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Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory: The Potrayal of Femininity in the Film Aladdin (2019)

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Abstract: Films are often seen as mere entertainment, but they can carry hidden messages and meanings, making them a medium of mass communication. Disney have a big influence on gender perceptions, shapes views on gender roles more powerfully than schools or families. This study aims to analyze the representation of feminism in Disney's "Aladdin" (2019). This research was conducted using Roland Barthes Theory, namely by using denotative, connotative, and myth meanings. The results of this study divided in six findings, there are: (1) Equality Between Woman and Men; (2) Belief in Women as Leaders; (3) Oppressing Women in the Name of Tradition; (4) The fate of being a Woman; (5) The Price of a Woman; (6) Women and Freedom.

Keyword: Feminism, Roland Barthes Theory, Semiotic

INTRODUCTION

Films are often only seen as a medium of entertainment for the audience. However, films can actually have many hidden messages and meanings when analyzed using certain methods. This is because film is a form of communication that uses media to connect filmmakers as communicators with audiences or mass communicants. Therefore, films can also be considered as a mass communication medium (Alfrait et al., 2022).

Film is a form of mass media that delivers packaged content to a wide audience. It is also a medium capable of conveying various messages and meanings embedded within the film, expressed through specific symbols or clarified through selected scenes. The messages or meanings contained in films can also depict various realities of life through the characters that showcase different facets of their identities. For example female characters are no longer depicted solely as traditional women but are increasingly portrayed with traits typically associated with men. There is often a perception that masculine traits are exclusive to men. In reality, masculinity can be present in both men and women due to influences such as culture, education, and other factors. Femininity and masculinity are intertwined with stereotypes and societal mindsets that draw distinction between the two (Pratiwi et al., 2021). This statement clarifies that masculinity is not something innate or biologically determined but rather a result of various influences. Women can also possess masculinity, though many people fail to understand or acknowledge the concept of female masculinity (Salsabil, 2019).

Women are perceived as socially weak and always dependent on men. This perception persist to this day due to the entrenched influence of patriarchal culture in society. The inequality experienced by women originates from societal views that regard women as inferior to men. Patriarchal culture reflects the lack of social power, which results in the subordination and oppression of women.

Disney animated films are highly loved by both children and adults, men and women alike. Disney characters are often admired and idolized by girls, especially the Disney princesses, who are the main female characters in various Disney animated films. Disney princess merchandise is also highly popular in the market and sought after by fans. Disney generates significant revenue annually from the sales of various merchandise related to their characters and animated films. Every change in the characters of Disney princesses reflects the shift experienced by women in contemporary society. These changes influence the characters, their environments, and other elements shaping each Disney story. While female characters today are portrayed as more courageous, independent, and determined to achieve their goals, it remains a question whether these changes truly reflect reality and genuine gender equality. Women are often portrayed as objects in films, particularly as sexualized or alluring figures in the presence of men. Disney animated films shift this perception, especially for children, by reshaping views on social realities. According to media analysts, Disney films have the potential to teach children about gender roles more effectively than schools, religious institutions, or families. (Biasini, 2019).

Disney has been established for more than ninety years. It began in 1923 when founder Walt Disney arrived in Kansas City, California, and created an experimental cartoon titled "Alice Wonderland" to sell to distributors, which turned out to be a success. October 16, 1923, marks the founding date of Disney (The Walt Disney Studios, n.d.-a). Initially, Disney focused solely on producing animated films, now known as Walt Disney Animation, and later merged with The Walt Disney Company along with other production studios such as Pixar and Marvel Studios (Dwiastono & Iman, 2021).

Representation can also be defined as something that portrays an idea from the mind through images or imagination, creating a sense of similarity in our thoughts or emotions. Furthermore, representation can be described as something that symbolizes or serves as a substitute. Thus, it can be regarded as the result of a social process involving depiction and embodiment (Purwasito, 2003).

Representation is closely related to knowledge and identity. At its core, representation is the process of generating meaning through language. Language itself is a cultural product that functions as a system of representation. According to (Mulyana, 2006), culture is fundamentally connected to the meanings that are created, shared, and exchanged among members of a community. Representation refers to how opinions, ideas, individuals, and groups are depicted. Therefore, representation is the process of producing meaning through the interaction between individuals and the use of images, symbols, and language across cultures (Subardja & Arviani, 2021).

