually high speaking time. As not all women identified as primary characters are introduced in greater detail within the text corpus of this thesis, it is recommended to refer to the filled out table in the annex to grasp the full scope of female activists considered (*Table 16*).

Table 5: Primary Character Attributes Collection Sheet.

Film ID + Character ID	<i>01-11; Film ID-Name/Number</i>
Name	<i>If known, otherwise Alias (e.g. "Unidentified Female Activist 01")</i>
Identification	<i>How is character introduced in film (occupation, job, organisation, ...)?</i>
Introduction	<i>How is character introduced in film (caption, verbally, not at all, ...)?</i>
Gender	<i>Categories e.g. male, female, unclear, none</i>
Age	<i>Known (number); or rough estimate: adolescent (<18), young adult (18-30), adult (30-45), midlife adult (45-60), senior adult (60+)</i>
Race	<i>Mentioned, known or determined through visual characteristics → white/BIPoC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) categorisation</i>
Activist ID	<i>Film-ID; self-ID; author-ID; not one</i>
Notes	<i>Additional notes on character; pot. relevant to analysis</i>

Phase 2: Organisation

Inspired by and adapted from multiple publications, the coding approach utilizes a mixed inductive and deductive framework for the thematic content analysis of the documentary films, combining theory-driven guidance with data-driven emergence (see e.g. Eschholz et al., 2002; Gilpatric, 2010; Johnson, 2016; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Mayring & Fenzl, 2019; Myerson et

al., 2007; Neuendorf et al., 2010; Vears & Gillam, 2022; White & Marsh, 2006). This organized approach ensured a systematic analysis while remaining open to unexpected findings and began with an iterative process structure, informed by existing literature on ecofeminism, environmental justice, and gender representation. This enabled a preliminary coding outline and guiding questions to approach the data with (*see Table 6: Coding Framework for QCA.*) that would help code pertaining to the research questions, while still allowing new patterns and themes to emerge. As the analysis proceeded, new themes and patterns emerging directly from the textual and visual data were also incorporated, allowing the initial coding framework to expand and adapt, but still remain tethered to the theoretical framework.

To ensure consistency, the analysis involved iterative re-coding of documents including a pilot coding phase to refine the categories and train the coder before full analysis. The primary goal was to identify recurring patterns, stereotypes, and themes in the portrayal of women in environmental movements by critically examining both verbal and non-verbal elements, tying together textual (transcripts) and visual (film material) data.²

Primary big picture themes were developed out of ecofeminist and environmental justice theorising. The categories and subcategories, as specific manifestations of themes, are broken down further into more detailed and nuanced aspects of the data and allow for a finer analysis. The finalised codebook, or code tree, is the result of this organisation phase. It distinguishes between visible behaviours and dialogue, as well as underlying themes and meanings to empirically explore whether existing academic theories are reinforced or challenged. The code tree ultimately followed the same baseline structure as the initial deductive coding framework (*Table*

² On Merging Textual and Visual Analysis

Many image-focused studies treat individual pictures as the analytical unit – overlooking how contextual elements like linguistic framing shape interpretation, often pulling narratives in divergent directions (O'Neill & Smith, 2014). At the same time, communications research prioritizes text-based methods despite the recognized centrality of visuals in environmental media (Hansen, 2011), and visual culture analyses remain inherently suspicious of images' persuasive power (Callahan, 2015). In response, this study integrates both modalities organically. An originally planned standalone video analysis was scrapped and visual insights instead folded into MAXQDA coding, where films were rewatched alongside transcripts to capture memorable, 'unwritten' elements like key scenes directly in unified documents. Time constraints precluded exhaustive independent visual analysis of full films (or all women's scenes) or formal film techniques like camerawork and lighting, instead emphasizing visuals that reinforced textual patterns; this merger proved methodologically sound, mirroring how films inseparably intertwine image composition to guide viewers on visual and emotional journeys (Ryman, 2021).

6). Portions of the code tree will be introduced in more detail in the respective chapters relying on the coding results, and its remainder can be found in the annex (*Table 13*).

Table 6: Coding Framework for QCA.

Representation Patterns	Gender Role Stereotypes	What roles do women hold, and how? Are there counter-stereotypes or traditional role reversals?
	Underrepresentation	Who is visible and how? What or who is absent, or barely visible?
Ecofeminist Lens	Power Dynamics	Is there a visible struggle between activists and power structures? Are power relations within movements, communities highlighted?
	Ecofeminist Themes	<i>e.g. women/nature connection or oppression, patriarchy, capitalism</i>
	Dualism and Binaries	Is there dualistic/antagonistic framing? How do binaries structure narrative framing and/or representation?
Ecofeminist & Environmental Justice Lens	Marginalised Identities	Do women's race, age, class, nationality seem relevant to how they are portrayed?
	Layered Identities	Do films connect multiple layers of identity to activism, environmental problems, to one another? Are intersectional challenges and compounded barriers presented?
	Contextualisation	Are women contextualised or abstracted? (<i>from community, movement, ...</i>) Are, and if so which, intersectional issues (<i>poverty, migration, colonialism, healthcare, ...</i>) raised?
Environmental Justice Lens	Distributional Justice	How are environmental consequences framed? Who causes them, who suffers, who acts? Are there visible disparities in impact experiences based on gender, race, geography, community etc.?
	Procedural Justice	Who is involved in decision-making, governance, consultation, leadership?
	Scale	(<i>local to global</i>) Across which scales does the film move (<i>literally and narratively</i>)?
	Activism	What kind of activism do we see, and how?
Narrative Elements	Silencing & Voice	Who speaks, who narrates? Are people actively or passively silenced (<i>interrupted, dubbed, spoken for, ...</i>)? How does direct and indirect narrative space look? What are textual elements? (<i>narration, translation, subtitles, captions, on-screen text, ...</i>)
	Narrative Structures & Framing	Is there a clear narrative arc, and where do women position within? (<i>background, foreground, ...</i>)? Who does the film follow? Who has authority in the narrative? Who speaks for whom?
Visual & Cinematic Framing	Settings	How are women shown, literally and visually? What spaces and contexts are women shown in?
	Cinematic Choices	Is there striking camerawork or editing choices? (<i>e.g. combination of audio and video, contrasting scenes, ...</i>) Are emotional cues intensified by music? (How) is sound used to influence scenes?

Phase 3: Reporting

In reporting on all steps and findings of the QCA, this phase will produce the following results section of the thesis (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) and allow the researcher to move forward with contextualising said results. In the case of this research project, this will lead over into the third and final literature phase, the results of which will be combined, contrasted and compared with findings from analysis within the discussion section.

5.3 Anticipated Challenges

5.3.1 Methodological Challenges

Several methodological challenges were anticipated to arise. With many environmental documentaries being produced by Western filmmakers, there is a potential bias in representation that could shape narratives through a specific cultural lens. While keeping film selection open regarding the size of production is an attempt to counter this and gather a diverse selection for representation patterns, the exclusion of paywalled content may in itself cause a different selection bias. Further, given that QCA is inherently interpretive, a pilot coding phase was implemented to refine coding categories before a full dataset analysis. The time intensity of watching and coding multiple films within a structured timeline must also be considered.

The choice of a QCA methodology itself does not come without issues, as confirmed through own experience as well as literature on its processes (Graneheim et al., 2017). There is a wide range of sometimes varying or interchanging terminology and overlapping, or even contradicting descriptions of how and when to perform it, combined with a dearth of papers that provide sufficient detail on how to manage the data analysis process. The methodological literature on QCA can be (and most certainly was) difficult to navigate, especially for someone new to qualitative research (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Vears & Gillam, 2022). Ultimately, there is never just one way to apply a method and this individual approach came to be through swerving, testing the terrain and forming a new path.

During the course of the analysis, two films were removed from their original source. While one was still available through another link and remained in the sample, the other had to be eliminated because it was put behind a paywall at a point in analysis access would still have been necessary. Any later film removals cannot be accounted for by the author.

5.3.2 Ethical and Security Challenges

Since this research does not build upon interviews or the collection of personal data, issues of informed consent do not apply. Careful attention was paid to properly attributing filmmakers, activists, or organizations to acknowledge the sources of any excerpts, transcriptions or visual materials (such as screenshot or image descriptions) used. The units of analysis – publicly available documentary films – are pre-existing and have already been consented to for publication. As such, copyright and access ethics are not a concern.³

Even though documentary films are publicly available, the individuals depicted within them are still real people, whose representations will be critically analysed. Ethical interpretation and fairness must remain at the forefront. Researchers have a responsibility to handle their work with care, and particularly when studying the representation of minorities, should duly avoid reinforcing the same (mis)representations or stereotypes that the study seeks to examine in the first place. While this research does not interact directly with activists, it is important to recognize that many environmental justice movements involve individuals working under politically or socially precarious conditions. Some activists portrayed in these films may be at risk of surveillance, political retaliation, or even legal action in their home countries. Although this thesis primarily focuses on representation rather than activism itself, care was taken to avoid amplifying harmful or reductionist narratives that could impact these individuals. Furthermore, since this research does not analyse audience reception or discourse surrounding the films, the thesis

³ Legal Use of Audiovisual Material for Academic Research

As most of the active research process occurred in Germany, it was performed in compliance with both German and Austrian Copyright Law to securely cover legal bases. In accordance with Austrian copyright law (Urheberrechtsgesetz, 2023), documentary films are considered works of cinematographic art and while protected because of this, there are ‘free use of work’ exemptions covering the extent of this thesis. Within a scientific context, published works may be reproduced and cited, and specific parts of the work (such as screenshots) may be included if they serve to explain the content of the scientific work. Their use is thus justified by a specific purpose. Sources must of course be clearly indicated, and sources must be described with enough precision as to be easily found, which is for this thesis guaranteed through clearly identifying the films and their producers, as well as marking direct citations from films with timestamps. German copyright law states that audiovisual materials specifically may be downloaded, locally stored, cited and partially (up to 75%) reproduced for the purpose of scientific research, including citations, excerpts or images of copyrighted works if they are used as evidence or commentary. The documentaries also did not necessitate specific agreement of those portrayed in the films due to the nature of the footage (Klimpel & Rack, 2023).

must clearly reflect to be about representation, not about perception of or reaction to any given documentary or individual within it.

Here, researcher positionality and bias also come into play (*see Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity*). As a white, European female activist working within an academic setting, my own perspective can influence how I interpret material. While subjectivity is inherent in all qualitative research, steps will be taken to minimize bias and ensure transparency. This includes using a structured coding system with predefined categories, conducting a pilot coding phase to refine categories and check reliability, engaging in continuous reflexivity and referencing prior studies to ensure alignment with established research.

Even though documentary filmmakers are assumed to strive for authenticity, their choices – what footage to include, how to edit interviews, how to set up a shot or scene – shape the portrayal of the activists they portray. This research remains critical of how representation is constructed within these films and acknowledges that no documentary is an entirely neutral portrayal of reality, even though it is precisely this quality that makes the films such a mirror to the real world (which is also never neutral, but always individual). Maintaining a methodological rigor will ensure that the study upholds both ethical integrity and academic reliability in its examination of documentary representations of women in environmental justice movements.

6 Results

The following chapters focus on presenting the findings of QCA and laying out key findings on patterns and gaps of representation that recur across the data corpus, illustrated using exemplary scenes and characters. After a narrative summary of the films and their primary characters (the women upon whom the analysis rested) follow in-depth presentations of recurring themes in the portrayal of female activists within the documentaries. A subsequent comparative analysis addresses hierarchies in storytelling and the ways in which they are constructed.

6.1 Narrative Summaries: About the Films and their Women

Inspired by Luyt (2011) and Ernanda (2023), narrative summaries of the films are provided to introduce their central themes, characters (primary female activist characters) and framing. Any information presented here is taken from the films themselves, their opening/end credits and video descriptions where available. This information can also be found in the respective tables in the annex (*Table 12: Basal Meta-Data, Table 14: Documentary Content and Table 16: Primary Character Attributes*) which systematically recorded such data. The films are sorted

alphabetically and according to their respective film identification number (film ID). In the results, characters are referred to by name where known and character ID where not, and the films are referenced through title and/or film ID. Out of the 11 films, 9 feature women as key protagonists (though to varying degrees), and 58 women were overall considered for analysis.

01 – Abandoned: Abandoned: Greed, Neglect and Environmental Injustice in Adel (2022)

In this 35-minute-long production, released in 2022 and produced by the Georgia Conservation Voters Education Fund, we enter the community of Adel, Georgia and through them, learn about the environmental injustices they are faced with and fighting against. The local struggle is introduced by and through members of a local activist organisation, the *Concerned Citizens of Cook County*, as well as individual members of the community suffering the impacts of environmental pollution in the city. Minority and low-income populations are localised most densely around the harmful sites: an abandoned lumberyard (*DelCook*), a company refurbishing old propane tanks (*Advanced Cylinder & Tank*), as well as a Bitcoin mining operation. With a wood pellet plant planned to be entered into the neighbourhood as well, affected community members and activists share their personal experiences, motivations and struggles around air, water and noise pollution, and insight into their fight against yet another polluting industry entering their neighbourhood. The narrative focus is on the community, and without outside narration, the film is a story of community-led action and environmental injustice at the local scale. Five women were recorded as primary characters: Dr. Treva Gear, founder of the *Concerned Citizens of Cook County* is shown and heard most frequently in the film, making her the most relevant female character. Vicki Weeks and Erniko Brown of the *Dogwood Alliance*, Altheia Paige of the *Concerned Citizens of Cook County*, and Adel resident Annette Tiveron were also identified as activists and considered for analysis.

02 – Disobedience: The Fight for Climate Survival (2023)

This Creative Company production, roughly 41 minutes long and released in 2023, introduces viewers to the worldwide fight against coal mining and related industries. Through consulting experts and activists working in various organisations in the field of climate protection, the documentary journeys across the globe to connect individual actors through their shared motivation: ending fossil fuels. With the anti-coal movement as the general focus, frontline actors are highlighted for each country, intertwined with expert interviews on civil disobedience and climate change, such as Bill McKibben, Michael Mann or Ricken Patel. While six women were recorded as primary characters from this production, because of clearly belonging to an organisation or initiative working on environmental (justice) issues, they all played a relatively small

role in the overall narrative and as a result, in the analysis. Because of this, they are not introduced in greater detail here but are recorded in the *Primary Character Attributes* table in the annex.

03 – I Am Greta (2020)

This feature-length biopic on world-famous Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg was released in 2020 and produced by B-Reel Films in cooperation with Hulu, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, SVT and BBC Storyville. It was written and filmed by Nathan Grossmann, who accompanied Thunberg from one of her first parliament strikes in August 2018, up until the UN climate summit in New York in August 2019. The film takes the viewer along on Thunberg's journey across Europe and the Atlantic, from climate strikes to climate conferences, from public speeches to private moments, and from the big stages to small backroom conversations. Simultaneously, the narration by Thunberg herself allows insight into her inner workings; instead of providing context as to where she is or what she is doing, it resembles diary entries as to how she felt, how she got to where she is as an activist, what motivates her to continue and what her struggles along the way are. Because of this and the intimate nature of the footage, the film feels more like a journal than a large production. There are no interview setups for the documentary specifically, the filmmaker is never heard or seen, there is no direct interaction between Thunberg and the viewer, yet she gives insight into her personal life and struggles. As a result, the production gives an intimate feeling, humanising a person that many consider a figurehead of the climate justice movement. While other female activists outside Thunberg appear, none of them are officially introduced and all of them play a subliminal role in the production. Details can be found in the *Primary Character Attributes* table in the annex.

04 – L'EAU EST LA VIE: From Standing Rock to the Swamp (2019)

Released in 2019, this 24 minute long Mutual Aid Media production chronicles the work of Cherri Foytlin as part of the *L'eau Est La Vie* (French for 'Water is Life') resistance camp in the Atchafalaya Basin in Louisiana, USA, as well as the environmental injustice faced by the community of St. James Parish located in the same bayou. The oil industry has encroached on Indigenous land here, and the Atakapa-Ishak and Chitimacha traditional territories are disrupted by and for the sake of oil drilling, opening multiple layers of environmental justice – from colonial history and present, over capitalist structures to community-led resistance. While the documentary takes place only within the Atchafalaya Basin of Louisiana, it weaves the connection to other oil industry and pipeline conflicts, embedding local conflict into a global web of resistance. The film follows Foytlin through the channels and marshland of the bayou, from

past to present, and through her, we briefly meet other locally engaged activists, two of which were eligible for analysis: Anne White Hat of the *L'eau Est La Vie* council and an Unidentified Female Activist (04-01) speaking at a protest action.

05 – Not On Our Soil: A Climate Justice Reality (2021)

Released in 2021, produced by the African Climate Reality Project and with a runtime of about 20 minutes, this short production takes place in Durban, South Africa. Through interviews with local actors, it introduces the project 'Action24 – Active Citizens for Responsive Legislatures', which was co-funded by the European Union and strives for community involvement in tackling climate and environmental injustice. While not referencing a specific issue per se, interviewees speak more abstractly on their work around and with environmental justice, intertwined with footage of community work and locals. Three female activists, clearly identified as members of local organisations working in the field of environmental protection and justice initiative, were considered as primary characters for the analysis: Lisakhanya Mathiso (*YouLead Initiative*), Sibongile Mtungwa (*Women's Leadership & Training Programme*) and Shanice Firmin (*South Durban Community Environmental Alliance*).

06 – On the Fenceline: A Fight for Clean Air (2020)

The 25-minute Picture to Picture production, first released in 2020, visualises a community's fight for environmental justice in South Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. Through following and interviewing active members, the film lays out the efforts of the local movement *Philly Thrive* as they strive for community involvement in decision-making regarding the oil refinery that has been polluting their neighbourhood for decades, demanding it stay closed for good. While prominently focused on the local scale and community level, the film also accompanies activists to a protest action in New York City, at the very building where outside actors are auctioning off the refinery, deciding the future fate of their community. Activists shown at the frontlines of this movement are predominantly female and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour), reflecting the community bearing the brunt of the refinery's pollution. As such, primary female characters are Carol Hemingway, Carol White and Sonya Sanders of *Philly Thrive*, whom the film joins in introducing the community, partaking in civil disobedience and civil hearings. Three more activists, never officially introduced, were considered for analysis as well. While two remain unnamed and are not shown as frequently (06-01, 06-02), a third woman referred to as 'Alexis' was present at every group action and highly involved with the movement.

07 – Planet of the Humans (2020)

In this feature-length production, released in 2020, producer and main character Jeff Gibbs takes the viewer along on his journey to uncover the green energy movement in the US. With a flair for the dramatic, both in visuals and narration, Gibbs travels across the states to speak with scientists, scholars, experts and activists. Ultimately, he comes to the conclusion that in following the green movement, he uncovered that there is no such thing, that environmentalists led by financial and political reasoning beyond ‘the greater good’ have taken a doomed path towards striving for technological fixes that can never truly be ‘green’, and that they, too, are encapsulated in corporate structures. Throughout the entire production, Gibbs is the leading character, both on and off camera, as well as the narrator, and the green movement figureheads he demystifies through brutally direct questions and pointed interview footage are exclusively men (e.g. Bill McKibben, Al Gore, Robert F. Kennedy Jr.). In nearly 100 minutes of footage, only a single woman is clearly identified as an activist: Catherine Andrews. Because of this severe dearth, any unidentified females briefly interviewed in protest or activist context were considered as activists, even when not introduced as members of any specific movement or organisation (character ID 07-01 to 07-08); all except for environmentalist Vandana Shiva, whom Gibbs briefly speaks to during a protest action. These women are recorded in as much detail as possible in the *Primary Character Attributes* table.

