

The Representation of Women's Empowerment Depicted in the Movie *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021)

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Abstract

*The purpose of this research are to analyze the representation of women empowerment and find the impact of women empowerment in the movie *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021). In this research, the researcher analyzes the women empowerment and the impact of women empowerment. Then the researcher explains the women empowerment on the main character represented in *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021). The object and data of this thesis is the movie entitled *Raya and The Last Dragon*(2021). The researcher uses women empowerment by Rowland and Kate Young as the grounded theory. Furthermore the researcher uses semiotic analysis method by Roland Barthes and the researcher uses feminism approach to analyze the data. This research is using descriptive qualitative method. As the result, the researcher found that the impact of women empowerment on the main character is having control, or gaining further control, having a voice to be listened, being able to define and create from a women's perspective being able to influence social choices and decisions affecting the whole society (not just areas of society accepted as women's place), being recognized and respected as equal citizens and human beings with a contribution to make. By that finding, it is proven that the impact of women empowerment have significant effect on the main character in this movie.*

Keywords: *Women's Empowerment, The Impact of Women's empowerment, Feminism*

Introduction

Movie as a form of literature can be a very entertaining media. It can be proved by the fact that almost every family in the world has at least one television set at home or mobile phone with internet connection provided. The reason that movie become the most popular literature product is that it offers many interesting benefits there are moral values, produced in many genres, interesting with many colorful animation and special effects, easy and cheap to get, and often include language and cultural content. Many of the movies produced bring both cultural and social elements that are written into a movie. Besides of attracting attention of the audience, it is also an opportunity as a review of tangible social condition. The more movies are produced, the more diverse the movies are produced in different

styles. In general, movie can be clarified according to the story, orientation, and genre. According to the clasification of movie, it divided into fiction and nonfiction. Fiction movie is a movie based on human imagination. Whereas non-fiction, the design is based on actual events, which then developed with the cinematographic elements with the appealing effects, sounds, musics, lights, and variative scenario. Movies serve as the entertainment of modern society, but it also provide media information on social issues in the community. This is why people understand the purpose of the movie. Because movie is not only entertainment tool, but also as the communication tool, and mass cults.

As the movie industry has grown, many movies have begun to portray women not as weak and oppressed creatures, but in the movies the female lead role such as Mulan, Moana, Captain Marvel, and much more. The female figure in the movie is shown to have a high intellectual, brave, independent, and own the power like men. One of the movie that elevate women with independent personalities as the lead role is an animation adventure movie entitled *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021). This animated movie is directed by Varlos Lopez Estrada and Don Hall as the first Walt Disney movie inspired by southeast Asian culture. The movie *Raya and The Last Dragon* is set up in the fantasy world named Kumandra where human and dragons live in harmony. One day Druun, a plague born from human strife, attacked Kumandra and turned all creatures to stone. Then Sisu, the last dragon that survive from Druun concentrated and combined all of the dragon magic into a gem that finally destroyed the Druuns. Thanks to the magic of the dragon, everyone who turned to stone came back alive, except the dragons. This movie represents Raya as a female figure that brave, nimble, and clever, in contrast to the more popular animated films before, such as Cinderella, Rapunzel, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and many others where woman in the movie portrayed as a delicate, graceful in a beautiful dress, then married to the prince. However, in the application of this latest Disney movie, there are few people who lack understanding of the meaning of the movie. *Raya and The Last Dragon* is a movie with a sequence of research with interesting issue to be analyzed, how women's empowerment representation in a movie *Raya and*

The Last Dragon the researcher uses the feminism theory approach to support the data.

Literary Review

Sociology of Literature

According to Laersonson (1972) stated that “Sociology is essentially the scientific, objective study of man in society, the study of social institution and the social process” (p.11). Sociology as the science to study social relationship and obtain material from different source that is literature. Literature and sociology are a reflected of human relationship and their environment. There is a way to interact with the environment, it is related to real life. Sociology can be learned as the literary facts and the impact on social environment. The sociologists such as Alan Swingewood, Karl Mark, Max Weber and others agree that sociology is an institution and sociology is included. Sociology associated with literature unlike other social sciences. Sociology is interested in almost all aspects of human social life.