Hartley believes that representation means using language to express something meaningfully, or present it to other people. Representation can be found in various forms such as words, images, stories, sequences, etc. that represent ideas, facts, emotions, etc. Meanwhile, feminism is a movement that starts from the assumption and awareness that women basically experience oppression, discrimination and exploitation, as well as efforts to end these things. According to Tong (2010) in her book titled *Feminist Thought*, adherents of feminism can be categorized into eight groups: liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist and socialist feminism, psychoanalytic and gender feminism, existentialist feminism, multicultural and global feminism, ecofeminism, and postmodern feminism (Harinanda & Junaidi, 2021).

The study by (Rudy et al., 2021) focuses on the representation of friendship in the film

"Aladdin" and the importance of friendship for humanity, analyzing dialogues as symbols using the theory of representation within a semiotic approach. Meanwhile, the research by (Putri et al., 2023) specifically examines symbols and signs in the film using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, with a focus on women's roles in social contexts and patriarchy through the character of Princess Jasmine. Although their study provides insights into aspects of feminism, they primarily centers on women's roles in challenging and transforming patriarchal systems. However, this present research identifies a gap in the specific exploration of the overall representation of feminism in the film *"Aladdin"* (2019), including how feminist elements are depicted through the narrative, characters, and conveyed values.

Therefore, the research problem addresses the question of how women are represented in the Disney film *"Aladdin"* (2019). The aim of this study is to analyze and demonstrate the representation of feminism in the film, examining how gender roles and feminist themes are portrayed through the characters and narrative. By filling the identified research gap, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of feminist representation in *"Aladdin"* (2019).

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method to explore the representation of women in the film *"Aladdin"* (2019). The research focuses on observing and interpreting scenes in their natural context, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena through systematic data collection and analysis. The material object is specific scenes from the film that convey representational messages, analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, while the formal object is the depiction of gender equality and women's empowerment. Data sources include the film as primary data and supporting documents as secondary data. Data collection involves triangulation techniques, combining various methods to enhance understanding, and using scene snippets and movie scripts to document and categorize findings. The analysis delves into denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings of the scenes, focusing on signs and symbols created through camera techniques, with the aim of systematically uncovering messages about women's representation in the film *"Aladdin"* (2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

In the film *"Aladdin"* (2019) there are 6 scenes that show feminism, which will then be explained using Roland Barthes Theory, which consists of 3 (three) forms, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. The results of these findings are described as follows:

The Equality Between Woman and Men



Figure 1. Conversation between Princess Jasmine and Prince Anders

Denotation: in this scene, Prince Anders comes to the Kingdom to meet Princess Jasmine, with the aim of matchmaking. The Prince is fascinated by the Princess's beauty when he sees her walking towards him. The Prince compliments her by saying that Princess Jasmine is very beautiful, but he has never heard of her beauty. Hearing this, Princess Jasmine replies

with sarcastic words, which are then reprimanded by her father because they are considered rude.

Connotation: In figure 4.1, Princess Jasmine says “Our titles are the same, but described differently.” to Prince Anders, when the Prince mentions her beauty that he has never heard of. Princess Jasmine says this because she feels offended by Prince Anders’ words. She feels that even though they have the same title, namely as a princess and prince of the kingdom, the spread of rumors about the princess is more widely discussed by people. Women are often talked about and judged based on their beauty, without considering other things that may exist in the women. This shows a sign of patriarchy where women are rumored more than men.

Myth: So far, patriarchal culture has made women considered as objects, while men see themselves as subjects. This results in a construction where women will consider themselves as objects, which gives rise to oppression of women (Isnaini, 2021). Patriarchal culture emphasizes that men are very important, which cause women to be oppressed (Oknadia et al., 2022). In addition, women are often judged by their beauty, which gives rise to the myth of beauty, where women consider beauty to be something very valuable. Feminism is a liberator from women’s beliefs regarding the injustice felt due to gender. Feminism strives to prevent oppression by men against women, because of patriarchal culture (Kartini, 2020).