08 – Re: Environmental Activism. The Last Generation Movement (2022)

This 2022 production by Arte, SpiegelTV and ZDF is an originally German production, but appeared through the systematic search and was thus considered and translated to English for analysis. In about 32 minutes, the documentary introduces the *Letzte Generation* (German for ‘Last Generation’) movement, who turn to civil disobedience and disruptive protest actions to direct public attention towards the climate crisis. The film operates at a national level, introducing, interviewing and following three activists as well as a local pastor in their respective cities and through this opens three parallel storylines, guided and framed by outside narration. Pastor Wilhelm Gohl, who feels concerned with the climate crisis in his own manner, sympathises with the *Last Generation* movement and their goal, yet feels their action to be too radical. Henning Jeschke, a founding member of the *Last Generation* in Germany, while still being actively involved in protest outside the footage, is here shown partaking in community engagement and educational work in Greifswald. The sisters Lisa and Maja Winkelmann, who later cross paths with their fellow activist Henning at a court hearing, are followed across Berlin where they prepare and partake in one of the glued-to-the-street protests their organisation has become known for, as well as accompanied on a hometown visit. Lisa and Maja Winkelmann, as well

as a third, unnamed female activist (08-01) who is present and vocal at the film's main protest action, are primary female characters subject to analysis.

09 – Targeted: Environmentalists in Danger (2022)

Woven together through a female outside narrator, this 51-minute 2022 production by DokUtopia Film, ZDF, Deutsche Welle and phoenix connects environmental activists around the globe through their shared fate of being personally endangered through the work that they do. Whilst in Nigeria, effects of the oil industry continue to negatively impact locals, illegal logging is taking over in Romania, and activists in both countries are risking their lives to fight against the corrupt systems that allow such disruption. Both storylines centre exclusively around men and are thus of relatively little importance to the analysis. As for primary female characters, in Nigeria, Esther Ato of the *Goi Women's Movement* is once very briefly consulted. In Peru, the storyline focuses on Lucila Pautrat, a forest sciences engineer and environmental activist. Pautrat has focused her legal advocacy work at *Kené* on Indigenous communities threatened by illegal deforestation, timber trade, and palm oil plantations. While she is the proclaimed main character of the Peru plotline, Pautrat is not the person most seen or heard within it, sharing the narrative space with a multitude of other actors.

10 – The Burning Question (2016)

Released in 2016, this 30-minute long Trócaire production and campaign film outlines the International Non-Governmental Organisations' (INGO) project 'The Burning Question' around fossil fuel divestment. Emmet Sheerin, one of the producers as well as the main character and narrator, travels to Malawi on his quest to meet locals affected by the climate crisis and subsequent food scarcity. Back home in Ireland, he speaks with members of the fossil fuel divestment movement centred around Irish universities. In Malawi, Sheerin meets and travels with Heather Maseko of the *Civil Society Network on Climate Change*, who accompanies him to villages and supports him in a translator position, through which she gathered significant speaking time, even while not speaking for herself. In one of the villages, Chithandala, the two converse with a local farmer and member of a village initiative, Meeckness Moffat, and in a separate interview, Sheerin speaks with Malawian student activists – none of whom are introduced, but one of which was eligible for analysis (10-01). In Ireland, several fossil fuel divestment actors are interviewed; Sheerin also sits down to speak with Deirdre Duff of the *Fossil Free TCD* group.

11 – The Troublemaker (2020)

Running at about 55 minutes, this Sasha Snow Film and Passion Planet production was first released in 2020 and introduces the formation and work of the *Extinction Rebellion* movement

through two of their members, as well as chronicles of two of their largest and most famous actions to that date: the shutdown of central London with a massive protest blockade in 2019, as well as disrupting air traffic to London Heathrow airport by operating drones. The film follows previously law-abiding citizens in their journey towards and of disruption and civil disobedience: Roger Hallam and Sylvia Dell. Dell, one of the two main protagonists, was a primary character, alongside two more anonymous female protesters (11-01, 11-02) that were shown and heard briefly.

6.2 Architecture of Storytelling: Narrative Elements, Editorial Mediation and the Construction of Authority

A documentary film, like any other product of media, is the result of someone's creation, and because of this will always (overtly or unknowingly) transfer thoughts, ideologies and experiences of its creators, placing relevance on which narrative devices documentaries use, and how. Even though not the focal point of analysis, it is important to acknowledge the agency and responsibility of filmmakers: they decide which and how voices are heard, which and how stories are told, whose identities are visible – and whose are not. The documentaries' narrative elements and how they position their subjects construct power hierarchies in storytelling. In following, the narrative elements analysed in the films, as well as their role in constructing identity and authority are introduced – showing that and how they contribute to shaping the representations of a productions' protagonists, including female activists.

Coding began deductively led by theory while remaining inductively open to emergent patterns, yielding systematic categories for both narrative and textual elements, as well as the more visual cinematic framing. Tables 7 and 8 below present the simplified code trees for these analytical dimensions that allowed documenting editorial and thematic choices that would then become relevant in shaping gendered activist portrayals in the data corpus. As the (sub)categories are rather self-explanatory in nature, they are not broken down into each singular code that was applied.

Table 7: Code Tree for Narrative Elements.

Theme	Category	Subcategories
Editorial Narrative Mediation	Opening & Close	First & Last Speakers
	Filmmaker Intervention	Filmmakers Speaking
		Postproduction Anonymisation

Theme	Category	Subcategories
Narrative Space	Narration	None
		by film's main character
		by outside person
	Direct Narrative Space	Set Interview
		Moving Interview
		Noteworthy Instances
	Indirect Narrative Space	Public Speaking
		External Interview Footage
		Casual Conversation and Interaction
	Silencing	Paraphrasing / Quoting
		Direct Silencing
		Editorial Silencing
	Linguistic Accessibility	Subtitles, Translations, Dubs
Identification Methods	Outside Identification	Caption
		Narration
		Verbally
	Lack of Identification	Unidentified Speaker
		Author ID
		Unidentified Speaker in External Footage
	Self-Identification	Verbal Introduction of Self
Textual Elements	Captions	Caption for Location Information
		Caption for Context Information
		Caption for Location and Context Information
Narrative Framing Structures	Prioritisation of Male Narrative	Sequence without women foregrounded (not present or not speaking)
	Hierarchical Empowerment	Narrative structures suggesting hierarchy of importance among characters

Table 8: Code Tree for Visual & Cinematic Framing.

Theme	Category	Subcategories
Settings	Formal & Non-Native Contexts	Shown within / exploring foreign community
		Shown in judicial, courtroom, hearing context

Settings	(Direct & Indirect Narrative Space)	Shown in (press) interview
		Shown in institutional/office interview setting
	Interview & Direct Narrative Space	Inside interview setting (private/home/residential)
		Outside interview setting, moving
		Outside interview setting, set
		Videocall/phone interview
	Environment	Shown in setting of (film-specific) environmental issue
		Shown in nature
		Shown around animals
	Mobility	Changing locations smaller scale (neighbourhood)
		Changing locations larger scale (across regions or countries)
Soundtrack	Sound	<i>Recording individual use and application of sound effects, play with sound etc.</i>
	Music	<i>Recording individual use of music</i>
Contrast & Juxtapositions	Visual Contrast	<i>Recording individual dissonance between scenes following one another</i>
	Narrative Contrast	<i>Recording individual contrast of situations</i>
	Visual / Narrative Contrast	<i>Recording individual dissonance between what is seen and what is heard</i>

Editorial (narrative) mediation refers to instances of filmmakers being conspicuously involved in the film and representation. This would be either through being seen or heard themselves (on or off camera), or through very clear postproduction choices, such as anonymising persons in the footage.

The **narrative space** within a documentary, coded on the micro-levels of interview presence, voice, anonymity or identity, language and character roles, holds valuable macro-level hints as to who drives its narrative, and how. Analysis of narrative space (or lack thereof) gives crucial insight as to who has legitimacy and authority within the narrative of a film. **Narration**, for instance, can tell us who is allowed to speak for themselves, and whose stories are told by others. **Direct narrative space** refers to moments where people, in this case female activists specifically, have an explicit voice through first-person statements and interviews, giving them clear on-screen speaker presence. **Indirect narrative space** covers instances of primary female

characters speaking outside of purposefully set interviews, for example through public speaking at actions, in external footage or in casual interactions, not necessarily occurring for the sake of the documentary specifically.

Questions of **silencing** refer to the discursive status of women – what happens to their voice, unrelated to where their body is in a scene. They capture overt silencing (like the lack or absence of primary characters, their statements or interviews), but also more direct forms. Are women cut off or narrated over when speaking (editorial/direct silencing), are they spoken for by someone else (paraphrasing/quoting)? This is naturally closely related to **narrative framing structures**, which ask how women are situated in the respective storylines – at the frontline, in backrooms, or anywhere in between. While also considering whether there was, and if so which, a clear narrative arc, this mapping of whose lives or actions structure the story later allows correlating visibility and centrality with agency and stereotype perpetuation. Looking at narrative arcs was especially poignant because it revealed hierarchical empowerment tropes and prioritisations, like that of men over women. It was coded through more open-ended items, as no two films would be identical in this sense.

The **linguistic accessibility** – how a film handles foreign languages through translation, subtitles or dubs – signals that editorial decisions of filmmakers can control which voices reach their audience, and how. Here, one production had to be eliminated from consideration because the original production was not available (03). Another production was German, only providing subtitles in English (08). Purely English-speaking films were, without exceptions, released in primarily English-speaking countries of production and most likely through this void of other languages spoken (01, 04, 06, 07, 05, 11). The remaining three films handled foreign languages differently: either through subtitles (02), through dubbing them in English (09), or through a mixture of in-situ translation and subtitles (10).

Various **methods of identification** played into the narrative prioritisation of characters. The attribution of identity, so understanding who was introduced versus who remains anonymous, can even be linked to silencing: a lack of (clear) identification can reinforce invisibility and marginalisation, while the decision to explicitly identify a person can strengthen their (perceived) importance to the storyline. Examining methods of identity attribution allows addressing intersectional research questions as to who receives narrative rights and visibility. Throughout the data corpus, people were most frequently introduced through captions, occasionally through narration or verbally by themselves. The lack of identification, so a person remaining unidentified through the entire production, was particularly interesting for people who were 1)

nonetheless seen and heard multiple times, 2) interviewed for the documentary's sake or 3) in direct interaction with the main characters (more on this in the chapter *The Absent Woman: Underrepresentation and Invisibility*).

In analysis, as aforementioned, **visual and cinematic framing** were also considered, as they naturally held great influence over how a scene could be read. For instance, the **spatial and social setting** of female activists relevant to if and how they were contextualised, which in turn counted towards patterns of representation. For example, when women are positioned only individually, never in context with other people, activist or otherwise, this can evoke a sense of vulnerability or marginalisation – or on the contrary, depict them as especially agentic and powerful in their own identity. Such readings depend heavily on how the individual scene is constructed and construed for the viewers and influenced through additional cinematographic methods such as music. Individual viewings of the documentaries are recommended.

6.3 Recurring Themes in Representation: Thematic Analysis of Female Environmental Justice Activists

The analysis of the documentaries' transcripts, together with repeated and simultaneous screenings drew out gendered patterns of identity and action, addressing both traditional and subversive narrative roles of women, each of which was reflected across multiple documentaries. These themes in the portrayal of female activists will be presented in the following, in order of frequency from high to low, and in contrast to perhaps the most relevant and frequent theme: absence. During analysis, the quickest conclusion to be made was that women did not appear frequently or consistently throughout the data corpus, much less did female activists.

Alongside extracting patterns in the representation of female activists, the data analysis aimed to tie those back to the individual identities and layered, intersectional identities of the women to find connections across themes, patterns within the patterns. Because ecofeminism understands racism, classism and sexism to be fundamentally entangled (Gaard, 1997; Mallory, 2006), intersectional factors of identity such as race, age and queer identity were approached with special attention during analysis. However, finding variance in the representation of female activists relating specifically to such layered identities proved to be difficult – not because it would not be there, but rather because of the underrepresentation of female activists generally. For more on this, please refer to the chapter *The Absent Woman: Underrepresentation and Invisibility*.

Of course, in any instance, one or multiple patterns could appear more than once within the same film, even the same woman. Though for purposes of visualisation, examples will be provided⁴, these cannot reflect the entire reality of the films. There are always more scenes that would have served to exemplify the point and, logically, written descriptions of movie scenes cannot compare to the actual watch experience.

To systematically capture dimensions of identity construction and representation of female activists, coding distinguished granular categories for emergent representational patterns into themes and categories. *Table 9* below presents a condensed code tree overview, transparently documenting the analytical framework applied across the film corpus and introducing in more detail the categories which constructed the themes discussed in following.

Table 9: Code Tree for Patterns in Representation.

Theme		Category	Subcategories
Relational Identities	De-Escalating Femininity (Accommodating Conduct)	Relativisation / rationalisation of emotionality	
		Non-violent arrest	
		Polite, calm in exceptional situation	
		Non-/anti-confrontational	
		Humility	
	Women as Caregivers	Emotional support & empathy	Empathetic conduct
			Calming another person
			Women supporting (women); female warmth
		Responsibility	Feeling responsibility for child / family
		Care work	Act of caretaking
			Woman partaking in traditional care work
	Women as Community Stewards	Acting out of community / solidarity	
		Feeling responsibility for community (members)	
		Connection, community for empowerment	
		Collective “we”	
		Knowledgeable about, involved in community	

⁴ **Film Citation**

Exemplary moments and people from the films are credited according to their respective film identification (Film ID) and name or character ID. Concrete timestamps (min:sec) are reserved for direct quotations and screenshots.

Theme		Category	Subcategories
Relational Identities	Family & Motherhood	Motherhood	Prioritisation of child(ren) over self
			Identification of woman as mother
			Instrumentalization of womanhood/female solidarity/motherhood
			Regretting motherhood
			Reduction of woman to motherhood
			Motherhood as motivation for activism
		Family	Partaking in familial home life activities
			Personal loss (of family member) foregrounded
			Parenting styles seen (from gentle to authoritative)
	Reference to parenthood/family		
Daughterhood	Reduction of woman to daughterhood		
Intergenerational Connection	Feeling responsibility for younger generation (knowledge transfer)		
	Intergenerational connection		
Counter-Stereotype: The Caring Man		Man partaking in traditional care work	
Agents of Disruption	Disruptive Behaviour	Violent arrest	
		Violent altercation	
		Vocal, loud, yelling	
		Confrontation, provocation	
	Active Resistance	Assertive female energy	
		Prioritisation of self	
		Resistance	
		Persistence	
		Agency	
	Defiant / Agentive Emotions	Anger	
		Hope	
	Leadership Roles	Organisational Role	
		Leadership Role	

	Theme	Category	Subcategories
Activist Persona	Personal Sacrifice		
	Purpose & Identity		Sense for (in)justice
			Feeling/suggesting moral obligation / calling for activism
			Activism as fulfilment of purpose, self, to become “whole”
	Motivation & Reasoning for Activism		Individual responsibility/agency to act
			Personal motivation for activism
			Individual activist 'becoming' / path
			Lack of alternative action
			Necessity to fight for your own/yourself (nobody else will do it)
			activist hardship: doing what's 'right' over what's 'easy'
	Heroization		Inspirational figure
			Fan-like behaviour (towards activist)
			Celebrity-sation (of activist)
	Self as Activist		Self ID activist
			Self ID political involvement
Emotional Landscapes	Visible / Physical Emotionality		Mental break-/meltdown
			Crying, choked up
	Expressing Emotional Vulnerability & Inner Struggles		Exhaustion
			Solitude / outsider
			Loss of appetite
Underrepresentation	Absence of Female Activists		Scene sequence without women (speaking, shown, foregrounded)
	Sidelining of Other Female Activists		(Other) female activists shown, but not foregrounded

6.3.1 Relational Identities: The Nexus of Traditional Femininity & Care

As the background chapter at the beginning of this thesis posed (*see Women, Environmental Change & Environmental Activism*), there have been global developments as to the roles and emancipation of women (see e.g. Ernanda, 2023). But still, there are persisting expectations of women having to manage the emotions and wellbeing of those around them, and through this becoming the adhesive glue holding together families, groups, structures of social co-existence (see e.g. Gorczyca & Zozulia, 2025; Longest et al., 2022; Mersha, 2018; Prindeville, 2004). In

this ‘traditional’ understanding as to the position of women, they are also often reduced to who they are related to, as a mother, daughter, or sister, or how are incorporated in other forms of relation such as community. This is reflected in the most persistent pattern across films, which focused on **Traditional Femininity** and **Relational Roles**. In this, female activists were anchored specifically in their relational roles as members of a family or of a community, and within stereotypically feminine qualities and actions of care and empathy.

In a form of **De-escalating Femininity**, for example, women exhibited accommodating conduct most prominently through remaining non-confrontational in situations of direct provocation, attempting to or successfully avoiding escalation. For instance, in film 08 (*‘Re: Environmental Activism. The Last Generation Movement’*), Maja Winkelmann is yelled at and personally insulted by an enraged pedestrian during a street blockade action, yet she remains exceptionally calm and repeatedly offers to explain her movement’s reasoning for the action, meeting the angered woman with a level-headed invitation for dialogue. In a similarly polite take, Sylvia Dell (11) is shown in what could be described as the demurest arrest in history. During a planned action involving the voluntary arrest of the partaking activists, Dell, who is actively wanted by the police at the time, phones local authorities to very calmly and kindly explain the illegal action she is currently committing and offering to be picked up and taken in.



11 – *The Troublemaker* (2020). Sylvia Dell organising voluntary arrest (l., 43:47) & being arrested (r., 45:31).

Within this representation pattern, women are often situated as **caregivers**, either directly through expressing feelings of responsibility for their children or family, or through being shown as such through footage of practicing traditional care work (i.e. childcare, cooking, chores), or familial home activities (i.e. spending time or sharing meals with family members, spending time with pets). Women also provided physical and emotional care to members of their community and activist context, including one another. In *‘On the Fenceline: A Fight for Clean Air’* (06) Alexis is shown assisting Carol Hemingway, whose health visibly deteriorates throughout the film production and who walks with a cane during a protest action. Adélaïde

Charlier checks in on Greta Thunberg, who seems uncomfortable and overwhelmed during a climate strike (03). In film 04 (*L'EAU EST LA VIE: From Standing Rock to the Swamp*), an unnamed woman (04-01) speaks during a protest action on her child's health being negatively affected by environmental hazards in her community. As she chokes up and cries, the group of women around her consoles, verbally affirms and supports her through sharing her personal story. Such expressions of solidarity also translate across gender lines, for example with Maja and Lisa Winkelmann accompanying their fellow activist Henning Jeschke to a court appearance for moral support (08). Instances of women showing **empathy** to those around them, even those potentially affected or disrupted through their actions or outside of their immediate personal responsibility, are a frequent occurrence.