The Women Empowerment

Women's empowerment is the process of empowering women. Empowerment raises the status of women through education, awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment equips and allows women to take life-determining decisions. Women may get the opportunity to redefine gender roles, which in turn provide more freedom to pursue the desired goals. Women are taken as secondary to men in their social role by many of the philosophers. “Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Rousseau, and are not physically or mentally fit to participate in politics on equal terms with men” (Barro, p. 2). Women empowerment is a significant topic of discussion in development and economics. Economic empowerment allows women in controlling and getting benefit from resources, assets and incomes. It also grows ability to manage risks and improves well-being. It refers to women's ability to make strategic life choices which had been previously denied them. The worlds, Nations, businesses, communities and groups may benefit from women empowerment. It enhances the quality and the quantity of human resources available for development. In a very brief definition

of empowerment is a social action process that promotes participation of people, organizations, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger societies. Empowerment is about positive changing and redistributing the balance of power in a given society, power being defined as control over resources and ideology.

a. Process of Women Empowerment

The first step begins at a personal level. An individual woman develops feelings of personal power, command and self-sufficiency over material and inherent choices she has to make. Second step, empowerment takes place on interpersonal level. Here a woman influences the decision-making power of another woman through their contact and working together. Third step, they emphasize the goals for social action and social change. A community development programs develops through a group effort. The community development programs can lead to individual empowerment and interpersonal empowerment.

b. Dimensions of Women Empowerment

According to Rowland, empowerment to be within three dimensions:

1. Personal: Developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the defects of internalized oppression.
2. Rational: Developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it.
3. Collective: This includes involvement in political structures, but might also cover collective action based on co-operation rather than competition.

The Impact of Women Empowerment toward Someone's Life

According to Young (1993), empowerment enables women to take control of their own lives, set their own agenda, organize to help each other and make demands on the state for support and on the society itself for change. Empowerment is a complete change of the processes and structures responsible for women is inferior status in the society. The summary of the concept empowerment from individual to wider political perspectives puts sufficient importance to collective action, as it is a sure means to individual empowerment. In true sense, the term of empowerment is discussed as feminist perspective. According to Marilee Karl

(1995), the word ‘empowerment’ captures the senses of gaining control, of participation in decision-making. And Vanessa Griffen (1987) explains it also through gender lens, as empowerment means:

1. Having control, or gaining further control
2. Having a voice and being listened legitimately
3. Being able to define and create from a women’s perspective being able to influence social choices and decisions affecting the whole society (not just areas of society accepted as women’s place)
4. Being recognized and respected as equal citizens and human beings with a contribution to make.

Research Methodology

This research is using the descriptive qualitative method. In this research, the researcher will conduct the process of analysis and the final result by applying a theory of women empowerment and feminism which represents the study of literature. The researcher uses the feminism theory approach to analyze the women empowerment depicted in *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) by describing them with the theory as reviewed in the literary review.

The objects of the research are in the form of words, phrases, clauses, narrations, pictures or sentences that relevant to answer the research question taken from the subtitle and scen capture of the scenes in the movie entitled *Raya and The Last Dragon*(2021). The movie is directed by Don Hall and Varlos Lopez Estrada which released in 2021 in United States by Disney plus production. The duration of the film is 1 hour and 47 minutes.

The data of this research is divided into two sources. The primary data is from words, phrases, narration, or sentences in the movie and the screen capture scene of *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) that the researcher obtained. In collecting the data, the researcher conducts some steps such as watching the movie, identifying and classifying the data, and selecting the classified data. While in produce of analysis, the researcher did exposing, explaining, analyzing, and interpreting the preferred data.

Finding and Discussion

This finding and discussion consists of data analysis and its explanation to support the data which researcher analyzed. The researcher uses feminism theory approach to analyze the character and the researcher identifies the women empowerment in the main character using Barthes's semiotic theory analysis. The data, and explanation are acquired by watching the movie, comprehending the movie's subtitles, and gain other supporting data from books and journals. Here is the analysis which the researcher provided in order to answer the problem statements stated in the previous chapter. The researcher provides the screen capture of scenes to analyze the subject.

Women empowerment depicted in *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) movie.