Trust In Women as Leaders



Figure 1. Conversation between Jasmine and her father

Denotation: In this scene, Jafar argues with the sultan regarding the attack on the kingdom of Shirabad, which is the kingdom of Princess Jasmine’s mother. The Sultan agrees to the proposal because he is hypnotized by Jafar’s stick, so he follows Jafar’s request. In the middle of the conversation, Jasmine hears the plan to attack her mother’s kingdom. Considering her age is no longer young, the Sultan says that he want Jasmine to get married, so that Jasmine’s partner can continue his leadership. Hearing this, Jasmine tells her father that she can lead the Kingdom without having to marry a prince. However, her father does not agree with Jasmine’s words because there is no history of female leaders since the kingdom was founded.

Connotation: In figure 4.2, Princess Jasmine says “I can lead if...” to her father or the Sultan, because she believes in herself and has been preparing for a long time to continue her father’s leadership. However, Jasmine’s words are denied by her father who says that during the founding of the kingdom there has never been a female leader. The Sultan does not give his trust to Jasmine to be the successor to the leader of his kingdom because women are considered weak and have little knowledge.

Myth: So far, women are often depicted as individuals who are less capable of leading, passive, and unequal to men. As a result, society tends to view men as more appropriate leaders. In addition, women are considered unfit to lead because their roles are considered limited to household chores and compliance with rules set by men. Although women's social status and legal rights continue to increase every year, leadership positions are still dominated by men (Wardah & Kusuma, 2022). The unfitness of a women as a leader is also due to the assumption that women are emotional creatures (Puspita & Supratman, 2021). If a women wants to be a leader, she must be able to convince everyone by proving that women have the same abilities as men.

Oppressing Women in The Name Of Tradition



Figure 2. Conversation between Jafar and Jasmine

Connotation: In this scene, Jasmine is disappointed with her father's decision to support Jafar's words, then she leaves the room on her father's orders. Jafar approaches Jasmine who comes out and then speaks to Princess Jasmine that it is better to obey her father's words and the prevailing traditions. Princess Jasmine is given no other choice but to follow tradition. The opinions she puts forward are never heard and are considered as just a passing wind.

Dennotation: In figure 4.3, Jafar says "Life will be better for you, princess, after you accept the tradition" so that Jasmine will accept Prince Anders so that Jafar obtains allied troops from Shirabad which are Prince Anders troops to carry out his plan to attack Jasmine mother's kingdom. As if Jasmine does not have full rights over the decisions that occur to speak for her own decisions and is required to accept her fate as a princess in a kingdom that must implement unfair regulations, one of which is forced marriage.

Myth: (Putri & Nurhajati, 2020) stated that the emergence of traditions comes from two ways, namely spontaneously and by force. Traditions that arise due to force are generally imposed by individuals in power. Women are considered as oppressed objects, so they must submit and follow all existing rules. Women do not have the freedom to express their opinions and determine what they want (Puspita & Supratman, 2021).

The Fate Of Women

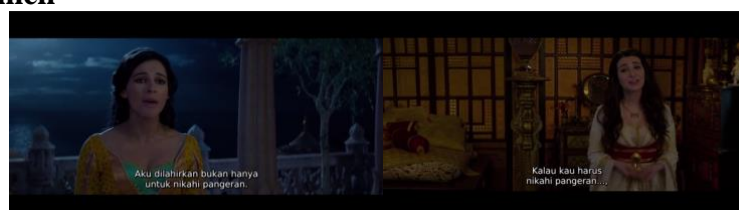




Figure 3. Conversation between Jasmine and her maid named Dalia

Connotation: In this scene, Jasmine and Dalia are discussing about Prince Anders' arrival in the kingdom with the aim of meeting Jasmine. Jasmine said that she was not born to marry the Prince. Because if she decided to marry for love, not for wealth, power, and tradition. However, Dalia denied Jasmine's words because if Jasmine married someone other than the Prince, it would definitely be someone worse than Prince Anders, because according to Dalia, even though Prince Anders is stupid he is tall and handsome. Dalia said that if Princess Jasmine wanted to marry Prince Anders, they would only marry for the sake of establishing cooperation, so that the Princess and Prince would not need to communicate with each other.