06 – *On The Fenceline: A Fight for Clean Air* (2020). Carol Hemingway (l.) & Alexis (r.) walking together, holding hands at New York Protest action (21:11).

This portrayal as being caretaking and feeling responsible for those around them, was further underlined by a sense of and for community within the female activists. It was expressed through articulations of solidarity and a sense of connection and community, and through this, feelings of empowerment. As such, these women could be interpreted as **stewards to their respective communities** – with the individual definition of ‘community’ ranging from their fellow activists/movement to those within their neighbourhood. In film 08 (*Re: Environmental Activism. The Last Generation Movement*), an unIntroduced female activist (08-01) shares how feeling as part of the group made physical harassment she experienced during their blockade action bearable. Sonya Sanders (06) voices that the loss of and worry for members of her community motivated her getting involved with *Philly Thrive*, as well as feeling empowered to

continue their fight by her fellow activists. Films on a local scale, with a specific group of actors working on a local environmental issue showed the female activists to be highly involved in their communities through knowledge on the happenings within, and through their expressed sense of responsibility in stepping up for those around them who might not be able to themselves (i.e. 01, 06).

Familial relations – attests to parenthood, motherhood or being someone's child – strung themselves consistently through most productions. This was purposefully included in the same construct as other, more communal than familial roles, because they are all rooted within the same gendered division of labour and socialisation, within patriarchal social structures that define women primarily through their interconnections with others. While some male characters (activists and otherwise) attested to feelings of responsibility attached to their roles as fathers (e.g. Roger Hallam (11), Svante (03)), this was rare in men and significantly more frequent in women. **Motherhood** in particular plays no small role in this type of relational role-focused portrayal. Women explaining that their being involved in activist work is out of concern for the safety of their children, both immediate and future, is a tangible instance of this. They expressed feeling responsible for the safety and wellbeing of their child, wanting to protect them from bodily or emotional harm. Often, this would be accompanied by the relativisation of their own priority: mothers explaining that they now do what they do because of and for their child(ren), with their own wellbeing playing a minor role at best. This is by way of example reflected in Sonya Sanders (06) sharing on multiple occasions that she fears for her son's safety, and even going as far as musing whether she should have had a child at all considering the environmental conditions in her community. Alongside women outside the primary character pool, some female activists were reduced specifically to their identity as mothers through first and foremost being introduced as such. This was always paired with the woman then being one to share her motivations surrounding her children as abovementioned. Perhaps the most prominent case of this is Sylvia Dell (11) who, while her male counterpart and second main character of the film Roger Hallam is introduced as a 'co-founder of Extinction Rebellion' through captions, is literally presented to the viewer as a 'retired mother of four'. The two become contrasted in an evidently gendered consideration of their roles and core identity markers.



11 – *The Troublemaker* (2020). Introduction of main characters Sylvia Dell (l., 08:43) & Roger Hallam (r., 02:17).

In a smaller, but still noteworthy instance, the siblings Maja and Lisa Winkelmann (08) were referred to as ‘the daughters’ by the film’s narrator on multiple occasions – flipping the switch and reducing women who are not mothers back to their relational identity as someone’s child.

The vaguer concept of **intergenerational connection**, unrelated to familial or blood ties, also shapes this relational role representation. While less abstractly considered in the chapter *Activist Persona: Responsibility, Calling and the Heroine Trope* through a feeling of responsibility towards future generations, this also came through in wanting to help the younger generation in the present. Carol Hemingway (06), who is in her 70s, explicitly wishes to pass on knowledge to younger people to enable the continuance of the work that she will not be able to carry on forever, and is shown doing exact that within the film as well.

6.3.1.1 *Counter-Stereotype: The Caring Man*

What is perhaps the most striking in this form of representation is that it was almost exclusively reserved to women – hence its name Traditional *Femininity*. A reduction to familial relations and care work functions was next to non-existent for men and their contextualisation within a given community was also significantly less frequent. It was most occurrent for BIPoC female activists, that were commonly shown in community-led and -centred forms of activism and through this, visibly incorporated in their communities and activist structures.

Because it was so rare and across the data corpus most frequently performed by women, a noteworthy pattern formed around men partaking in what is traditionally considered care work. We see this in Svante (03), Greta Thunberg’s father, who takes on the leading caretaker role for his daughter, accompanying her across Europe and the Atlantic Ocean while she does her activist work. Svante gently supports and calmly parents Greta, coaching her through multiple emotional crises where she is visibly overwhelmed and struggling, he prepares food, does dishes and helps her pick out outfits. This came to be of relevance through the mere fact that

Svante is the *only* man we see partaking in such house- and care work, visibly taking care of and responsibility for his child. In another very brief but mentionable instance of a man in a gentle, caretaking capacity is Mischa Bareuther (08), a Last Generation activist in charge of protest operations that day. Bareuther checks in on his fellow activists, asking if everyone is alright and whether anyone would need handwarmers in the cold weather. Due to the lack of familial relations here, this likely connects more strongly to a sense of community and responsibility within the activist movement itself.

6.3.2 Agents of Disruption: Navigating Active Resistance

When the stereotypical image of expectations towards women is that of being calm, demure, and de-escalating, the portrayal of women as empowered, actively resisting and agentive becomes something of a contrast. As to be expected in the depiction of a multidimensional world, real life people are never just one or the other, and the two representational patterns coexisted within the same films, the same people even.

At the core of this pattern were female activists shown engaging in **disruptive behaviour**: yelling or screaming, speaking of or being shown in violent altercations, being confrontative or provocative in interaction with others (authorities, police, etc.), resisting arrest and so on. Cherri Foytlin (04) is the prime example of this. She is seen during group protest actions that take a violent turn towards physical altercation with the opposing site (supposedly police), in which she is thrown around, subdued to the ground and arrested with brute force; she yells provocatively at pipeline workers, she shares stories of how she defiantly engaged with prison personnel. In these altercations, Foytlin is not a passive participant but continuously vocal, as much as she physically could be while being subdued, remaining active and defensive in the protest action.



04 – *L'eau est La Vie: From Standing Rock to the Swamp* (2019). Cherri Foytlin (blue bandana) in during protest action at oil drill location. Subtitled for clarity in film due to bad audio (08:25).

Through being shown in **organisational** and **leadership roles** within their respective initiatives or movements, the women's portrayal focused on their being *empowered* and, as a result, in positions *of* power. Instances of the women being involved in action organisation and taking on leadership were equally frequent, often co-occurring and somewhat fluid in their interpretation, as one usually entailed the other. As such, where Alexis (06) strategizes with fellow female activists around where and how to proceed with their protest march, Maja Winkelmann (08) politely interferes with a male group member in the official leadership position during their protest action, pulling from her own experience to amend their action plan.

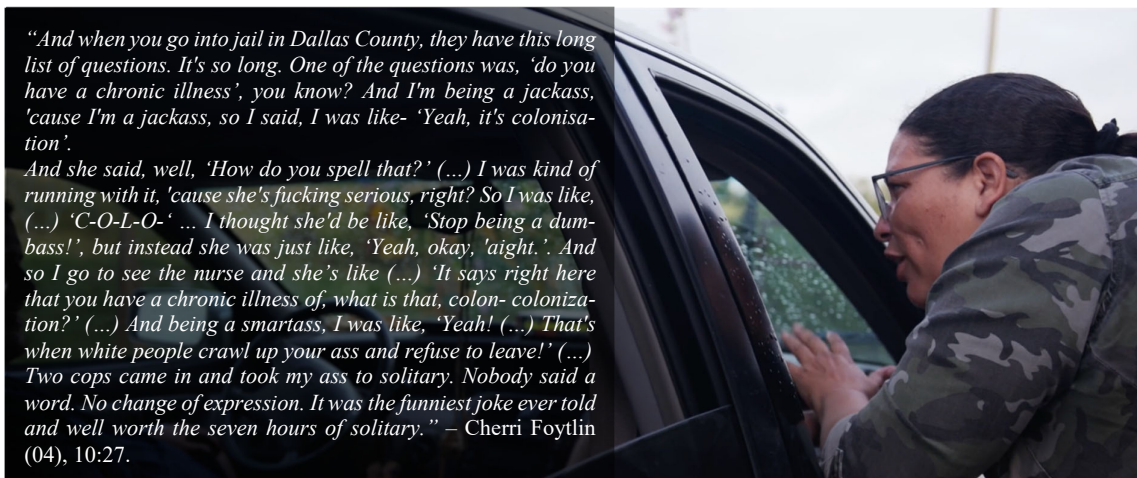
Agency, the literal agentive force of people, their capacity and vocalisation of an urge to act, is also strung across films. Female activists close the gap between seeing or understanding an issue and then partaking in what they consider to be necessary action. Sibongile Mtungwa (05), for example, works to empower women and girls because she believes this to be crucial in the protection of the environment, and Dr. Treva Gear (01) has always considered action to be the logical response to noticing injustices. **Assertive female agency** – the visible agency and boldness, the unapologetic presence of women – was central to this pattern. We see it across the sample: Lucilla Pautrat (09) does not sway from her legal advocacy even though it constantly endangers her personal life. Cherri Foytlin (04) considers a violent assault with the intention to make her afraid as the moment she lost her fear altogether. Sylvia Dell (11) feels that in joining Extinction Rebellion, she came into her true identity and would gladly accept any and all consequences if it means she can contribute to change for the better, including life in prison. Lisa Winkelmann (08) calmly refuses to end her protest participation, politely and persistently explaining this to a policeman, and is as a result forcefully removed from the blockade; the list goes on. Such expressions, as well as acts of **active resistance** strongly factored into this pattern. **Persistence** was a theme present in female activists across all films except one (07) and refers to female activists speaking on not being deterred and continuing their work despite difficulties, sticking with their activist work and choices, as well as physically remaining in protest actions when asked to vacate. Through portraying women as persistent and agentive, the viewer can understand them as individuals capable of acting upon their own desires, values and beliefs.

Emotional cues as to particularly **agentive emotions** further cemented this, such as anger, defiance or even hope. Hope, in the context of environmental injustice, was considered a defiant emotion because it is tied to agency and resistance. To hope for change and betterment requires participation and action. Because emotional cues are highly subjective and easily misread, they were only considered and coded where entirely clear – so for example 'anger' only being

ascribed to instances of a woman verbally expresses feeling angry. Even with this strict approach, enough scenes came into consideration of women being particularly defiant. Carol White (06), at a city council hearing related to the refinery devastating her community, provocatively asks whether those in charge would kindly let her community know how much time they'd have left to live if the refinery was to pick operations back up. Cherri Foytlin (04) retells a story from when she was imprisoned due to protest actions in a manner proving her persistent stance and willingness to risk her own personal safety to prove it.



06 – *On the Fenceline: A Fight for Clean Air* (2020). Carol White at Philadelphia City Council hearing on the future of oil refinery site polluting South Philadelphia (11:28).



04 – *L'eau est La Vie: From Standing Rock to the Swamp* (2019). Cherri Foytlin sharing imprisonment process story with acquaintances (10:40).

6.3.3 Activist Persona: Responsibility, Calling and the Heroine Trope

Another pattern emerged highlighting the women's identities as tightly intertwined with and fundamentally related to their being an activist.

A willingness for **personal sacrifice**, in own individual manner, at the benefit of the cause they are fighting was central to this pattern, playing into an altruistic, self-sacrificing image of activist necessity. Be that Greta Thunberg (03) who sacrificed regularly attending school and classic education alongside domestic life and comforts for the sake of being present and speaking at strikes and conferences, or Maja Winkelmann (08) postponing her Master's degree to dedicate her life to the *Last Generation*. Sylvia Dell (11) purposefully gets arrested to garner media attention for the work of *Extinction Rebellion*, which will at the least lead to a criminal record, at the most to time served in prison.

Verbal recollections of the women as to feeling that their activism is fulfilment of their **purpose**, that they feel a **moral obligation** for activism and are led by a sense for (in)justices underlines the narrative that their activism is not only part of their identity, but could be considered their **calling**. Sylvia Dell (11) speaks on this on multiple occasions, such as in the scene quoted below. Greta Thunberg (03) shares that her becoming aware of the extent of the climate crisis meant that she was unable to forget about it again, and later that she feels she has no option but to act. Dr. Treva Gear (01), while retelling her personal history within the community she fights for, speaks on always having had and feeling closely tied to her sense and strive for justice.

"I have a voice, and I want to use that voice. A year ago, I was a really tired old lady. Now, I am full of passion, energy, fire. I'm more determined than ever." – Sylvia Dell (11), 41:38.

This centrality of activism to personal identity is related to, but not entirely superposable with the **personal motivation or reasoning** for being politically active that the women speak on. As aforementioned, this often connects back to women's communal, Relational Identities – feeling that they must be engaged for the sake of their neighbours, friends, children and so forth. Here, it relates to women feeling like activism, their individual involvement in whichever way it is occurring, came to be out of a lack of alternative, out of wanting to do what's 'right', and out of the feeling that if they don't fight for equity, nobody will do it.

Within films, there was a certain discrepancy between the identification or situation of women as activists, and them visibly being involved in it. Out of the 58 women considered for in-depth analysis, only 6 verbally identify *themselves* as activists. For the rest, reliance on filmmaker identification (captions/narration) and author identification was required. Only 36 women were seen partaking in clearly identifiable activist action, rather than just being identified as part of a movement/organisation or merely speaking on participation. These women became people with specific insight, and their activism rather abstract, perhaps even distant. Interestingly, in

some films where this is true for women, it is not for men; they are then not only introduced as activists, but also speaking of and/or seen in particular actions they were involved in. Over the data corpus, when looking specifically at the type of activism women are engaged in, there is a focus on non-violent, community-led activism taking responsibility for environmental injustices in their respective communities through collective agency and action, for current and future generations alike. Individual action of single persons, removed from the context of a movement or organisation, is rare and the physically violent disruption shown explicitly in *'L'EAU EST LA VIE: From Standing Rock to the Swamp'* (04) is a singular exception.

The purposeful **contextualisation of activists** within their movement or organisation through captions or narration only occurred for people that were otherwise also identified by name. While a complete abstraction never occurred for films' main characters, there are highly variant degrees to how well someone is put into context. Only for films with a focus on a singular, specific movement (01, 04, 06, 08, 11) is the actual cause and motivation of a movement revealed; in films where we meet a multiplicity of actors from equally diverse backgrounds, they are contextualised through names and titles (of organisation, movement etc.) only, but never through what exactly they do, or what their organisation specifically is or does. This makes them contextualised on a surface level only, because the assumption a viewer would be familiar with all organisations mentioned through captions is ludicrous.

The peak form of the Activist Persona pattern is when and where a woman is painted as a **figurehead**, an inspirational figure: Greta Thunberg (03). Interestingly, this is not done through the film itself, but rather other people in the production; crowds cheer Thunberg's name when she enters stages as though she were a rockstar, she is called an inspiration or a hero, becomes a photo prop for politicians, prominent figures such as Pope Francis wish to meet her, and so on. But the film contrasts such moments of (involuntary) fame with scenes of solitude and calm, the uproar of crowds with the quiet of hotel rooms, the rigor of speaking in front of thousands with mumbled conversations of father and daughter – and through this, seemingly seeks to counter the popular narrative and instead, humanise Thunberg through her person and struggles.



03 – *I Am Greta* (2020). Crowd of protesters in Vatican City cheering for Greta Thunberg (51:48).

Thunberg herself also evades this heroization trope throughout the film, downplaying moments in which she is idolised, never looking truly comfortable in public settings. In one of her speeches at the London parliament, she literally addresses the crowd of politicians and press:

“We have not taken to the streets so you can take a selfie with us and say you really admire what we do. We children are doing this so you’ll put aside your differences and start acting as you would in a crisis.” – Greta Thunberg (03), 62:51.



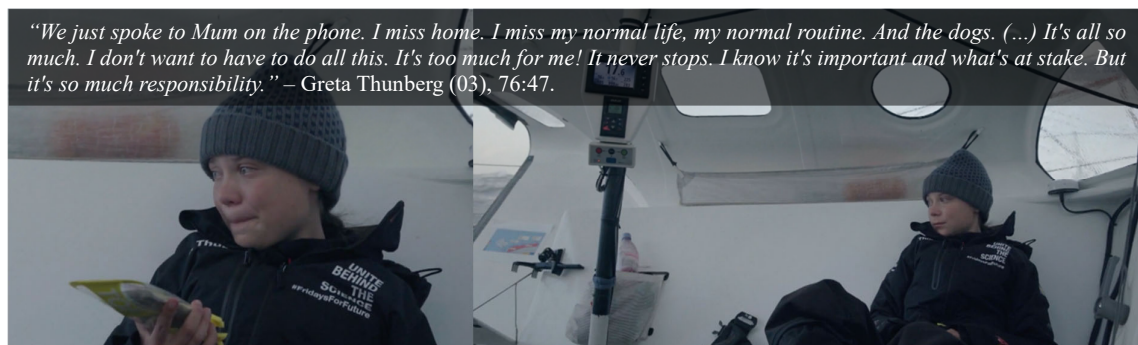
03 – *I Am Greta* (2020). Greta Thunberg meeting Pope Francis in Vatican City (l., 51:41) and taking Selfie with an unnamed female politician in England (r., 50:13).

In permanent contrast between how Thunberg is framed publicly, versus how she perceives her work – as a necessity, something she *has* to do – the trope a heroine activist saviour becomes both a pattern of representation, as well as a trope the film attempts to dismantle.

6.3.4 Emotional Landscapes: Vulnerability and Struggle

Presented as a significantly variant pattern and always co-existent with others was a narrative around emotionality and struggle. Because there is no way to surely interpret the emotional turmoil within a person, this relates specifically to verbal or visible expressions of emotion. In the dualistic nature of ecofeminist theorising, reason/emotion are not only separated, but masculinity and pre-eminence are suggested to the first (*see Dualism and Hierarchical Thinking*). While across all 11 films, not a single man was shown on the brink of or shedding tears, it was a more frequent occurrence among women, both activist and otherwise, perpetuating a **stereotype of female emotionality** that could, if taken out of context, be interpreted as vulnerability or weakness. This is decidedly not the interpretation here, yet coding for it allowed the identification of patterns in how female emotionality is presented or perhaps rationalised or challenged.

The documentary *'I Am Greta'* (03), for example, shows main protagonist Greta Thunberg in various emotional states. Thunberg is depicted with a choked-up voice on the brink of tears, actually crying, once even having a meltdown, perhaps related to overstimulation, where she shuts down entirely and refuses verbal interaction for a stretch of time. The film, without an outside narrator or any additional commentary, remains seemingly neutral about this, opening the space for scenes of emotionality to play out uncut (such as the scene below spanning multiple minutes), or to be contextualised by Thunberg herself. In a scene in which she is confronted by a male interviewer in a press interview about having cried during a speech, she calmly explains that given the fatality of the climate crisis it would be only understandable to cry.