In this discussion the researcher identifies the women empowerment depicted in the movie *Raya and The Last Dragon*. Furthermore, the researcher also displays the signs of the women empowerment be found in the movie.

1. The dominance of women

As in animated movie entitled *Raya and The Last Dragon*, the main character of this movie is a woman named Raya. She has been described as a courageous, intelligent, strong, and conscientious woman. Her behavior and way of things, seemingly a blend of masculinity and femininity. She has been described as a woman with strong mental character, unafraid of battle, and single-minded in motherhood. Not only the main character that play important role as a woman but also the other character such as the last dragon, the chief, the general and even a cute baby girl is included. In this movie, the women character is quite strong.

Picture 1.a 00:21:24 Raya in an open field looking at the last river



Denotation : In the picture 1.a the scene displays Raya is looking for the last dragon namely Sisudatu. In the scene shows the area of dessert or barren that she is now standing. Raya stares straight to the last river that spotted in front of her. In her journey Raya provides everything by herself, she also began the journey by herself after her father, Chief Benja turned into stone because of the druun. As in picture 1.a, Raya wears a woven hat, and she seeming to wear a crimson coat.

Connotation : The picture 1.a displays the female character, Raya. She is the woman that struggle to get her father back after turned into stone. She began the journey to find the last dragon with hope that the dragon would get her father back to human. Raya's appearances as seen in the picture 1.a it shows that Raya is not the typical woman who wear dress or fancy accesories, instead she wears wears clothes just the way she is. The movie focus on woman to lead the story, Raya depicted as the strong woman, having courageous and a fine fighter. The movie highlight Raya to done the action as men used to do. The character of Raya become the main point of the dominance of women as it can be seen from her character and actions in the movie scenes.

Picture 1.b 00:32:43 Dragon Sisu is waiting for Raya to take the dragon gem.



Picture 1.c 00:33:01 Sisu shapeshifted into human after touching the dragon gem.



Denotation : The picture 1.b shows the scene where Sisu is waiting for Raya to take the dragon gem piece in a trap designed by Tail's chief that is now dead within her pitfall. After Raya succeed taking the gem piece, Sisu suddenly shapshifted into human after she hold the gem as displayed in the picture 1.c. Sisu

turning into human with soft pastel purple and wearing blue oversized cloth combined with grey trousers.

Connotation : As in picture 1.b and 1.b showing the transformation of Dragon sisu into human form because of the magic of her dragon sister Pranee that reside inside the gem piece. In the picture above can be seen that the story in the movie focuses on the female character. In this movie the dragon displayed not just like another dragons that looked vicious and terrifying but as a beautiful, agile and feminine figure. When Sisu touches the second fragment, sisu changes into a female. Aagain, another female form, her face and body are designed exactly like woman, complete with long hair and her feminine behaviour.

Picture 1.d 00:16:17 Chief Virana is welcomed by Chief Benja in Heart kingdom



Denotation : Picture 1.d shows two figures of chief Benja and chief Virana in a hall full of crowded people. Chief Benja and chief Virana is having conversation, it is chief Benja welcoming Chief Virana for attending his invitation to Heart Kingdom.

Connotation : As can be seen in picture 1.d chief Benja and chief Virana is having conversation. From the scen it is recognizable that they are both the leaders of their respective kingdoms. In the scene of picture 1.d shows that chief Benja and chief Virana is having conversation in the same place and in the same opportunity, by the scene it implies that woman can be equal to the man, chief Virana herself represents that woman is able to be the leader like men.

Picture 1.e 00:51:52 General Atitaya informing Chief Virana to expand to the main land.



Denotation : In the picture 1.e it can be seen that General Atitaya is giving information to Chief Virana that Fang kingdom need to expand to the main land because Fang kingdom is running out of room for the people.

Connotation : As in picture 1.e displaying general Atitaya giving information regarding to the condition of the Fang. It can be seen that general atitaya standing infront of a table map and explaining the real happening situation in Fang. As in the previous scene in picture 1.d, woman is able to be equal as men in the social status. Woman could become a chief, and even a general. In the picture 1.e general Atitaya explains to the chief Virana about the urgent situation in Fang land. By her face expression it tells that she really have serious concern and critical thinking to solve the problem that happen in Fang's kingdom

2. Women Leadership

Picture 1.a 00:11:30 Chief Benja invites Raya to greet the invited kingdoms.