03 – *I Am Greta* (2020). Greta Thunberg records diary entry during Atlantic Crossing, visibly and audibly emotional (l.: 77:05, r.: 79:13).

Further **verbal expressions of exhaustion** from female activists, such as the literal statement of being tired, being worn out, wanting their fight to be over speak to open conversation on struggles as well as well. Though they are always given in the context of either choosing not to

stop fighting regardless, or while being actively involved in a protest action, they further underline the personal involvement and sacrifice of the women.

When linking instances of emotional expression specifically to the representational patterns of women, it showed to not only be connected to feelings of exhaustion and overwhelm, but was most strongly related to the activists' relational roles as parents, children and community members. Crying because of the personal loss of family and community members (06-White, 06-Sanders), because of a responsibility or perhaps even guilt in their roles as mothers (06-Sanders, 04-01, 04-Foytlin, 07-Andrews, 11-Dell), or because of emotional turmoil over having to leave behind their home and safety of relational contexts (03-Thunberg) – such open and honest emotional expressions are reserved entirely to women. Throughout the entire data corpus, not a single man is shown crying, much less in emotional turmoil over their role as a father. Visible emotionality is closely linked to relational roles that weigh heavily in how female activists are represented in the documentaries.

6.3.5 The Absent Woman: Underrepresentation and Invisibility

Perhaps one of the most significant, and the most immediately apparent pattern in the representation of women in the documentary films on environmental justice is that of absence. Even without in-depth research into women's roles and positions within environmental movements or their stereotypical representations within media, it would be clear that they *do* play a role, and that they thus *must be* represented. It is noteworthy how little they are seen or heard in some productions and becomes crucial to not just ask who is visible and how, but to also aim the spotlight at empty space and see who barely is, or who is absent altogether.

Analysing the explicit lack or absence of women and female activists, was vital to uncovering narrative foci, to understanding who was sidelined or erased entirely for whose benefit, and to uncovering who was most frequently marginalised.⁵ Using this lens of narrative marginalisation

⁵ **On Coding the Absence of What You're Looking For**

Already set before going into analysis, as it was highly significant to the research questions, this theme was originally titled 'Under- and Misrepresentation'. However, as it turned out, *misrepresentation* would be impossible to attest to from an outside perspective. Thus, it became a focal point to record the pattern of absence of female activists, and women altogether. This meant recording 1) sequences within films where women were not foregrounded (did not speak, were not shown at all), as well as 2) sequences where (other) female activists were present, but sidelined through not receiving any significant attention, not being heard speaking or not being introduced as characters of relevance.

also enabled the analysis of narrative centrality, which will follow in the next chapter. The documentaries most significantly shining in the absence of women and female activists were 02, 05, 07, 09 and 10. This was perhaps notably reflected in the exemplary scenes provided in the patterns of representation above: the less woman there is, the less there was to code, and thus, where there is no female activist, there will be less to no patterns in her portrayal outside of not being there. Both *'The Burning Question'* (10) and *'Planet of the Humans'* (07) narratively follow male filmmakers (Emmet Sheerin and Jeff Gibbs respectively), and consequently, women generally and female activists in particular play but a marginal role. Especially Jeff Gibbs's *'Planet of the Humans'* (07) is not just a film by, but a film *about* him, too. Gibbs sets out to uncover the green energy movement's motivations and for this, travels across the US, musing on the meanings of life and sustainability with natural and social scientists. It is a story of conspiracy, controversy and corporate capture – and a story of Jeff. During the course of this production, Gibbs hardly speaks to women, much less female activists. While a General Motors spokesperson is consulted, an anthropologist and an electrical engineer, the only female *activist* officially introduced and interviewed is Catherine Andrews. All other female activists remain anonymous, interviewed for short snippets woven together in coherence with narration and plot progression. Similarly, even though female activists were present and speaking in *'Disobedience: The Fight for Climate Survival'* (02), *'Not On Our Soil - A Climate Justice Reality'* (05) and *'Targeted: Environmentalists in danger'* (09), they were so heavily outnumbered and out-talked by their male counterparts that they became overshadowed to a noticeable degree.

A different, yet equally as important form of sidelining and absence is that where (other) female activists become but a tool in the narrative construction site. In a prime example, *'I Am Greta'* (03) centres around a woman – but does so at the cost of all others. While strangers shown in passing within activist contexts can easily be considered marginal to the films' and Thunberg's own story and their lack of identification excused, there is a significant overlook of other prominent activist figures within the FridaysForFuture (FFF) context. Only through author knowledge were four activists who were/are respective figureheads of their countries' FFF movement identified: Anuna de Wever van der Heyden, Kira Gantois and Adélaïde Charlier (Belgium) and Luisa Neubauer (Germany). They are with Greta Thunberg in various key scenes, from climate strikes and press conferences to interviews with political leaders and climate conferences – yet they are never properly introduced through caption or narration, and often not seen or heard speaking, even though logically must have been. They were likely invited to functions and events as key figures alongside Thunberg, yet the film does not show them as such. Instead, they function as a narrative tool in cementing the very Heroine-trope the

film is working to dismantle: what they are heard saying, when they are speaking, are instances of support and awe for Thunberg and her work, it having inspired their own, and so forth. They are members of the same movement, same community, perhaps, but they are not introduced equal to Thunberg.



03 – *I Am Greta* (2020). Climate protest in Brussels, Belgium. Anuna de Wever van der Heyden, Greta Thunberg, Kira Gantois, Adélaïde Charlier, Luisa Neubauer (l to r, 36:19).



03 – *I Am Greta* (2020). FFF activists meeting in interview with French president Emmanuel Macron. Greta Thunberg, Emmanuel Macron, Adélaïde Charlier, Anuna de Wever van der Heyden, Luisa Neubauer, Kira Gantois (l to r, 38:18).

Another example: even though relatively gender balanced through having two male and two female main characters, film 08 (*'Re: Environmental Activism. The Last Generation Movement'*) marginalises its female protagonists in smaller, less immediately noticeable manner. The sisters Lisa and Maja were narratively merged through a shared story arch. Though shown in multiple settings – in activist action, on a home visit to their parents, in their organisational headquarters – they are always *together*, whereas male primary characters Jeschke and Gohl are both awarded their own individual storylines.

While the sidelining or absence of certain people from a production may not be intentional, it is still reflective of systematic exclusions and invisibilization; narrative and visual foregrounding are important dimensions of representation bias. The identity attribution through the production also plays a role here, and there are distinct differences as to the level of importance and prominence characters would be implied to have through it. In *'I Am Greta'* (03), prominent (and thus, likely familiar) figures that Thunberg interacts with are identified through captions (e.g. Emmanuel Macron, Pope Francis, Arnold Schwarzenegger), while fellow FFF activists appearing more frequently are not. In *'Planet of the Humans'* (07), identifying captions are awarded to most people the filmmaker briefly speaks with, from press personnel over solar power technicians to famous environmentalists (e.g. Vandana Shiva) – yet those attending protest actions, interviewed for snippets underlining the narrative development are not. This was common across the corpus; outside of the logical, necessary introduction of core characters, more marginally appearing figures would be prioritised in editorial mediation. Some were introduced, others remained anonymous.

Across the sample corpus, two distinct patterns in the balance of core characters to sidelining become clear: 1) the more a film centres around white main characters, the less BIPOC will be centred and sharing the spotlight, and 2) the more central men are to the production, the less women will more foregrounded. Consequently, if the documentary revolves most significantly around a white man, there were not only less women, but also less diverse women. This also holds true for white female main characters, as in the Greta Thunberg biopic (03), which sidelines nearly any and all other people – but shows (female) BIPOC least of all.

On the other side of this, multiple female BIPOC primary characters in the same film often shared narrative weight near equally amongst each other, and where they didn't, they were still surrounded by a diverse community and either speaking on or shown engaging first and foremost with women (e.g. 01, 04, 06). Analysis shows that patterns of absence and silencing in the film sample mirror structures of environmental injustice. It is the same groups of people that are again, further marginalised most in narratives, even though they are most severely affected: women and minorities. And that even though logically, they should be most present when looking at effects and instances of environmental justice conflicts. When narrative and visual foregrounding privileges men, especially white men, this shapes the story according to hierarchal power dimensions reflected in the real world outside the productions.

6.4 Geography of Intimacy: Patterns of (In)Visibility

The close examination of the films' architectures of storytelling was framed by environmental justice and ecofeminist theorising as to the obvious intersectionality the two attribute to their subjects' uncovered patterns in visibility of characters. Correlating the three followingly introduced concepts (Narrative Centrality, Narrative Hierarchy and Mobility-Abstraction Trade-off) and examining their individual overlap determined whether a film empowered its subjects, specifically female activists, or if it reinforced systemic marginalisation. They are dimensions in the construction of visibility and power on screen, and the analysis uncovered connections between narrative space and physical, geographical space in the documentaries, visualised through Figure 2 below and elaborated upon in the following subchapters.

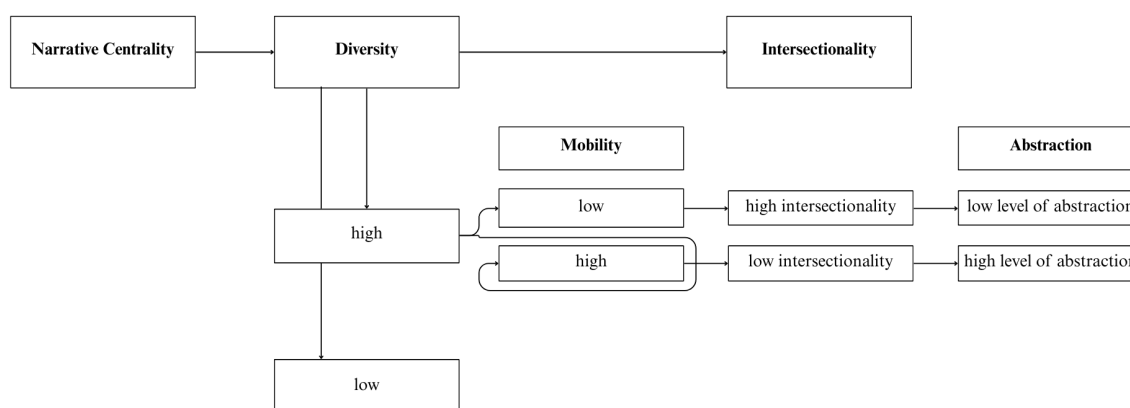


Figure 2: Geography of Intimacy: Narrative Centrality & Mobility-Abstraction Trade-off.

6.4.1 Narrative Centrality and Narrative Hierarchies

The narrative centrality of female activists describes how important they are to the storyline of the documentary, how frequently they appear at all and, if they do, if they do so in a purposeful and active role rather than marginally. It is the relative importance of characters to a film's storyline. Previously mentioned specifically in relation to low narrative weight (see *The Absent Woman: Underrepresentation and Invisibility*), i.e. the general lack or absence of female activists, the following comparative analysis focuses on patterns of and around narrative centrality. Table 10 below summarizes this narrative weight.⁶

⁶ On Gendered Bookends: Editorial Mediation in Opening and Closing

An intriguing pattern emerges in the films' narrative framing: those with high narrative relevance of women (01, 04, 06) open and close with female speakers, while those centred around men (02, 05, 07, 10) predominantly begin and end with males speaking. Whether coincidental or a deliberate editorial choice, this bookending underscores how gendered voices gatekeep the narrative journey.

Table 10: Narrative Centrality of Female Activists across the Data Corpus.

Film ID	Narrative Centrality of Female Activists	
01	high	Female main character; follows female-led and centred movement
02	low	Majority male characters; foregrounds male characters over female characters
03	high	Female main character (biographical)
04	high	Female main character; follows female-led and -centred movement
05	low	Foregrounds male characters over female characters
06	high	Majority female main characters; follows female-led and -centred movement
07	low	Male main character
08	medium	Theoretically balanced (two male, two female main characters)
09	low	Majority male characters; foregrounds male characters over female characters
10	low	Male main character
11	medium	Theoretically balanced in main character genders; foregrounds male main character

The narrative centrality of female activists affects the diversity of their portrayal. Female-centred documentary films show a higher bandwidth in women's identities and roles (both within and across individuals), as well as their contextualisation. Through women being central to the storyline and -telling, they are more present on screen and become more clearly situated within the context of their community or movement. While this was untrue for film 03 (*I Am Greta*), the biographical (rather than environmental justice) focus of this film could make it an exception proving the rule.

As the natural mirror image, films with low or medium centrality of women in their narrative tended to show them in less diverse, more stereotypical ways. Instead of as agentic political actors, female activists were most consistently portrayed in relational and caregiving roles: in films 02 (*Disobedience: The Fight for Climate Survival*) and 05 (*Not On Our Soil - A Climate Justice Reality*), women appear mainly as community stewards, shown in isolated interview settings or slow-motion montage footage of nurturing and care work, often disconnected entirely from activist action. Male activists, by contrast, appear in collective, confrontational forms of protest. *Planet of the Humans* (07) marginalizes women almost entirely, and the single female activist identified clearly in a narrative otherwise centred around a man is shown emotional and speaking about her connection to nature. *Targeted: Environmentalists in danger* (09) also features women minimally, focusing on non-violent and community-based activism. Female activists were mediated through or overshadowed by men's voices, and

secluded entirely to set interview formats whereas men were shown outside of this as well. In *'The Burning Question'* (10), a contrast emerges between Malawian activists shown as communal caregivers and the (only) Irish female activist expressing anger and agency. Across both contexts, women remain secondary to the filmmaker's (male) narrative. Film 08 (*'Re: Environmental Activism. The Last Generation Movement'*) portrays women as calm, mindful, and collective actors engaged in non-violent civil disobedience, but still frames them within their relational identities, particularly sisterhood and family ties. *'The Troublemaker'* (11) emphasizes motherhood and moral duty as the foundation of the female main character's activism; it is directly linked to care, empathy, and emotional vulnerability, whereas the male protagonist receives much greater narrative weight through speaking time alone. Across these films, women's activism is tied into care, emotion, and relational identity, while male activism is depicted as strategic, public, and politically central.

Diversity here refers not only to a bandwidth in identities and representational patterns within a film, but also the literal diversity of core characters. Environmental justice movements often centre around BIPOC identities and struggles (Prindeville, 2004), which was reflected in how the diversity of core characters in turn played a role in if, and how intersectional topics such as poverty, race, or gender would be raised. The more white central characters a production had, the less such topics would be considered at the tangible, personal scale of the films' protagonists. They would instead remain theoretical at best, and female activists, if present at all, would hardly ever be contextualised within. Conversely, a film with higher diversity in characters could not automatically be translated to having higher intersectional relevance, though. Film 10, for example, has a large number of BIPOC characters, yet hardly touches on issues related to environmental justice or ecofeminism. The crucial point here is the overlap with mobility (see *The Mobility-Abstraction Trade-off*): productions with more diverse BIPOC characters as well as a narrative focus on a localised environmental injustice would address more intersectional issues, as well as better contextualise women within their surroundings and conflicts.

What happens naturally through films having a narrative centrality is a disbalance in narrative weight of characters. Depending on the direction this scale would tip, there would be narrative hierarchical empowerment: raising the narrative importance of one person at the cost of another, with implications for various intersectional cornerstones. This narrative hierarchy, evident through a disbalanced narrative weight between different actors in the film, was especially prevalent in documentaries with (mobile) outside actors or white people as their main protagonists. The Trócaire production *'The Burning Question'* (10) follows Emmet Sheerin and with him, the

narrative arc of a Western, white male traveling across the world to see the work of the church-based welfare organisation he works for. The near balance of scenes with and without primary characters present is owed the mere fact that local activist Heather Maseko joins Sheerin on most of his Malawian endeavours. Through providing in situ translation, she adds to the speaking time of female activists – but at the cost of local communities. The film narration is heavily weighed by phrases constructing Sheerin almost casually as an outsider: he ‘visits’ communities during his ‘trip’ to Malawi, wanting to speak with ‘typical farming families’ and to ‘see for himself’ how affected communities are coping with climate change. The entire film feels, and very likely is, an image film for the work of Trócaire, drawing the narration back to their humanitarian aid work on multiple occasions. In *‘Targeted: Environmentalists in Danger’* (09), a narrative of locals ‘voluntarily’ exposing themselves to environmental risks prevails, but the film fails to take a critical, clear stance on whether this is considered an act of defiance against a corrupt system. Through establishing continued swimming in polluted waters as a voluntary act, it is framed as locals laughing danger in the face, rather than systemic neglect of marginalised communities. In the same film, there is a narrative in which activists such as primary character Lucilla Pautrat work to ‘protect’ affected Indigenous peoples – even though they themselves are seen actively engaged in the same project and work Pautrat is shown in. This small phrase is relevant in the constant projection of savoir tropes and outside perspectives on marginalised people. Film 03 (*‘I Am Greta’*) has no BIPoC characters at all, except for in external footage at the very end (which is an unfortunate but realistic representation of the majority white climate movement FFF in European countries (Daniel, 2025)), and other female are sidelined for the sake of the main character. This establishes a hierarchy of importance that may be logical for a biopic, yet interesting considering the film is attempting to humanise Thunberg through showing the private, introspective aspects of her activism, and instead simultaneously isolates her even further.

6.4.2 The Mobility-Abstraction Trade-off

Naturally, even local fights for environmental justice are always embedded in a larger web of resistance and take place within a global context (Mallory, 2006). Analysis found that the spatial scale of a film and the mobility of its narrative and characters directly dictate the personal distance between the viewer and the protagonist, as well as influence the presentation of intersectional issues related to environmental justice and ecofeminism. To better visualise geographical aspects of the thesis, an interactive map feature was created on GoogleMyMaps using film data (*recorded in Table 14 in the annex*). The map is available to peruse through the provided link

and a screenshot can be found in the discussion section (*Intersectional Invisibility: The Gaze of Power and the Power of Gaze*), where it becomes more relevant.

In what is from here on out described as a Mobility-Abstraction Trade-off, documentaries centred around a main *character* rather than a main *issue*, tended to be less localised and depict much more movement across various geographical scales. When the viewer moves around alongside a singular, highly mobile character, like Greta Thunberg (03) or Jeff Gibbs (07), this might give more insight into them as persons but remains rather distant from issues of environmental (in)justice. The main characters themselves would be far removed from or scratching only at the surface level of affected communities and localised struggles they were not personally involved with. This same abstraction occurs on the character level: the closer we narratively are to one person, the further removed we become from all others. The centrality of fewer, singular main characters comes at the cost of others and necessitates the omission of their individuality. They become presented purely in relation to this main character, rather than being their own standalone person.

The same is true for films that focus on multiple characters across a large geographical scale: through the narrative movement, and through meeting a large number of protagonists across highly diverse contexts briefly rather than a smaller number extensively, individual identities and themes prevalent in the theoretical framework of this thesis would become much more abstract and less tangible (e.g. 02, 09). Injustices would be less closely related to specific communities or people, but rather tied into the (flawed) system as a whole, and female activists would be less personally contextualised within this and become much more removed – both from their movement or organisation, as well as the viewer. The result: fleeting impressions of female activist identities at best.

Spatial distance (or mobility) equals personal distance, and a local scale allowed narrative closeness; intersectional ecofeminist and environmental justice related themes were much more present in films with a clear narrative focus on a local environmental injustice and key persons involved with it (e.g. 01, 04). Through less geographical movement across a country or the globe, a stronger focus would be applied to characters tied together through locality, conviction and cause. Female activists were thus better contextualised not only within their struggles and fight for justice, but also their communities. This relates back to these films being more individualised and closer to the actual environmental issue and injustice, because women would be tangibly connected to it. The more affected main characters are by intersectional issues within (and outside of) environmental justice and ecofeminist understandings, and the more we remain

with them, the closer we get to the characters, and the more we learn about their individual environmental injustice experience and context. Their layered, often marginalised identities (e.g. as BIPOC) are magnified in the film's lens.⁷

As such, the films function almost like a camera themselves: when zoomed out to a global, mobile scale, the whole world might be visible, but people and their problems look like tiny, anonymous specks on the lens. Zoomed in and holding the camera steady, these dots turn into humans with faces, families and specific stories. The stillness of locality allows the viewer entry into the intimacies of life and liberation struggles.

7 Discussion: Deconstructing the Lens

In following, the results of this study's QCA will be situated within the theoretical frameworks of environmental justice and ecofeminism, as well as reflected against existing scholarship as to the roles and representations of women within environmental (justice) movements. Approaching with a specific theory base in mind allowed not only discovering how the two are reflected within the documentaries, but also becoming aware of narrative elements that are ideological in nature. This is in congruence with previous research into the representations of women in environmental movements, which shows that social norms and practices are indeed gendered and discriminatory against women (Ernanda, 2023). In parts, the results of this study are consistent with prior research that has highlighted patterns of unequal and stereotypical representations of women (Marr & Luchies, 2023).

Intersectional perspectives like ecofeminism allow understanding that and how gender interacts with other social and cultural factors, and can uncover power structures interwoven with socially constructed positions, relationships and roles of people (Hjort & Østenstad, 2025). Environmental justice has refined this research field through addressing intersections of these factors with environmental issues; it challenges traditional narratives and highlights the

⁷ Notably, the film *'Not On Our Soil'* (05) both proves and contrasts this argument. Through introducing a large number of characters, the documentary remains vague on tangible experiences of environmental injustice and the individual level – even though on an abstract, theoretical level, it is very much about environmental justice, and features primarily BIPOC characters. The film is also situated in just one location, thus having low mobility, yet its contents are neither specifically related to this geographic locality, nor to the individual identities or histories of its protagonists. It is the image film for an initiative (Action24) and through this, moves on a very abstract level, despite having low mobility and high diversity.

disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation on marginalised communities, inextricably linking environmental justice to social justice (Ciulla, 2025).

Despite documented gender-based barriers for women in their fight for environmental safety and sustainability, academic perspectives on the important role of women within environmental protection are consistent (Mensah et al., 2025; Venes et al., 2023). Consensus on what their roles are specifically is less clear, however, and findings on gender roles in environmental activism remain mixed (Hjort & Østenstad, 2025).

7.1 The Paradox of Femininity and Relational Roles (or: The Motherhood Crux)

The findings of this research project relating to the paradox of Traditional Femininity and Relational Roles, especially the motherhood of female activists are strongly echoed in scholarship as to the motivations and contextualisation of women within environmental activism.

Ecofeminism critiques the dualistic separation of nature/culture, in which men are associated with culture and women with nature (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023; Eaton, 2021; Mallory, 2013). But there is baseline consensus that women are in fact more likely to hold pro-environmental values, attitudes and concerns than men and are, as a result, more likely to engage in pro-environmental actions (Haq et al., 2020; Hjort & Østenstad, 2025; Isaacson, 2024; Price & Bohon, 2019; Tindall et al., 2003). What form such actions take is highly influenced by individual patterns of socialisation and experiences in the gendered division of labour (Tindall et al., 2003). Historical barriers to women's participation in politics still have repercussions on gender equality and thus, can significantly limit women's opportunities for activist engagement (Isaacson, 2024).

In environmental justice understandings, the gendered division of labour increases women's environmental awareness and shapes, potentially even necessitates their engagement in environmental activism (Cousins, 2021; Tindall et al., 2003; Venes et al., 2023). It places the burden of environmental risk management most strongly on women, can limit their participation in environmental advocacy and reproduce existing gender inequalities alongside inequalities among women of different levels of privilege. Women in low income and minority communities are much more likely to experience greater exposure to environmental hazards, and simultaneously often lack time and resources to engage in activism (Cousins, 2021). While some films easily confirm such differences in impact experiences related to geographic and social position

(e.g. 01, 04, 06), these same films closely attached to low income and minority communities are the ones centred most strongly around the activist work of (BIPOC) women. From an eco-feminist perspective, this reflects how patriarchal and capitalist systems exploit the feminine principle of life production (see Bezerra Guimarães, 2023).

Reflected in both the documentaries and literature is that representations are undoubtedly and uniquely gendered (Tran, 2023). Media oftentimes portrays characters according to gender role stereotypes (Aley & Hahn, 2020), and gendered roles perpetuated in- and outside of media strongly influence political action and activism (Prindeville, 2004). Feminine stereotypes of self-sacrifice and docility can for example pressure women into refraining from bolder behaviour, also to avoid the delegitimization of their protest (Tran, 2023). It is well likely that such persistent archetypes and socialisation are the reason that women in the sample are portrayed in instances of De-escalating Femininity. In this study's context of protest and patriarchy, the ability to mediate or disrupt conflict is a traditionally feminine quality. Primary female characters were also shown less in violent confrontation than male main characters; they would almost exclusively partake in non-violent forms of civil disobedience or, as aforementioned, not be actively seen partaking in activist action at all.

Research finds that motherhood and caregiving are particularly often central in the formation of a (gendered) collective identity mobilising women into environmental action, enabled through a shared concern about creating safer, healthier communities and lives for their children (Longest et al., 2022). Because women are socialised into caregivers that hold responsibility for the wellbeing of their family and surroundings, they participate in gendered structures of care within the activist context as well through fulfilling roles as nurturers and providers (Gorczyca & Zozulia, 2025; Prindeville, 2004). In the films, care structures extend beyond the nuclear family into Community Stewardship and Collectiveness, for white and BIPOC women alike. Through scenes of women consoling each other, checking in on the wellbeing of their fellow activists or sharing their motivations, women are anchored in their activism through their roles as nurturers, perhaps as the adhesive glue holding their movements together through emotional and physical support. Such docile, traditional characterisations relating to their socialisation as women can be seen critically, because it might suggest to viewers what is expected, acceptable behaviour for female activists. It is further cemented as a strongly gendered structure by the near total absence of men in such caretaking or community focused roles across the film sample. When taking *'The Troublemaker'* (11) as an example, male main character Roger Hallam is seen partaking in acts of civil disobedience and vandalism, as well as sharing personal

insight into individual protest actions (i.e. hunger strike, blockades, vandalism). In contrast, Sylvia Dell is shown going about town, purchasing groceries and, in an almost comedic climax of the activist-care-nexus, ironing an Extinction Rebellion protest banner.



11 – *The Troublemaker* (2020). Sylvia Dell ironing Extinction Rebellion protest banner (16:50).

The heavily recurrent theme of motherhood in the context of women in environmental activism across literature resonated with the pattern of women in their Relational Roles in the films, within which motherhood became its own independent category. Expectations that mothers are especially likely to partake and be highly productive in environmental activism (Cousins, 2021; Tindall et al., 2003) benefit stereotypical media framing around motherly identities (Gorczyca & Zozulia, 2025; Munir, 2021; Tran, 2023). Motherhood is considered a powerful tool in media stories of environmental injustice, able to evoke impressionable narratives of fierce mothers protecting their children. This often draws on the ‘Eco-Mum Theory’, which believes women’s greater environmental concern compared to men is due to the fact that mothers care about their children’s health and safety, whereas fathers primarily care about economically supporting their household (Price & Bohon, 2019). There are, however, no proven differences in concern for environmental change between women who do or do not have children – so while there are studies on parenthood being likely to increase environmental engagement in people who *already* held pro-environmental concerns and values, they also found that children do not explain differences in environmental concern *among* women (Price & Bohon, 2019; Shrum et al., 2023). Further, gendered roles and expectations around motherhood are just as likely to create barriers to women’s activism and participation through isolation and care work constraining their biographical availability (Longest et al., 2022). Motherhood is thus a paradox frame for activist movements, because while it can justify women’s presence and political authority, it can also confine women in the limits of what is considered acceptable female and mothering behaviour (Munir, 2021). While it certainly can be a factor in environmental activism, as the analysis confirms through identifying a pattern in the relational contextualisation of women as mothers, motherhood was never identified as the singular motivator. Relying heavily on children as a storytelling factor can contribute to building a narrative in which the activism of women is

reduced to biological instincts of motherhood, rather than their intentional decision-making and participation. Scientific discourse around motherhood narratives in the representation of female activists is strong, but when their activism is framed as a result of and primarily linked to motherly or other relational instincts, this can delegitimise women's individual identities – both activist and otherwise. Reducing women's environmental concerns to their motherhood status alone would be problematic (Price & Bohon, 2019).

Equally strong across the data corpus were foci on non-familial ties, on community stewardship and ethics of care among people who bonded through conviction rather than blood relation. Intentional, supportive community – the existence of relational forces outside of family – is proven to be critical for women's persistence in activism (Shodiya-Zeumault et al., 2025), and women's own, their family's or community's direct lived experiences of environmental injustice alike can be a catalyst for their engagement (Shodiya et al., 2025). This was shown across the sample, where the portrayal of women as Community Stewards and Caregivers was closely linked to their sense of connection, community and responsibility. In literature, intergenerational connections, such as feeling responsible for future generations and actively participating in shaping a better future, were discussed in relation to parenthood, if at all (see e.g. Shrum et al., 2023), while in the films, it transcended beyond. Even though both male and female adults speaking on their perceived responsibility for future children, their own and otherwise, were often identified as parents, young people (i.e. 03-Thunberg, 08-Maja) would also speak on this sense of connectedness.

Where literature focused on motherhood as a core dis-/empowering frame of women's environmental activism, it was not reflected as heavily in the analysis. In the primary characters across the documentaries, their introduction as mothers became a mere facet of their activism, again challenging the concept of a singular narrative. While some women were speaking on motherhood influencing their activism, it was more a factor of motivation that led to them being connected and empowered through this, as well as other relational ties. The female primary characters were almost never 'only' mothers, and where they were, it was women who appeared only very briefly.

However, where female activists appeared *more* than momentarily, they were always contextualised in some form of relational role and/or traditionally feminine role of caretaking. Of course, the portrayal of women as tied into networks of family and community places is not inherently negative, even when it places them in traditional positions of care. Relational ties, be that communal or through motherhood, can be a powerful constituent of collective identity in the

formation of activist structures, but they can just as well construct barriers confining women to what is considered ‘acceptable female behaviour’. This becomes critical when such portrayals specifically within relationality a) emerge primarily for women, b) are done in a reductionist manner (as a singular focal point of identity) and/or c) suggestive of women having less skills, less will for confrontation or less fierceness because of it.

Ultimately, this was the case in the sample. The analysed documentaries did nothing to challenge strong foci on Relational Identities aspects as part of a patriarchal, gendered hierarchy through the fact that they were relegated most significantly to women. While not merged into a singular concept of relational identities within literature, the clear implication of women as mothers, daughters, caretakers and community stewards consistently anchored them within ethics of care prioritising the wellbeing of a collective over the individual. When characteristics attributed to Traditional Femininity and gender roles are central, this suggests women’s political authority to be derived most strongly from their roles as caregivers and women.

7.2 Breaking the Binary: Beyond ‘Passive Victims’ and ‘Agents of Change’

Research on the roles and medial representation of women in environmental (justice) movements found that media predominantly frames such women either as victims of environmental impacts, or as the ultimate agents of change. Within victimhood, this very position is interpreted as the primary driver of their agency. When challenging this narrative, women are in turn situated as intentional beings, innately intertwined with their environment through direct, lived experiences (Kaur & Mizo, 2025) in an ecofeminist manifestation of the woman-nature connection. Through mainly working to disprove a narrative of women as victims of environmental injustices, scholarship most frequently situates female activists as agents of change with strong presence and initiative in the opposition of environmental disruption (Demirdiş, 2025; Gorczyca & Zozulia, 2025; Tran, 2023; Venes et al., 2023), creating a binary between being one or the other. This dual, contradicting narrative reflects broader gendered media biases, in which the activism of women is often acknowledged, yes, but only through framing it in the context of either suffering *or* empowerment (Demirdiş, 2025).

From the data corpus of this thesis, no tangible victimhood trope emerged, even with specific considerations and expectations that it might arise in the context of environmental justice and ecofeminist theorising. This was potentially due to the fact that the films allowing more in-

depth knowledge of the women did so from a perspective allowing their own agency and individual motivations to crystallise. Documentaries in which female activists were underrepresented did then also not frame them necessarily as victims – they rather did not frame them *at all*. Through focusing specifically on female activists and their work, analysis ratified women to be more than passive victims, and their motivations to go far beyond just reacting to positions of victimhood.

The portrayal of women as active agents of change through their involvement in grassroots activism and local movements (Mensah et al., 2025), on the other hand, is strongly reflected in the data through emergent themes of Agents of Disruption and Activist Persona. Female activists in the films reflect the trope of being actors of disruption and transformation through assertive agency, leadership roles and confrontational behaviour in protest actions (e.g. 04-Foytlin, 06-Alexis). They are also framed in a potentially reductionist manner, though, when it comes to their activism being a calling or instinct, rather than a strategic political choice. The activists' protagonism and leadership finds resonance in academic research showing women to have been increasingly taking on leadership positions within various environmental conflict situations (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023; Ernanda, 2023; Gardner et al., 2024; Martinez-Alier et al., 2016; Mensah et al., 2025; Mersha, 2018). Such leadership must be in itself recognised as a gendered construct.⁸ Leadership roles in social and environmental movements involve abilities and capacities to lead, to embrace and unite diversity and differences, and a commitment and willingness to face and handle challenges (binti Padzil & Somiah, 2023), demonstrated through the persistence identified in the primary characters. Alas, activist leadership of women is

⁸ **On 'Motherly Instincts' & Gendered Leadership**

Constructs of leadership are determined by those who enact it, and how. Social structures, cultures and gendered expectations condition what leaders are and do (binti Padzil & Somiah, 2023; Melby, 2024). In the frequent interpretation of female leaders being driven to join political or activist structures because of their experiences as mothers or daughters, and considering that their leadership is described as instinctual, nurturing and caring (binti Padzil & Somiah, 2023) – where is the line between traditionally 'motherly' and leadership qualities? The social construction and commendation of 'motherly instincts' describes women who are caring, compassionate, and can 'get shit done' even under difficult circumstances. This ability to manage multiple responsibilities and duties while still showing up for people is, when you remove the goggles of gendered roles and expectations, actually nothing other than leadership skills. There is no necessity for motherhood to be able to hold such qualities, as proven by men being 'natural leaders' when they do, rather than having 'fatherly instincts'; women who are not mothers can just as well hold leadership positions as women who are. While attempting to separate acts of leadership from acts of care within the analysis, it can never be guaranteed that the two are entirely abstracted from one another.

characterised by nurturing and caring for participants and activist spaces, often reproducing traditional expectations of women (Melby, 2024). This connects back to gendered structures of care within environmental movements, which are both a product of the patriarchy and a conduit for empowerment. They can place primary burdens of care on specific members, but also challenge patriarchal assumptions and lead to women taking on powerful and empowering roles within the movement in the first place (Gardner et al., 2024). Such gendered structures of care, rooted in patriarchal socialisation and the gendered division of labour, are intertwined with the patterns of representation identified in environmental justice documentaries. They manifest through themes of Relational Identity, De-escalating Femininity and Community Stewardship, qualities that are considered inherently feminine when looking at both who is socialised to perform them, as well as who is seen within them in the documentaries.

When it comes to the general protagonism of women in engaging in environmental activism, there is a particular nook of academia on women's modes of participation, beyond them generally participating more than men. It places women as most significantly engaged in individual and non-confrontational activism, and considers protesting as the least likely form for women to engage with (Isaacson, 2024). In the analysis, we see the opposite in the activist modes of primary female characters; women were never seen or speaking specifically on individual action, and while their activism was mostly non-violent, it was confrontational nonetheless. From peaceful protest marches and sit ins (03, 06, 07, 10, 11) to more disruptive acts of civil disobedience (04, 06, 08, 11), women engaged in various kinds of collective action that the considered literature would suggest being atypical.

The dual narrative dominant in media research of women as either passive victims or self-sacrificing heroes, the ultimate agents of change, must be critiqued, because it contributes to the erasure of women's diverse experiences and identities (Tran, 2023). Such representations can create binaries void of accurate, individual distinction (Banjo & Jennings, 2017). There is logic in how this duality comes to be, of course; constructing one group (of representation) necessitates inadvertently shaping or defining another group in relation to it, often in a binary opposition that is then qualified in terms of power, suggesting a hierarchical relationship (Banjo & Jennings, 2017). Absolutist conceptions of female activists as either victims of whichever system is at play, or as purely emancipated agents can be avoided when it is understood that both patriarchal and anti-patriarchal elements can coexist within the same movement (Gardner et al., 2024). As such, constructing a 'emancipated activist' narrative in purposeful refusal of and thus in contrast to that of 'victimhood' creates a dichotomy, lacking nuance and anything in between

or outside of this binary. When you care to look and listen closely, there is nuance, multiplicity, ambivalence in female activist's identity. Across the documentary films analysed, where we got to know the women, they held within them facets of being, never just one layer of identity or the other. Take Cherri Foytlin (04) as an example of the eclectic roles female activists can unite within them. Foytlin is a figure of active resistance and anger, yet remains vulnerable and honest; she speaks on defiance and persistence, tethered to her identity as an Indigenous woman; she is influenced by her motherhood, but has her own separate history, too. She acts for her child(ren), for her community, for her natural environment, and for herself.

7.3 Intersectional Invisibility: The Gaze of Power and the Power of Gaze

Prevailing stereotypical patterns of representation reflect social realities in the marginalisation of women, especially when it comes to their literal sidelining through silencing and absence in images where logically, they should be standing front and centre. Unintentional or not, the lack or even invisibility of marginalised groups in a media landscape dominated by those with systemic power superiority mirrors the same hierarchies that environmental justice seeks to dismantle. There are inherent structures of power in constructing how fights for environmental justice are portrayed, and depending on *who* a film looks at, there is variance in *how* they are looked at.