Picture 1.b 00:09:22 The introduction of Chief Virana as the leader of Fang



Picture 1.c 00:11:04 Chief of Tail



Denotation : In the scene in picture 1.a, Raya and Chief Benja (Raya's father) are standing in front of four clans that arrived in Heart. Chief Benja deliver a short welcoming speech about Kumandra, a country that has been divided into four countries, namely Heart, Fang, Spine, Talon, and Tail, can be reunited. Raya felt doubtful because it was impossible at this time, but Chief Benja was adamant that he believed that Kumandra would be reunited and peaceful one day. In the scene in picture 1.b Raya in her narration revealed the Chief of Fang's clan is a woman. The last scene of picture 1.c the attendance of Tail chief that is a woman.

Connotation : In picture 1.a. Chief Benja standing in front of the clans and deliver his welcoming as for the closing he said, "we can be Kumandra again" Chief Benja spoke while looking at the clans expectantly. The next picture 1.b is the narration about woman leader named Virana or Chief Virana of Fang. Then in the picture 1.c the scene shows female character of a chief. In the picture 1.a the researcher interpreted that Raya, the daughter of chief Benja the leader of the Kingdom of Heart summoned representatives of the Kingdom of Kumandra to give a speech that aimed at re-establishing harmony. The researchers explain Raya's presence as not the absence of a sign passiveness as a woman. When chief Benja delivers the speech talking nervously, Raya's presence turned the situation into a calm atmosphere. Researchers have noted how Raya's attitude conveys that women are capable of holding leadership positions. It means that Raya, as a female role model, has shown the capacity to exert leadership like her father over the circumstance and the condition. The personal decision reveals a leader's personality. A leader should be able to make decisions in a variety of circumstances, selecting the best option from the many options available.

The story focuses on women leadership rather than men. It brings the women empowerment to the movie, in the other hand the role of men is minimum in this story. They are only presented as supporting actors who do not contribute

much in making decisions, such as Raya's friend, Tong, from the Spine country. It indicates that patriarchal domination is no longer applied in this film.

Women have thus far been portrayed as being less capable of being a leader, passive, and inferior to men. In the end, people believe that men are more deserving of ruling and holding positions of leadership. Women are also viewed as unfit for leadership roles because, by nature, they are domestic workers who adhere to all of the rules set forth by men. Even though women's social status and legal rights are increasing annually, men continue to hold the majority of leadership positions. Because women are still frequently portrayed in the media as beings who do not dare to make their own decisions, the media hardly ever emphasizes important issues relating to women, such as leadership, women's movements, and the social contributions made to society. If a woman decides to become a leader, she must make others believe that women also have the same abilities as men.

3. Women as Brave Fighter

Picture 3.a 00:59:16 Raya prepare to fight with Namaari.



Picture 3.b 00:59:18 Raya give herself note to not die during the fight.



Picture 3.c 01:00.12 Raya fight with Namaari in front of the entrance gate of Spine.



Denotation : In the picture 3.a Raya venturing herself to be courageous to engage in a combat along with Namaari and the Fang Country soldiers in order to complete her mission to collect Dragon gems. Raya's facial gesture shows a bit of fear but she must done her mission if she wish to get her father back, Raya try to outcome her fear by giving herself note to not die as displayed in the scene of picture 3.b. After that, Raya bravely fight against her opponent to get the last gem piece as seen in picture 3.c.

Connotation : In the picture 3.a Raya holds her weapon and prepares to open the gates to fight her childhood ex-closefriend that become her opponent that is Namaari and her Fang's soldiers. Raya prepare herself to fight in the Spine Country's gate while saying, "A note to myself..." that continued in picture 3.b. "Do not die". In picture 3.a. and 3.b. show that Raya finally encourage herself to fight against her opponent even though she was afraid. Raya, who failed many times, but still able to get back up, showed a brave action even though Namaari tried to beat her down. Furthermore, Raya was nimble and agile in fights and easily defeat her enemies, in this case showing that she occupied a superior skill to other male characters. Even Raya is a woman but she holds a courageous in herself on tough actions.

4. Strong Women's Appearances

Picture 4.a 00:21:18 Raya stares at Namaari to begin the fight.



Picture 4.b 00:59:28 Namaari gets ready to fight with Raya



Denotation : As In picture 4.a, as a princess of the Heart clan, she does not wear a dress but wears a plaited bamboo top, and outfit that looks masculine. Her hair was left loose without any accessories, and she also wears hand tie, and carried a dagger as her weapon. Moreover, it can be seen in picture 4.b Namaari as Raya's opponent, wears outfit like a knight, which is inspired by the cultures that exist in Southeast Asia. Namaari appeared with her hair loose with undercut style, wearing white sleeveless cloth and the combination red and gold belt as the symbol of strength and wealth, and a sword as weapon. Raya and Namaari's clothes were entirely different from the clothes the most of Disney princesses wearing. It was not a beautiful long dress typical of a princess that lives in a huge castle like Cinderella, Aurora, Jasmine etc, but the clothes that Raya and Namaari wore were pretty simple and made them able to move freely as fighter.

Connotation : Raya and Namaari's clothes in pictures 4.a and 4.b show that even a princess does not always have to look feminine and elegant. It is contrast to the existing stereotype that every princess or woman must wear elegant, expensive, dress, women can also wear clothes with a masculine look. In this phenomena, the outfit that Raya wears signify that her character is a brave and tough woman who is ready to fight. Her clothes in picture 4.a can be seen from the sampot suit with the pants that Raya wore made it easier for her to perform the masculine activities such as self-defense and fighting. Furthermore, yellow color in her clothe symbolizes the optimism. Raya also brought a weapon, namely a *keris* that inspired from Indonesian traditional weapon, especially from Javanese culture. Keris itself in Java is considered a symbol of heroism, strength, and courage. Moreover, the keris also has another philosophy: teaching about the harmony of life with nature and humans. The hat used by Raya was used as a shield when Raya explored Kumandra and fought against her enemies. Raya's overall outfit showed that Raya was indeed present as a strong and courageous

woman. Namaari's hair cut show that even a princess does not always have long hair with a crown or accessories to look feminim, from Namaari's hair style in the picture 4.b that princess can have any hair style. Namaari's undercut hair style make her free to do masculine activities as fighter such as riding her big cat, fighting, swinging sword and even ready to fight to defend her clan.

The impact of women empowerment toward the character of Raya in Raya and The Last Dragon movie.

Empowerment enables women to take control of their own lives, set their own agenda, organize to help each other and make demands on the state for support and on the society itself for change. Empowerment is a complete change of the processes and structures responsible for women is inferior status in the society. The pictures below descibe several impact of women empowerment toward the main character of Raya in Raya and The Last Dragon (2021) movie.

1. Having control and making decision of her own life

Picture 1.a 00:23:38 Raya arrived at the last river flow.



Picture 1.b 00:27:56 Raya found the last dragon



Denotation : As scene in picture 1.a displayed, it can be seen that Raya is somewhere in a land that the last river flows. From her facial expression she was gloomy and full of disappointment because sshe had not yet found the last dragon she had been looking for entire her life. Turns out, in the picture 1.b Raya finally found the last dragon named Sisudatu after casting a spell.

Connotation : As in the picture 1.a and 1.b Raya decide to find Sisu the last dragon to get back her father. Even if she pass through many obstacles she stand to it and keep continue to find Sisu. Her decision give her best result, her father turn to human at the end. The story displays Raya as the decision maker in every step she could make. The story also highlight that woman also could make every decision in their life. Raya breaks the stereotypes that women can only follow men's decision toward their life and how they live. The independent character of Raya also suppoert her step to make any decision wisely.

2. Having a voice to be listened

Picture 2.a 01:04:39 *Raya explaining her plan to take the last gem piece*



Denotation : In the picture 2.a above depicts Raya explaining her plan to bring the last piece of the Dragon Gem to her friend. This is done considering that the Kingdom of Taring is the territory of Raya's sworn enemy, Namaari, and its territory is the most heavily guarded of the five kingdoms, requiring a special strategy. The extended meaning of this scene is that Raya is doing a briefing with her friends for her final mission, working together.