This is echoed in the Mobility-Abstraction Trade-off. Films allowing closer insight into struggles for equity in environmental justice conflicts (e.g. 01, 04, 06) confirmed the disproportionate burdens they place on marginalised communities (Shodiya-Zeumault et al., 2025). Previous studies showed white women to have more voice and diverse manifestations of narratives, whereas BIPoC women were more often essentialised as vulnerable and burdened, maintaining stereotypes that silence them to begin with (Tran, 2023). In the sample, this is emulated through the abstraction of environmental injustice in films centring white women (e.g. 03, 08, 11) versus its bodily experience in marginalised, BIPoC communities (e.g. 01, 04, 06). While all female activists with stronger presence and influence on the analysis are subject to hegemonic constructions of femininity, there is a difference between how white and BIPoC women are contextualised in the realm of bodily experiences of environmental injustice. The marginality and diversity of experiences of BIPoC women specifically allows them to make connections between multiple systems of oppression in their activism (i.e. racism, sexism, capitalism, ...) (Shodiya-Zeumault et al., 2025). The topical proximity of BIPoC-centred films to

environmental justice within the sample is further reflected in the heightened and intersectional contextualisation of their struggles. This underlines the importance of diverse representations and diversity itself in media reporting on environmental justice struggles, lest it perpetuate environmental racism, the systemic and institutionalised oppression of BIPoC at the very foundation of environmental justice (Shodiya-Zeumault et al., 2025).

Symbolic annihilation refers to media representations that exclude, trivialise or demonise specific groups of people. Originally used to describe the scarcity and stereotypical portrayal of women in mass media, the term has expanded to include marginalisations of groups based on their race, age, ethnicity and sexuality (Marr & Luchies, 2023). It is evident most through the systematic exclusion or sidelining of women in several of the documentaries. This invisibility is not only a narrative choice, showing women largely absent or relegated to marginal roles despite their documented participation and leadership in environmental activism (Tindall et al., 2003), as discussed in the previous chapter. It is also a reflection of environmental injustice where the same groups bearing the brunt of environmental conflict are the ones whose voices are erased from the narrative. Symbolic annihilation also occurs when women are included, but their identities are oversimplified or trivialised. In the absence of more complex characterisations, stereotypical representations and narrative hierarchies prevalent in some of the productions become part of public imagination (McLaren et al., 2021). They mirror real world environmental injustice and environmental racism in a white-overpopulated media landscape perpetuating social distance (Banjo & Jennings, 2017).

The film sample ultimately reflects patterns of narrative dominance and prioritisation prevalent in both current academia and the outside world. The environmental justice conflicts and the rise against them mirror the tale of David and Goliath. In the film *'Disobedience: The Fight for Climate Survival'* (02), Marshall Ganz of Harvard University recounts it as follows:

"The Philistines send their powerful warrior, Goliath, to go confront the Israelites, who are afraid. Until finally David, who is not a warrior but a shepherd, went to King Saul and says, let me go fight Goliath. The king says, 'You're not equipped. You've got to take my sword, my shield, my helmet.' They're so heavy, he can't move. And he reflects for a moment and says, 'Wait a second. I'm a shepherd, not a warrior.' He takes off all that armour, picks up a few stones, goes to face Goliath. It's only when he discovers his own resources – not those of his opponent – as the foundation of his strategy, that things begin to shift. And that's what creates those moments of opportunity for the Davids of this world." – Marshall Ganz (02), 30:00.

The ‘David-versus-Goliath-ness’ of environmental justice came in through the very nature of such conflicts – ‘little’ activists fighting the manifestation of injustice that ultimately always led back to the ‘giant’ structures of capitalism (corporation, corruption, ...). The documentaries were also able to underline the strength and importance of community-led organising, and/or of individually adapted activism; only once David recognises his own agency and power does he stand a chance against the giant. None of the films take a clear stance against the function or necessity of environmental justice activism; they just award it different angles, prioritisation and understandings.

This manifestation of power asymmetries prevalent in our capitalistic, patriarchal world system is not only discussed in, but also narratively and discursively constructed through the film’s narrative patterns, their real-world questions of justice and activism. Narrative choices as to who is centred in or out of a story intersect with gender, race, as well as (post-)colonial dynamics. Stereotyping or silencing controls the conversation around environmental justice *and* its protagonists. The reality that those of privilege and success within current (patriarchal, capitalist) systems are generally less aware of the structural oppressions stratifying society (Stephens, 2024) is well underlined through analysed structures of Narrative Centrality and its effect. White (primary) characters are more distant from experiences of structural oppression and through this, it became less relevant to both the film’s storyline and their own representation. Considering Editorial Mediation and Narrative Hierarchies within the documentaries draws on ecofeminist critiques of capitalist patriarchy operating to marginalise women and nature alike (Mallory, 2013).

This Geography of Intimacy also reflects ecofeminist principles that local struggles are always embedded in a global context (Mallory, 2006). The increasing global resonance of environmental justice principles (Ciulla, 2025) is echoed across literature and documentaries. Dominant capitalist narratives justifying environmental destruction for profit force (especially traditionally powerless) communities into challenging exploitation and degradation (Demirdiř, 2025). While on the film level, ecofeminism remained somewhat abstract (e.g. through women often being shown in or connected to nature, but rarely named as closely entwined with it), it was still encapsulated the films’ capitalist narratives, in the very nature of struggles for environmental justice. Environmental justice also established the concept of a global environment, encapsulating local struggles in global advocacy. The gap, the fragmentation paradox between international recognition of and systemic changes and political decisions to fix an issue this created (Ciulla, 2025) is equally echoed through the analysis, because the further removed a film

became from its protagonists, the less tangibility there was to their actions and calls to action. Films that might at first glance⁹ seem like observational-style productions (e.g. 07, 09, 10) can actually reproduce problematic post-colonial perspectives of predominantly white (male) outsiders and saviour tropes, sidelining women and BIPoC activists through narrative structures and absence. Especially when Western filmmaker voiceovers act as a narrative adhesive between interviews of those affected and actionable, their voices are dampened.

Searching, Following and Dwelling: (Dis)Placing Women in Environmental Justice Narratives

Durand-Delacre's 2022 study of climate mobility documentaries investigates how filmmaking practices shape narrative patterns and images, asking whose mobility is prioritised in the production process. Drawing on six documentaries and interviews with filmmakers, the study identifies three modes of filmmaking practice: searching, following, and dwelling. Each is defined by the relationship between filmmakers' movements and those of their subjects. In the searching mode, filmmakers' own objectives and mobilities dominate, frequently positioning them as protagonists and often relying on simplified, even alarmist imaginary. In the following mode, subjects' movements guide the journey, typically centring one person or constituency and thereby opening space for less Western-centric and less securitised imaginaries, even though editing and the choice of whom to follow still shape political implications. The dwelling mode, by contrast, involves remaining with relatively immobile subjects and prioritising their mobilities over those of the filmmakers, further decentring the filmmakers' perspective (Durand-Delacre, 2022).

Although the present thesis does not study mobility per se, this typology strongly informed the initial research design and sensitised the analysis to uncover how films that follow male protagonists often marginalise women activists, whereas films that dwell with, or follow, women or women-led causes tend to render women's activism far more visible. Applying this typology to the 11 films analysed here reveals distinct patterns. Four films fit the searching mode (02,

⁹ On Building upon the Affective Foundation: First Impressions as Research Signals

In this moment, I would like to refer back to the first screening round of the sample, during which immediate impressions on recurring themes, standout moments, imminent power structures and narrative space were recorded. These affective experiences showed to be congruent with the in-depth analysis that followed; even though significantly less crystallized, first gut reactions as to power imbalances and gaps in representation have now been confirmed by analysis and grounded in theory. This indicates that initial individual impressions are not pure bias, but can be an essential analytical tool signalling to researchers when they stumble across something important.

07, 09, 10), characterised by filmmakers traversing multiple locations or countries to connect disparate examples – such as civil disobedience across four struggles (02), a white male filmmaker’s US journey (07), global exploration of endangered activists (09), or tracing fossil fuel impacts from Ireland to Malawi (10). These films often centred the filmmakers themselves or the overarching narrative rather than local communities. Three films align clearly with the dwelling mode (01, 04, 06), where storytelling remains place-bound and community-led, with any movement driven by community members taking their protests elsewhere. Three films follow protagonists (03, 08, 11), prioritising individual or small-group stories: a single female activist at the expense of others (03), four figures within one movement including a sympathetic antagonist priest (08), or two protagonists illustrating a broader movement (11). Film 05 (*Not On Our Soil - A Climate Justice Reality*) occupies a hybrid space, dwelling spatially on the Action 24 initiative in Durban (South Africa), but functioning more as a promotional image film without coherent community foregrounding.

Where the high mobility of filmmakers (searching, following) abstracts and perhaps simplifies or stereotypes characters identities, a low mobility (dwelling) enables core characters to drive the narrative according to their own story and action, challenging narrative hierarchies through a spotlight on local, communal power. This filmmaking influence on narrative distance is also tangibly reflected in narration choices: films with outside narrators approach their subjects rather distantly. Films narrated by main characters allow more insight into the given person, but remain at certain distance from other characters, whereas productions without any narration at all were closest to the communities themselves.

Mapping Geographical Film Coverage: Ecofeminist and Environmental Justice Trajectories in the North/South Divide

Using an interactive map feature, it became possible to visualise the individual locations covered in films, and through this gather insight on filmmaker and character mobility. The variance between Northern and Southern Hemisphere as to debate points of ecofeminism (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023) (*see Ecofeminism: Historical Development*) was well reflected through the documentaries’ respective environmental justice conflict foci, once more showing how tightly connected the two are.

Table 11: *Ecofeminist and Environmental Justice Themes across the Data Corpus, Northern vs. Southern Hemisphere.*

Northern Hemisphere				Southern Hemisphere			
Film ID	Country	Environmental Justice	Ecofeminism	Film ID	Country	Environmental Justice	Ecofeminism
01	USA	Environmental pollution (air, water, noise) through industries	Capitalism	02	Philippines	Extractive / fossil fuel industry	Capitalism
02	Germany, Turkey, Canada	Extractive / fossil fuel industries	Capitalism	09	Nigeria	Oil industry	Capitalism
04	USA	Extractive industries on indigenous land	Capitalism, resource conflict, removal of land and rights (colonialism)	09	Peru	Illegal deforestation and plantation	Resource conflict, removal of land and rights, livelihood protection of Indigenous people
06	USA	Environmental pollution through oil and water refinery	Capitalism	10	Malawi	Climate change impacts	Livelihood protection
09	Romania	Illegal logging	Capitalism	→ Films 03, 05, 07, 08, 10 and 11 reference environmental (in)justice and/or activism on geographically abstract levels.			
10	Ireland	Fossil fuel divestment	Capitalism				

Capitalism as a root cause of environmental injustice, be that through extractive or other industries destroying and pollution the environment, is core to documentaries located in the Northern Hemisphere. ‘*L’EAU EST LA VIE: From Standing Rock to the Swamp*’ (04) additionally, within this same context, covers issues around land and rights being taken from Indigenous people. While such dispossession of ancestral lands is a topic historically discussed more in the Southern Hemisphere (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023), in the context of past and present colonialism in the United States of America, it is logical to come up when a film is concerned with and located in Indigenous territories.



Figure 3: Known Film Locations across the Film Sample. Screenshot from GoogleMyMaps (January 16th, 2026). Map Data © 2026. For access to the interactive map including map legend, please follow link: https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=IYIi1TjgUaiU-C5vXaDZkyPrOae_tuZ0&usp=sharing.

Even though no geographic parameters were set during the data selection phase, there is a clear lack of documentaries exclusively covering the Southern Hemisphere. Films would either move across a global scale (02, 09, 10) or be focused entirely on locations within countries of the Northern Hemisphere, as a screenshot of the interactive map feature (Figure 3) demonstrates. This may have influenced more traditionally Northern Hemisphere issues of ecofeminism, such as capitalism (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023), to become focal points here, too. Ultimately, environmental justice conflicts in countries of the Southern Hemisphere (Philippines (02), Nigeria, Peru (09), Malawi (10)) thematized in the films were always discursively connected back to capitalism and consumerism of the Western world. This again underlines a global hierarchy of cause and beneficiaries within environmental justice (McKinney & Fulkerson, 2015), as well as the potential impact of pursuing a Western gaze through a searching approach in filmmaking (Durand-Delacre, 2022).

7.4 Synthesis

The relationship between identified filmic representations and academic scholarship is characterized by reinforcements regarding gendered roles, notable discrepancies in the types of activism depicted, and significant gaps in visibility. Even though the current media landscape on justice movements and activists is already pluralistic, there is still a dichotomy between

supportive and delegitimising frames (Santillana, 2024), and especially in dominant, mainstream media, they have long been established to have a tendency to reproduce social hierarchies through lenses of passivity or victimhood (Hall, 1997). Despite their growing and irrefutable significance in environmental conflicts, female environmental activists continue to face a marginalisation (Tran, 2023) that is demonstrated through their media and film representations, particularly through the persistent pattern of sidelining or absence.

Representations of activism significantly shape public perceptions of gender roles, influencing how women's resistance is understood and valued, and the research findings underline a need for more equitable, nuanced portrayals of women in social movements. When women become central figures, they challenge assumptions about women's physical vulnerability and traditional roles, rendering their visible political activism in environmental struggles a subversive force in patriarchal societies. Such activism unsettles not only economic and ecological hierarchies but also deeply embedded gendered expectations, revealing the transformative potential of women's public resistance (Demirdiř, 2025).

When drawing the arc back to the theoretical framework of this study, the identified patterns in the documentary film representation of female activists in environmental justice movements perform a dual role: they reinforce patriarchal and capitalist structures found in academic literature, while simultaneously challenging redundant narratives of passivity and victimhood. In what perhaps seems a bit blurry, the analysis both supports and subverts core principles of academic scholarship on women in environmental justice. The way female activists are portrayed in media such as documentary films is not just stylistic, but a subversive political act that can uphold or disrupt patriarchal structures.

7.5 Limitations and Future Research

This study looked at the portrayal of female environmental activists, in potential contrast to academically known gendered representation and roles within their activism. The reading of such portrayals is equally shaped by Western media biases, racial or class stereotypes, or selective storytelling as the films are. While intentional focus on intersectionality in the context of activism allowed a multi-level analysis and interpretation of the films, and such intersectional factors (i.e. race, class, gender, age) are increasingly incorporated in studies of activism and of the dynamics within environmental movements (Cousins, 2021; Gardner et al., 2024), they remain difficult to account for through outside identification. None of them can securely be ascribed with certainty unless they are specified or the subject is personally consulted. The

inherently interpretive subjectivity of qualitative research, individual researcher positionality is a contributing factor to analysis. While steps to counter and minimise bias were undertaken (reflexivity, pilot coding, etc.), there is no cross-checking by other coders to ensure inter-coder coherence or reliability, making this a subjective research project nonetheless.

Documentary films are significantly shaped by their makers – they choose what to show, what to cut and, subconsciously or actively, how to frame people. Such surrounding discourse and context were not part of the scope of qualitative content analysis, however, and through the films being considered as standalone products, truly nuanced micro-level experiences of activism and marginalisation that female activists experience cannot be accounted for through incorporation contextual discourse. Similarly, an in-depth visual analysis of the films would require in-depth knowledge on film language (i.e. technical filmmaking understandings, experience with the effects of image composition, angles, light or film music). Going beyond affective experiences of consuming the documentary films unfortunately exceeded the scope of this thesis and through this, became less relevant with time, even though it would have been extremely interesting to consider. Further, through a certain selection and accessibility bias in restricting the release timeframe to 2015-2025 and excluding paywalled content, potentially relevant or interesting productions may have been omitted.

Implications of and Future Opportunities for Research

The findings of this present thesis open several pathways for deeper academic inquiry into environmental justice, gender and media analysis. In scrutinising masculinity over femininity, future research could pivot to asking why men do not express the same levels of emotional concern or care as women in the researched narratives (see e.g. Price & Bohon, 2019). Investigating men more closely, such as the missing dimension of Relational Roles in men or the performance of masculinity in environmental environmentalism, could enable fascinating comparison between gendered patterns of representation.

Because no productions specifically on potential shifts and developments in women's environmental activism were identified, this aspect could not be incorporated into the analysis. A longitudinal evolution as to women's individual roles and agency in their specific movements, rather than static snapshots provided by only the films, could be very telling. Incorporating the activists directly through interview formats, future projects could potentially bridge the gap between lived realities of activists, versus how they were edited and framed through filmmaking. Moving beyond representation, future studies could also investigate audience perception

of the films and account more strongly for the visual construction of representation narratives, perhaps also through incorporating surrounding discourse (e.g. filmmaker interviews).

8 Conclusion

Anyone can subconsciously be affected by film, adapting life choices according to the messages they internalise (Hammer, 2010), which creates a strong prerogative to analyse and understand such images and what it is they present and reflect in the first place. More significantly *who* they present – because within media, women and minorities are often systematically excluded or marginalised in storytelling (Eschholz et al., 2002).

In this thesis, 11 open-access documentary films covering various environmental justice conflicts, movements and activists around the globe were analysed using Qualitative Content Analysis. Grounded in a theoretical framework of environmental justice and ecofeminism and drawing on scholarship as to the roles of women in environmental movements and their portrayal in modern media, this project allowed comparing and differentiating how prevalent patterns found in the films hold up against dominant academia perspectives.

In deconstructing documentary films on environmental justice as to the representation of female activists, this research found the architecture of storytelling to influence the construction of narrative authority, and to dictate who is granted legitimacy and presence on screen. There is a recurrence of **Underrepresentation and Invisibility**, showing that female activists are frequently absent or narratively sidelined in the data corpus. Where they are present, they are often anchored in their **Relational Identities** and **Traditional Femininity** that persistently frame, and risk confining women to being caretakers and community stewards – and alas, to traditional and gendered expectations of care. Simultaneously, the films challenge narratives of passive victimhood found in older scholarship, instead situating women as intentional, strategic **Agents of Disruption** and **Activist Personas** engaging in collective and confrontational acts of civil disobedience out of individual conviction and care for their peers.

The repetition and subsequent normalisation, or conversely the absence of certain imagery manifests whose voice has power, while stripping it off others (O'Neill & Smith, 2014). While women are increasingly central to efforts for environmental equity, they often remain subject to symbolic annihilation and stereotypical or literal marginalisation. This continued bias as to the position of women in society within mass media productions (Due et al., 2016; Hammer, 2010), and their systematic exclusion and/or consignment to minor roles, or roles matching

traditional stereotypes of women and minorities must be criticised, carefully considered and understood (Eschholz et al., 2002). Unless the increasing media coverage of female environmental justice activists is and becomes more diverse and interactive in its portrayals, it may distort rather than amplify such crucial voices (Tran, 2023). Breaking down the Power of Gaze, documentaries can reinforce patriarchal structures – or they can become a subversive force challenging systemic oppression. By breaking the binary of ‘passive victims’ versus ‘agents of change’, this thesis argues for the recognition of nuance and multiplicity in women’s activist identities. Exploring the Geography of Intimacy, research findings underline that narrative centrality, narrative hierarchy and film mobility and abstraction (both geographically and narratively) influence how women’s intersectional identities are constructed. This suggests that the prerequisite for a truly intersectional representation of female environmental justice activists, avoidant of symbolic annihilation and inclusive of their eclectic individual identities is a stillness of locality and narrative. We must move in close and allow the camera to capture lived realities, and the voices of those affected to be heard most clearly.

By way of final word, I want to gesture to the future of environmental justice and ecofeminism. Through deconstructing gendered narratives in documentary film, this thesis contributes to highlighting the structural oppressions hindering genuine gender and environmental transformation. In deciphering gender roles within environmental movements, we can begin to unravel patriarchal dynamics of modern cultures (Ernanda, 2023). Gender and environmental transformation alike, in the interest of ecofeminism, can only be achieved simultaneously, through and after addressing such hegemonies (Tran, 2023). The realisation of environmental justice requires disrupting strictures of structural oppression (Bell, 2016), and hegemonic masculinity to be confronted and dismantled (Bezerra Guimarães, 2023). Even though women in patriarchal societies are already a force to be reckoned with, redirecting attention and focus to adequate, eclectic portrayals of female activists specifically could serve to be an enlightening experience. Documentary film has the potential of a powerful medium to shift the spotlight to those already working to dismantle the system disadvantaging them, at whichever scale they are able.

9 Bibliography

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10 Annex

Overview of Tables in the Annex

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Table 12: Basal Documentary Meta-Data Collection.

Film ID	Film Title	Year of Release	Country of Production	Production	Length	Link	Availability (platform)	Source (found through)	Languages
01	Abandoned: Greed, Neglect and Environmental Injustice in Adel	2022	USA	Georgia Conservation Voters Education Fund Production	35:03	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJKuTDVIqKc	YouTube	YouTube	English
02	Disobedience: The Fight for Climate Survival	2023	USA	Production: Creative Company Production Director & Writer: Kelly Nyks Producers: Kelly Nyks, Tad Fetting, Hypatia Porter, Jared P. Scott	40:57	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZ5vV75Wulo	YouTube	YouTube via Google	English
03	I Am Greta	2020	<i>unknown</i>	Production: B-Reel Films (BR-F) Cooperation: Hulu, Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR/SWR/RBB), SVT, BBC Storyville Film by: Nathan Grossman Producers: Fredrik Heinig, Cecilia Nessen	97:00	https://www.ardmediathek.de/video/wdr-dok/ich-bin-greta/wdr/Y3JpZDovL3dkci5kZS9CZWl0cmFnLTk4NDVkeTEwM2UtNDY1Zi05NGJhLTllZjM4NGY5MTNkNw	ARD Mediathek	IMDb	German (dubbed), German Subtitles
04	L'EAU EST LA VIE: From Standing Rock to the Swamp	2019	USA	Production: Mutual Aid Media Director: Sam Vinal Producer: Melissa Cox	24:00	https://vimeo.com/343900691	Vimeo	IMDb	English
05	Not On Our Soil - A Climate Justice Reality	2021	South Africa	Production: African Climate Reality Project; co-funded by EU	20:10	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_TQzzdzzS8	YouTube	YouTube via Google; Youtube	English

Film ID	Film Title	Year of Release	Country of Production	Production	Length	Link	Availability (platform)	Source (found through)	Languages
				Film and Direction: ReWild Africa					
06	On the Fenceline: A Fight for Clean Air	2020	USA	Production: Picture 2 Picture Productions Producers & Directors Tara Eng, Alex Klein	25:22	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYI3ALSubpY	YouTube	Youtube	English
07	Planet of the Humans	2020	USA	Production: Huron Mountain Films; Rumble Media Film by: Jeff Gibbs Producer: Michael Moore	99:57	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zk11vI-7czE	YouTube	YouTube via Google	English
08	Re: Environmental Activism. The Last Generation Movement	2022	Germany	Production: Spiegel TV Commission: ZDF Cooperation with: Arte Producer: Beate Schwarz	32:16	Arte: https://www.arte.tv/en/videos/111750-007-A/re-environmental-activism/ YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20X5cGmvDYc&list=PLPHH-np4qbfZUEHp_FRiMMkcUPgSSSirG&index=2	ARTE Mediathek; YouTube	ARTE media library	German, subtitles available in English, German, Spanish, Polish, Italian
09	Targeted: Environmentalists in danger	2022	Germany	Production: DokUtopia Film Commission: ZDF Cooperation with: phoenix, Deutsche Welle Producers & Writers: Barbara Völkel, Berndt Welz	51:55	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHSDDHLD-GaQ	YouTube	YouTube via Google	English
10	The Burning Question	2016	Ireland	Production, Director, Camera work & Script: Alan	30:03	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcsXm1UI0fs	YouTube	Youtube	English

Film ID	Film Title	Year of Release	Country of Production	Production	Length	Link	Availability (platform)	Source (found through)	Languages
				Whelan, Emmet Sheerin, Eoghan Rice Credit: Trócaire 2016					
11	The Troublemaker	2020	United Kingdom	Production: Sasha Snow Film Production, Passion Planet Production Release: Journeyman Pictures Director & Producer: Sasha Snow	55:32	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuwe2cnGNhk	YouTube	YouTube via Google	English
12	We the People 2.0	2017	USA	Production: Tree Media Producer: Matthew Schmid Director: Leila Conners	91:22	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7gQ75AoHrU	YouTube	YouTube via Google	English

Table 13: Code Tree for Theoretical Framework Lenses (Ecofeminism & Environmental Justice).

Theme	Category	Subcategory	Subcategory / Notes
Ecofeminist Lens	Power Dynamics	Violence	Threat of violence
			Physical violence against activist (by executive authorities or private citizens)
			Verbal insult of activist
		Power Asymmetry: David vs Goliath	Person(s) vs illegal system / corruption
			Person(s) vs Corporation / System
		Judicial Power Structures	Criminalisation of Protest
			Person of law exerting unjust power
		Delegitimization & Instrumentalization	Instrumentalization of activist(s) for publicity
			Delegitimization of protest based on age of activists
			Patronisation of activist(s)
			Delegitimization based on (perceived/alleged) ability
			Delegitimization based on emotionality
			Delegitimization of protest through media

Theme		Category	Subcategory	Subcategory / Notes
Ecofeminist Lens				Delegitimization of protest as chosen form of action
			Political & Corporate Structures	Profit over people
			Corporate Power Structures	People vs corporation/industry
				Promise of benefits (e.g. jobs)
				Feeling threatened by corporations
				Targeted silencing of activists through corporations (power play)
			Political Power Structures	Empty promises / false hope of politics
				Open suggestion of power hierarchy
				Political neglect of responsibility
		Rebalancing of Power	Support across Divides	<i>Theoretically opposing sites holding neutral position / showing support</i>
		Historical Patterns & Systemic Inequality	Unjust Distribution of Power	
			Reference to historicity	i.e. “it has always been like this”
	Ecofeminist Themes	Metaphoric & Direct Connections to Nature	Interconnection of Protection of People & Environment	
			Human – Nature Connection	
			Connectedness of “Everything”	
			Indigenous Closeness to Nature	
			Women – Nature Connection	
			Rights of Nature	
			Personification of Nature	<i>i.e. “she”, “Mother Earth”, ...</i>
			Animal Metaphor	<i>to describe environmental disruption, i.e. “black snake” = oil pipeline</i>
		Systemic Root Causes	Capitalism	
			Global system	
	Dualism / Dichotomy	Status Quo vs Change	Variance between needed and actual action	
			Conflict between business as usual / possible change	
		Dualisms of Disconnection & Alienation	Humans vs Nature	Disconnection of humans from nature
			Self vs Other	Disconnection of humans from one another
				Us vs them
			Time: Past vs Future, Then vs Now, Old vs New	Contrasting past and future
				Connection past and future
				Fight for future
				Loss of future

Theme		Category	Subcategory	Subcategory / Notes	
Ecofeminism & EJ Lens				Loss, wasting of time	
				Connection past and present	
	Marginalised & Layered Identities	Age	Intersectionality: Youth / Age		
			Age of Woman	Estimate (Adolescent, Young Adult, Adult, Midlife Adult, Senior Adult)	
		Ability / Health	Health issues		
			Aspergers Reference		
		Sexual Orientation / Queerness			
		Race	White		
			BIPOC	Indigeneity recorded specifically where referenced	
	Contextualisation	Relational Context of Woman	Community	Shown interacting with, as part of community	
				Personal context: history within community	
			Movement / Organisation	Identified clearly as member of movement/organisation	
				Shown in activist group context, interacting	
		Relational Abstraction of Woman	Community	Shown in group/public context, non-interacting	
			Solitude	Shown alone (not in movement, community, ...)	
			Movement / Organisation	Not identified clearly as member of movement/organisation	
		Intersectionality	Connectedness of struggles / issues		
			Age/Youth		
			Colonialism	Context: colonial history	
				Government/company taking Indigenous land/property	
				Destruction of Indigenous land and heritage	
			Gender		
			Apartheid		
			Poverty		
			Racism		
			Housing/Living		
	Capitalism				
	(Public) Healthcare				
	Migration/Mobility		Forced relocation due to environmental issue		
		Right to move/right to stay			
	Democracy				

Theme		Category	Subcategory	Subcategory / Notes
Environmental Justice Lens	Framing of Environmental Consequences	Framing of Environmental Consequences	Human Rights	
			Visibility/obviousness of issue	
			Urgency of issue	
			Environmental exploitation	
			Claims to/against legitimacy of environmental issue	
			Environmental issue of film	
	Substantive (In)Justice: Bodily and Social Impacts	Loss of livelihood		
			Restriction of life quality	
			Mental health impacts	
			Physical health impacts	
	Distributional (In)Justice	Disparities in Impact	Systemic injustice	
			Disparities in impact experience	
			Community affected negatively	
			Vulnerability to polluting industries	
			Sacrifice zone	
			Benefit vs consequence	
			Exploitation of marginalised community at expense of “general gain”	
			Unawareness of those affected	
		Responsibility & Accountability	Denial of responsibility	
			Responsibility vs consequence	
			Responsibility with big corporations, western societies	
		Political, Institutional Sphere	Lack of institutional/official response	
			Institutional Blockade / Failure	
	Procedural (In)Justice	Corporate Capture (of Governments)		
		External Actors & Decision-Making	Outside actors in local community	
			Decision-making by “outsiders”	
		Community Involvement	Want/right to involvement in decision-making	
			Necessity for involvement in meaningful policies	
			Community not involved	
			Disabling/hindering of community involvement	
			Official secrecy or obscuration	Lack of communication from political side

Theme		Category	Subcategory	Subcategory / Notes
Environmental Justice Lens		Institutional, Political Sphere		Lack of knowledge on issue due to institutional barriers
				Coverup/withholding of information
			Institutional barriers	<i>i.e. bureaucratic hurdles</i>
			Political obliviousness / Ignorance of issues	
			Unreliability of Officials / Politics	
	Scale	Scale of Activist Movement	local	
			translocal	
		Scale of Environmental Issue	global	
			Local <> global	Destruction of nature part of global system
				Local problem connected to global system
	Activism	Community & Collective Agency	Empowerment & Enablement	<i>Enabling / empowering those affected</i>
			Strength in Numbers	
		Civil disobedience as activist tool	Effect of civil disobedience / activism	
			Call to (radical) action	
			Justification of protest action	
		(Grassroots) Leadership & Development	Development of protest	
			Community wishes & needs	
			Community-led organising	
			Change from people, civil society	
		Responsibility (for Activism/Action)	Environmental movements taking responsibility	
			Feeling responsibility for future generations	
			Shift of responsibility: from past to future	
			Locals feeling responsibility for their immediate environment	
			Youth taking responsibility	
			Responsibility of “all” to act	
			Responsibility placed on individual	
		Form of Protest & Action	Non-violent	Non-violent civil disobedience
				Legal action
			Violent	Violent protest
			Individual action	
			Collective action	

Table 14: Documentary Content Collection.

Film ID	Spatial Scale	Region	Country	Specific Location(s)	Environmental (In)Justice	Character / Film Focus
	local (single location)	Arctic, Antarctic, Asia, Africa, South America, North America, Europe, Oceania		can also be found in interactive map feature	respective environmental issue / conflict addressed	e.g. whole movement, subgroup, individual, ...
	national (multiple locations within country)					
	regional (multiple countries within region)					
	global (multiple regions)					
01	local	North America	United States of America (USA)	Adel, Georgia	inactive lumberyard (water pollution); Bitcoin mining operation (noise pollution, power demand); tank refurbishing business (air pollution); planned wood pellet plant (air pollution) → within/in vicinity of minority, low-income residential area	Local movement: Concerned Citizens of Adel (local movement); affected community members Individual: Dr. Treva Gear
02	global	Asia North America Europe	Philippines Canada Turkey Germany	Batangas Alberta; Coast Salish Territories (British Columbia) Aliağa, Izmir Welzow-Süd, Lausitz	fossil fuel industry	Global: anti coal movements in various countries

Film ID	Spatial Scale	Region	Country	Specific Location(s)	Environmental (In)Justice	Character / Film Focus
03	global	Europe North America	Sweden Poland Belgium France Denmark Vatican City Germany United Kingdom (UK) USA	Stockholm Katowice Brussels Paris; Strasbourg Copenhagen Vatican City Hambacher Forst, North-Rhine Westphalia London Plymouth New York City, New York	climate change as general construct	Individual: Greta Thunberg
04	local	North America	USA	Atchafalaya Basin (Atakapa-Ishak & Chitimacha traditional territory), Louisiana St. James Parish, Louisiana	oil industry on Indigenous land	Individual: Cherri Foytlin Local movement: L'eau Est La Vie
05	national	Africa	South Africa	Durban	abstract, unclear: environmental justice as concept; briefly mentioned: inactive coal mines + power plant, oil refinery	Action 24 initiative
06	national	North America	USA	(South) Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; New York City, New York	oil and water refinery in South Philadelphia (air pollution) → health impacts on community	Local movement: Philly Thrive Individuals: active members
07	national	North America	USA	Lansing & L'Anse, Michigan; Lowell & Burlington & Middlebury, Vermont; San Francisco & Mojave Desert & Daggett, California; Moapa & Las Vegas & Sparks, Nevada; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; New York City, New York	abstract, unclear: environmentalist movement as topical focus	Individual: Jeff Gibbs

Film ID	Spatial Scale	Region	Country	Specific Location(s)	Environmental (In)Justice	Character / Film Focus
08	national	Europe	Germany	Berlin, Berlin; Buchenberg (Allgäu), Bavaria; Nehren & Stuttgart, Baden-Württemberg; Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	abstract, unclear: climate change as general concept	movement: Last Generation individuals: Henning Jeschke, Maja Winkelmann, Lisa Winkelmann, Wilhelm Gohl
09	global	Africa North America South America Europe	Nigeria USA Peru Romania	Iko & Edowink, Ogoniland Washington, D.C. Pucallpa; Santa Clara de Uchunya; Lima; Iquitos; Tamshiyacu Apuseni Mountains (Western Carpathians); Câmpulung Moldovenesc	Nigeria: (inactive) oil industry → health & livelihood loss, corruption Peru: (illegal) deforestation, timber trade, palm oil plantations → livelihood loss, Indigenous communities affected, corruption Romania: illegal logging, corruption	Nigeria: Celestine Akpobari Peru: Lucila Paultrat Romania: Tiberiu Bosutar, Alex Nedeia
10	global	Africa Europe	Malawi Ireland UK	Kanyera; Chilenga; Lilongwe Dublin; Galway Belfast	Malawi: climate change as general construct Ireland: fossil fuel industry divestment	Narrator Emmet Sheerin
11	national	Europe	UK	Totnes (Devon); London; Yiewsley	climate change and mass extinction as general concept	Individuals: Sylvia Dell & Roger Hallam Movement: Extinction Rebellion

Table 15: Literature Search Phases.

Author Notes: WoSCC = Web of Science Core Collection, accessed through University of Vienna. All literature search phases were conducted between October 2024 and October 2025. Additions to the respective search results since then cannot be accounted for.

Phase	Platform	Keyword String	Notes / Purpose
I	WoSCC	ALL=(“content analysis”) AND ALL=(“film” OR “documentary film”)	Initial inspiration
	WoSCC		Focus on content analyses of representation of women in film as inspiration for own analysis

I		ALL=(“content analysis” OR “feminist content analysis” OR “qualitative content analysis”) AND ALL=(“film” OR “documentary” OR “documentary film”) AND ALL=(“women” OR “representation”)	Provided starting point to collect and sort own thoughts and ideas
	WoSCC	ALL=(“content analysis” OR “qualitative content analysis” OR “feminist qualitative content analysis” OR “feminist content analysis”) AND ALL=(“ecofeminism” OR “ecofeminist” OR “representation” OR “representations” OR “gender”) AND ALL=(“film” OR “documentaries” OR “documentary film”)	185 results screened for research design approach and inspiration for analysis of representation
			Focus on papers working specifically on representations of women/gender or papers that looked at film representation/portrayal
	WoSCC	ALL=(“ecofeminist” OR “ecofeminism”) AND ALL=(“documentary film” OR “documentary” OR “documentaries”)	13 results screened for papers using ecofeminist frameworks in documentary analyses
	WoSCC	ALL=(“ecofeminist” OR “ecofeminism”) AND ALL=(“environmental movement” OR “environmental justice”) AND ALL=(“women” OR “gender” OR “representation”)	31 results screened for papers activism and representations of women
	WoSCC	ALL=(“women” OR “gender” OR “female”) AND ALL=(“environmental movement” OR “climate activism” OR “environmental activism” OR “climate justice”)	395 results screened for more generally applicable papers
			Broadened search to help fill specific intersection of representation of women in environmental justice
II	WoSCC	ALL=(“content analysis” OR “qualitative content analysis” OR “feminist qualitative content analysis” OR “feminist content analysis” OR “critical content analysis” OR “critical qualitative content analysis”) AND ALL=(“documentary film” OR “documentary” OR “non-fiction film” OR “non-fiction movie”) AND ALL=(“method” OR “methodology”)	266 results screened for papers to inspire own analysis and method
			Semi-strategic search: focus on methodological availability over topical focus
	WoSCC	ALL=(“content analysis” OR “qualitative content analysis” OR “feminist qualitative content analysis” OR “feminist content analysis”) AND ALL=(“documentary film” OR “film” OR “movie”) AND ALL=(“method” OR “methodology”)	202 results screened for papers to inspire own analysis and method
	WoSCC	ALL=(“qualitative content analysis” OR “feminist qualitative content analysis” OR “feminist content analysis”) AND ALL=(“method” OR “methodology”)	Most relevant results screened for papers to inspire own analysis and method
	WoSCC	TS=(“researcher positionality” OR “reflexivity” OR “researcher identity” OR “situated knowledge” OR “feminist reflexivity” OR “reflexive methodology”	605 results screened for papers to help frame and inspire own intersectional research

		OR “insider researcher” OR “critical self-reflection”) AND TS=(“qualitative research” OR “feminist research” OR “activist scholarship” OR “ethnography” OR “intersectionality”) AND SU=(“Anthropology” OR “Sociology” OR “Environmental Studies” OR “Women's Studies” OR “Social Sciences Interdisciplinary” OR “Cultural Studies”)	Semi-strategic search: rather open keywords, focus on recent publications (2018-2025) and relatability
	WoSCC	TS=(“researcher positionality” OR “positionality statement” OR “I am a” OR “as a researcher” OR “my role as a researcher” OR “subjectivity in research” OR “researcher identity” OR “reflexive approach”) AND TS=(“qualitative research” OR “feminist methodology” OR “ethnographic fieldwork” OR “activist research” OR “intersectionality”) AND SU=(“Anthropology” OR “Sociology” OR “Social Sciences Interdisciplinary” OR “Environmental Studies” OR “Women's Studies” OR “Cultural Studies”)	45 results screened for papers with inspiring positionality statement
III	WoSCC	ALL=(“women” OR “gender” OR “female”) AND ALL=(“environmental movement” OR “climate activism” OR “environmental activism” OR “environmental justice”) AND ALL=(“representation” OR “portrayal” OR “participation”)	124 results screened, majority already found in Phase I
	WoSCC	TS=(“environmental movement” OR “climate movement” OR “environmental activism” OR “climate activism”) AND (“women” OR “woman” OR “female” OR “gender”) AND (“activis” OR “leader” OR “participation” OR “role”))	152 results screened with broader environmental/climate movements and gender roles focus, not only environmental justice
	WoSCC	TS=(“activis” OR “social movement” OR “protest movement” OR “grassroots movement”) AND (“gender” OR “women” OR “woman” OR “female”) AND (“role” OR “leader” OR “leadership” OR “participation” OR “visibility”) AND (“environment” OR “climate” OR “ecological” OR “climate justice” OR “environmental justice”))	522 results screened with broader environmental/climate movements and gender roles focus, not only environmental justice

Table 16: Primary Character Attributes.