Connotation : In the picture 2.a above it can be seen that Raya sit in the center of her friends to explain the arrangement of plans. It seems everyone is paying attention to Raya while she speaks. Sisu that sit behind Raya pointed her eyes on the plan. The chief of Spine, captain Boun, the little baby Noi and ongies that stand in infront of Raya are all listening to her. By the act that occured in the scene it can be concluded that Raya proves to be woman is also capable to make a plan, and having a voice to be listened by people. Furthermore, in the process of completion of the mission, Raya repeatedly gives her friends the opportunity to speak up.

3. Being able to solve problems

Picture 3.a 01:23:23 *Raya tries to stop the druun.*



Picture 3.b 01:24:01 Raya telling her friends to trust each other and fix the situation.



Picture 3.c 01:24:36 Raya brace herself to take the first action.



Denotation : Picture 3.a displaying Raya holding the gem piece to banish the druun. As in her facial expression, Raya looks scared and confused. In the picture 3.b It seems the druun cannot be defeated, then Raya tries to give her best solution that is to trust each other so they can swipe the druun away. As displayed in picture 3.c Raya dare herself to take the first step, she look full of hope that it would work to save everyone.

Connotation : In the picture 3.a-3.c above it can be seen that Raya and her friends are in a grave situation surrounded by the mindless plague druun. In this scene Raya demand to handle the grave situation. In picture 3.a Raya also keeps wondering how to defeat so many druuns around her. At that very moment, Raya tries to recall Sisu's story who told her that the dragons could defeat the druun back then was because the dragons combine and unite their powers. Raya immediately tells her friend to trust each other if they wish to defeat the druun. However, Raya volunteered to give the dragon gem pieces to her enemy Namaari

to be her first step and her other friends follow her action. To banish the druun requires not only dragon magic, but also maintaining mutual trust between people. Raya's skill in solving problem became the focal point in the shown pictures above. Indeed, it is not easy to solve the problem that quickly. But Raya proves that women can also solve problems and bring solutions quickly. The researcher found that there is an ideology formed in the female character, Raya in this movie. This can be seen in the way Raya is described as a problem solver for existing problems. The ideology dismisses the concept of gender ideology that formed a patriarchal culture in society and created a male-dominated culture. This male-dominated and male-first culture has caused injustice.

4. Building Self-Reliance

Picture 4.a 00:01:09 Raya is riding Tuktuk in the dessert land.



Denotation : Scene in picture 4.a showing Raya is on her way heading somewhere. By her unraveling hair as the wind move her hair made Raya appear riding on something that made her accelerate. Raya was riding her pet that she named it Tuktuk, and Raya seemed to be traveling alone.

Connotation : In picture 4.a can be seen that Raya riding on her pet, she made all the journey by herself. No other figure seem appear in her very begining journey to found the last dragon that she believe would save her father. In as much as she has done everything she could be independent in many aspects of life. Since her father became a rock because of the druun plague, Raya went on many independent things and she has traveled alone for many years with her pet tuk-tuk in searching for the last dragon Sisu who would be her last hope to bring back the people of the land of Kumandra, including her father. In every pathway she bravely fought against the druun that attacked her. After Raya found Sisu the last dragon, Raya bravely faced all the threats and obstacles that encountered, both from druun and from the other clans that tried to break her plans because she was

used to fighting the druun alone and Raya had a fine martial art from her childhood. Not only that, Raya showing a strong faith in Naamari after being betrayed twice. It was brave to put her life in danger to someone she had never trusted before. But with that courage and her self reliance, she could make big and risky decision in her life and restore the land of Kumandra.

Conclusion

The researcher writes the conclusion that there are two major points of discussion based on the previous chapter. First is finding the women empowerment that represented in *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021) movie. Second is finding the impact of women empowerment on the main character. The results of the study found that women are able to be equal to men. The researchers found that from the way Raya was portrayed as the main female character, the female character changed. The statement that female characters are weak is also successfully shattered through this movie. Researchers have found that women can control their emotions and put their ego aside in order to fulfill their mission. The self-sacrificing character also successfully appears in several scenes of this movie.

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