Author Notes: Environmental (Justice) foci of named organisations or initiatives were confirmed through superficial internet searches. Characters printed in bold were particularly relevant to analysis due to frequency or significance of appearance.

Age Estimates: adolescent (<18), young adult (18-30), adult (30-45), midlife adult (45-60), senior adult (60+).

Film ID	Character ID	Name	Identification	Introduction	Gender	Age	Race	Activist ID		Storyline Importance / Notes
		<i>if known, otherwise alias</i>	<i>film caption or (author description)</i>	<i>caption, verbally, none (-)</i>	<i>categories (male, female, unclear)</i>	<i>known or estimate</i>	<i>White/BIPoC</i>	<i>self-ID, author-ID, film ID, none (-)</i>	<i>Contextualisation in activist context?</i>	<i>speaking time, appearance, part in narrative arc of film / noteworthy instances in portrayal</i>
01	01-Gear	Dr. Treva Gear	Founder of Concerned Citizens of Cook County	caption	female	midlife adult	BIPoC	self-ID	Member of local movement <i>Concerned Citizens of Cook County</i>	Main character Spoke most in film Shown in and outside of action
01	01-Weeks	Vicki Weeks	Dogwood Alliance	caption + verbal	female	senior adult	white	author-ID	Member of <i>Dogwood Alliance</i>	Shown in interview Positioned as part of Dr. Gears network
01	01-Paige	Altheia Paige	Concerned Citizens of Cook County	caption	female	midlife adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Member of local movement <i>Concerned Citizens of Cook County</i>	First speaker Shown in interview
01	01-Tiveron	Annette Tiveron	Adel resident	caption	female	senior adult	white	author-ID	Engaged affected citizen	Shown in interview Only shown in home context and with husband
01	01-Brown	Erniko Brown	Dogwood Alliance	caption	female	adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Member of <i>Dogwood Alliance</i>	Only appears within last 3min of film
02	02-Baraka	Hoda Baraka	Global Communications Manager, 350.org	caption	female	adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Working at <i>350.org</i>	Shown only in interview
02	02-Nacpil	Lidy Nacpil	Vice President, Freedom from Debt Coalition	caption	female	midlife adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Working at <i>Freedom from Debt Coalition</i>	Shown only in interview
02	02-Enriquez	Peti Enriquez	Secretary General, BUKAL	caption	female	midlife adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Working at <i>BUKAL</i>	Speaking foreign language, subtitled in English

Film ID	Character ID	Name	Identification	Introduction	Gender	Age	Race	Activist ID		Storyline Importance / Notes
02	02-Tekola	Sarra Tekola	Campaign Organizer, DIVEST UW	caption	female	young adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Member of DIVEST UW	Only speaks once Potentially external footage
02	02-Adam	Ferrial Adam	Africa and Arab Regional Team Leader, 350.org	caption	female	adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Working at 350.org	Long gap between her and woman speaking before Shown in interview
02	02-Esen	Selma Esen	Community Organizer, FOÇEP	caption	female	senior adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Shown within activist community	Speaking very briefly in male dominated group setting
03	03-Thunberg	Narrator	Greta Thunberg	None; verbal introduction (self)	female	15-16	White	Self-ID + author ID	Identified as activist due to prior knowledge and setup of film	No official introduction (presumed to be known); self-introduction in every speech
		Greta Thunberg								
03	03-01	Female Pedestrian 02	<i>(pedestrian turned participant)</i>	–	female	young adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action	
03	02-Heyden	Anuna De Wever Van der Heyden	<i>(FFF activist)</i>	not by film; verbal introduction (first name)	Nonbinary (female read)	adolescent	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action; author knowledge	Often in scenes (without speaking); seen in activist actions → ID through author knowledge
03	03-Gantois	Kira Gantois	<i>(FFF activist)</i>	not by film; verbal introduction (first name)	female	young adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action; author knowledge	Often in scenes (without speaking); seen in activist actions → ID through author knowledge

Film ID	Character ID	Name	Identification	Introduction	Gender	Age	Race	Activist ID		Storyline Importance / Notes
03	03-Charlier	Adélaïde Charlier	<i>(FFF activist)</i>	not by film; verbal introduction (first name)	female	adolescent	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action; author knowledge	Often in scenes (without speaking); seen in activist actions → ID through author knowledge
03	03-Neubauer	Luisa Neubauer	<i>(FFF activist)</i>	–	female	young adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action; author knowledge	Often in scenes (without speaking); seen in activist actions → ID through author knowledge
03	03-02	Unidentified 04	<i>(activist/onlooker)</i>	–	female	adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action	Only speaks once
03	03-03	Unidentified 05	<i>(activist/onlooker)</i>	–	female	young adult	white	self-ID + author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action	Only speaks once
03	03-04	Unidentified 06	<i>(activist/onlooker)</i>	–	female	midlife adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action	Only speaks once

Film ID	Character ID	Name	Identification	Introduction	Gender	Age	Race	Activist ID		Storyline Importance / Notes
03	03-05	Unidentified 07	(activist)	—	female	adolescent or young adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action	External footage; only speaks once
03	03-06	Unidentified 08	(activist)	—	female	adolescent or young adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action	External footage; only speaks once
03	03-07	Unidentified 09	(activist)	—	female	adolescent or young adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action	External footage; only speaks once
03	03-08	Unidentified 10	(activist)	—	female	adolescent or young adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action	External footage; only speaks once
04	04-Foytlin	Cherri Foytlin	L'eau Est La Vie Council	caption	female	midlife adult	Indigenous / BIPoC	self-ID, filmmaker-ID	Member of local movement and community	Main character Spoke most and followed in film
04	04-WhiteHat	Anne White Hat	L'eau Est La Vie Council	verbal introduction (self)	female	midlife adult	Indigenous / BIPoC	filmmaker-ID	Member of local movement and community	Appears throughout, but only briefly

Film ID	Character ID	Name	Identification	Introduction	Gender	Age	Race	Activist ID		Storyline Importance / Notes
04	04-01	Unidentified 01	<i>(mother speaking at St James community protest)</i>	–	female	adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Identified as activist due to speaking at protest action	Only speaks once
05	05-Mathiso	Lisakhanya Mathiso	YouLead Initiative	verbal introduction (self) + caption	female	adolescent (17)	BIPoC	self-ID	Member of local organisation	
05	05-Mtungwa	Sibongile Mtungwa	Women's Leadership & Training Programme	caption	female	midlife adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Member of local organisation	Not shown in context with other female activists
05	05-Firmin	Shanice Firmin	South Durban Community Environmental Alliance	caption	female	young adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Member of local environmental justice organisation	Not shown in context with other women or activists
06	06-White	Carol White	South Philly Resident, Philly Thrive Activist	caption	female	senior adult	BIPoC	filmmaker-ID + author-ID	Member of local movement and community	Spoke first in film Shown in action and interview
06	06-Alexis	Alexis	<i>(Philly Thrive activist)</i>	–	female	young adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action	Shown speaking and in action Present in all significant scenes; no own interview setup; Name ID through other film characters
06	06-Sanders	Sonya Sanders	South Philly Resident, Philly Thrive Activist	verbal introduction (self) + caption	female	midlife adult	BIPoC	filmmaker-ID + author-ID	Member of local movement and community	Shown in action, shown in interview

Film ID	Character ID	Name	Identification	Introduction	Gender	Age	Race	Activist ID		Storyline Importance / Notes
06	06-Hemingway	Carol Hemingway	Philly Thrive Membership, Circle Coordinator	caption	female	senior adult	BIPoC	filmmaker-ID + author-ID	Member of local movement and community	Shown in action and interview
06	06-01	Unidentified 01	<i>(Philly Thrive activist)</i>	–	female	senior adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action	Only speaks once
06	06-02	Unidentified 03	<i>(Philly Thrive activist)</i>	–	female	adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action	Shown and speaking at protests
07	07-Gibbs	Narrator (Jeff Gibbs)	<i>(filmmaker)</i>	verbal introduction (self)	male	midlife adult	white	filmmaker-ID	Self-identification as environmentalist	Main character + filmmaker Spoke first, spoke most
07	07-01	Unidentified 01	<i>(Sierra Club member)</i>	–	female	midlife adult	white	filmmaker-ID	Member of Sierra Club	None; interrupted and narrated over
07	07-Andrews	Catherine Andrews	Citizen Activist	caption	female	midlife adult	white	filmmaker-ID	not introduced as member of specific movement or organisation	Not shown in context with other women
07	07-02	Young Activist 01	<i>(student activist)</i>	–	female	young adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to joining protest action	Only speaks once

Film ID	Character ID	Name	Identification	Introduction	Gender	Age	Race	Activist ID		Storyline Importance / Notes
07	07-03	Female Protester 01	(participant of anti fossil fuel protest)	–	female	young adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Identified as activist due to joining protest action	Only speaks once
07	07-04	Female Protester 02	(participant of anti fossil fuel protest)	–	female	young adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to joining protest action	Only speaks once
07	07-05	Female Protester 03	(participant of anti fossil fuel protest)	–	female	young adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Identified as activist due to joining protest action	Only speaks once
07	07-06	Female Protester 04	(participant of anti fossil fuel protest)	–	female	young adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Identified as activist due to joining protest action	Only speaks once
07	07-07	Female Protester 05	(participant of anti fossil fuel protest)	–	female	young adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to joining protest action	Only speaks once
07	07-08	Female Protester 06	(participant of anti fossil fuel protest)	–	female	young adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to joining protest action	Only speaks once
07	07-Shiva	Vandana Shiva	(environmentalist, activist, author)	caption	female	senior adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Identified as activist due to joining protest action	Only speaks once
08	08-Narrator	Narrator	Narrator		male	unknown	unknown	not one		Spoke first in film
08	08-Maja	Maja Winkelmann	(Last Generation activist)	Verbal introduction (narrator)	female	young adult	white	author-ID	Member of Last Generation	Main character; shown in action, interview, activist group contexts and in interaction with other activists

Film ID	Character ID	Name	Identification	Introduction	Gender	Age	Race	Activist ID		Storyline Importance / Notes
08	08-Lisa	Lisa Winkelmann	<i>(Last Generation activist)</i>	Verbal introduction (narrator)	female	young adult	white	author-ID	Member of Last Generation	Main character; shown in action, interview, activist group contexts and in interaction with other activists
08	08-01	Unidentified 02	<i>(protester)</i>	–	female	young adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to sympathy with cause and joining protest action	Experiences physical violence
09	09-Narrator	Narrator	–	–	female	unknown	unknown	not one	–	Spoke first in film
09	09-Pautrat	Lucila Pautrat	Forest Sciences Engineer + Environmental Activist	Verbal introduction (narrator) + caption	female	midlife adult	Hispanic / BIPoC	filmmaker-ID	Working at Kené	Shown in action and interview
09	09-Ato	Esther Ato	Goi Women's Movement	Verbal introduction (narrator) + caption	female	midlife adult	BIPoC	filmmaker-ID	Member of local movement	Only speaking once very briefly
10	10-Sheerin	Narrator (Emmet Sheerin)	Trócaire Campaigns Officer	caption + credits	male	adult	white	not one		Spoke first in film; very present
10	10-Maseko	Heather Maseko	Civil Society Network on Climate Change, Malawi	Verbal introduction (narrator) + caption	female	young adult	BIPoC	self-ID + author-ID	Member of local organisation/movement	Local (in situ) translator Abstracted from own movement
10	10-Moffat	Meeckness Moffat	farmer, Chithandala village; <i>(part</i>	Verbal introduction	female	young adult	BIPoC	author-ID	Member of “village committee”	Only speaks once

Film ID	Character ID	Name	Identification	Introduction	Gender	Age	Race	Activist ID		Storyline Importance / Notes
			<i>of village initiative</i>	(narrator) + caption					(unspecific) for environmental protection	
10	10-01	Unidentified 01	<i>(young activist)</i>	–	female	young adult	BIPoC	filmmaker-ID	Member of “climate justice group” (unspecific)	Only speaks once; shown in same interview as 2 peers
10	10-Duff	Deirdre Duff	Fossil Free TCD	caption	female	young adult	white	filmmaker-ID	Member of local movement	Only shown in direct interview with narrator
11	11-Dell	Sylvia Dell	retired mother of four	caption	female	senior adult	white	self-ID + author-ID	Contextualised (but not captioned) as member of Extinction Rebellion	One of two main characters Shown mostly in solitude
11	11-01	Unidentified Protester 01	<i>(chanting protester)</i>	–	female	midlife adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to joining protest action	Only shown very briefly; leading chants at protest
11	11-02	Unidentified Protester 03	<i>(chanting protester)</i>	–	female	young adult	white	author-ID	Identified as activist due to joining protest action	Only shown very briefly; leading chants at protest

Table 17: Sample Selection Approaches.

Approach	Keyword String / Keyword(s) (n = results)	Notes	Usage	Date
Google Advanced Video Search	–	cannot handle Boolean operators or multiple specific keywords	NO	May 2025
Google Search for Platforms ("YouTube via Google")	("climate activism" OR "environmental activism" OR "climate justice" OR "climate justice movement" OR "environmental justice movement") site:youtube.com	too many results, majority non-documentary	NO	May 2025
		→ adjusted search string accordingly		

Approach	Keyword String / Keyword(s) (n = results)	Notes	Usage	Date
Google Search for Platforms ("YouTube via Google")	("climate activism" OR "environmental activism" OR "climate justice" OR "climate justice movement" OR "environmental justice movement") ("documentary" OR "film" OR "feature") -interview -panel -discussion -talk -Q&A -trailer -short -recap site:youtube.com	inclusion of terms "film", "feature", "documentary"	YES	May 2025
		exclusion of unwanted formats → appear still, but less frequently		
		add. parameters: length >20min, switched to video tab (filters out non-video results), timeframe 2015 onwards		
	("climate activism" OR "environmental activism" OR "environmental justice" OR "environmental justice movement") ("documentary" OR "film" OR "feature") -interview -panel -discussion -talk -Q&A -trailer -short -recap site:youtube.com	too many results, majority non-documentary	PAR-TIALLY	May 2025
	("climate activism" OR "environmental activism" OR "environmental justice" OR "environmental justice movement") ("documentary" OR "feature-length" OR "full film" OR "activist film" OR "climate documentary" OR "activist documentary" OR "activism documentary") -interview -panel -discussion -talk -Q&A -trailer -short -recap -reaction -highlight -livestream -debate -presentation site:youtube.com	too many results, majority non-documentary	PAR-TIALLY	May 2025
	site:youtube.com OR site:arte.tv OR site:zdf.de OR site:3sat.de ("climate activism" OR "environmental activism" OR "environmental justice" OR "environmental justice movement") ("documentary" OR "feature-length" OR "full film" OR "activist film" OR "climate documentary" OR "activist documentary" OR "activism documentary") -interview -panel -discussion -talk -Q&A -trailer -short -recap -reaction -highlight -livestream -debate -presentation	includes YouTube, Arte, ZDF, 3Sat (websites with free film content to research location) in basic search string, but showed results only for YouTube and Arte some different results to YouTube, but mostly non-documentary, already found	YES	May 2025
	("climate activism" OR "environmental activism" OR "environmental justice" OR "environmental justice movement") ("full length documentary" OR "full length" OR "feature length film") -interview -panel -discussion -talk -Q&A -trailer -short -recap -reaction -highlight -livestream -debate -presentation site:youtube.com	attempt to use viewer language to help find full films only 3 results total, no documentary	NO	May 2025

Approach	Keyword String / Keyword(s) (n = results)	Notes	Usage	Date
Google Search for Platforms ("YouTube via Google")	site:youtube.com ("climate activism" OR "environmental activism" OR "environmental justice" OR "environmental justice movement")	focus reset back to YouTube (including other web-sites made no difference)	YES	May 2025
	("documentary" OR "feature-length" OR "full film" OR "activist film" OR "climate documentary" OR "activist documentary" OR "activism documentary")	site operator first to ensure it being understood		
		less exclusion operators ("-"), stronger focus on film		
	site:youtube.com ("climate activism" OR "environmental activism" OR "environmental justice" OR "environmental justice movement" OR "environmental movement" OR "environmental movements" OR "climate movement" OR "climate movements") ("documentary" OR "full film" OR "feature-length" OR "activist film" OR "climate documentary" OR "documentary film" OR "film" OR "movie")	less exclusion operators ("-"), stronger focus on activism, film	YES	May 2025
		some new results, but eventually back to non-documentary		
IMDb	"environmental justice" (11)	parameters (in website language (German)): Titeltyp: Film, Kurzfilm, Fernsehkurzfilm, Video, Fernsehepisode, Miniserie, Fernsehfilm, Video)→ excludes games + audio formats); Erscheinungsdatum: ab 01.01.2015; Genre: Dokumentarfilm	YES	May 12th, 2025
	"environmental activism" (24)			
	"environmental movement" (8)			
	"environmental injustice" (0)			
	"environmental justice movement" (0)			
	"climate activism" (1)			
FilmsForAction	"environmental justice" (200)	cannot set specific operators	NO	May 12th, 2025
		showed mostly log/article entries		
YouTube (simplified)	"environmental justice documentary"	simplified, rapid search and screening	YES	May 15th, 2025
		exact number of results unknown → screened until saturation of relevance was long passed		
		parameters: length >20min, sorted by relevance		
Vimeo & Dailymotion	–	no results even with simplified search strings, initial goal to include websites → dismissed	NO	–