Denotation: In figure 4.4, Princess Jasmine said "I was not born just to marry the Prince." In her words, she did not want to marry any prince that her father had suggested. Princess Jasmine wanted to decide to marry for love, not for wealth, power, or tradition. The Princess considered that this was demeaning and trivializing a women, where in this case, arranged marriage is a patriarchal ideology that makes women only objects.

Myth: Matchmaking is a way to get a life partner that is compatible for both parties. However, during the kingdom era, matchmaking was often carried out to establish cooperation between kingdoms, which was often considered unfair to women. Women in matchmaking were required to be an object to expand the power of men, so they must always be obedient (Intan, 2020). Women do not have a choice in determining their own partner, because they will be considered imperfect if they do not have a partner (Intan et al., 2020).

The Price of A Women

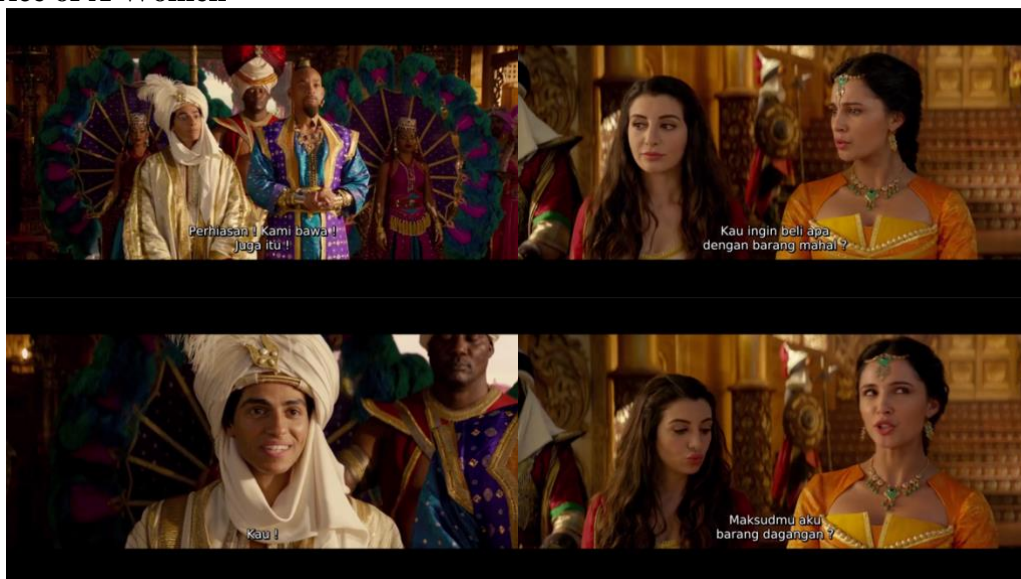


Figure 5. Conversation between Aladdin and Princess Jasmine

Connotation: In this scene, Aladdin who changed his name to Prince Ali, came to the kingdom after he became a prince with the of the genie in the Magic Lamp. Prince Ali brought

many gifts that had been prepared, including jewelry in the form of wheels and very expensive. However, Jasmine misunderstood the gift, according to her, she was not a commodity that could be bought or would be tempted if given a very expensive item. Jasmine was disappointed by the words uttered by Prince Ali, the Jasmine asked permission to enter with the excuse of getting bread.

Denotation: in figure 4.5, Princess Jasmine asked, “What do you want with expensive items?” to Prince Ali, because at that time there were so many gifts brought by Prince Ali for Princess Jasmine. Prince Ali’s gift offended Princess Jasmine. Prince Ali thought that Jasmine would be tempted because of the many gifts and expensive items brought for her. However, that actually made Jasmine feel like she could be bought, so she asked, “You mean I’m a commodity?” to Prince Ali. The princess felt that she could not accept Prince Ali’s treatment because she thought getting a women was that easy and thought that getting a women’s heart was enough with luxury alone. This scene shows the existence of patriarchy where men who have money are considered to have full power over women.

Myth: Feminists view patriarchal ideology as a treatment of women that makes them objects (Intan et al., 2020). In this case, women are depicted as objects that can be bought with money. By providing various luxury goods, men are considered to have the right to control women according to their wishes, because of the image attached to women, that they are just goof that can be bought (Ratna et al., 2020). In this era, giving goods or property to women is called ‘dowry’.

Women and Freedoms

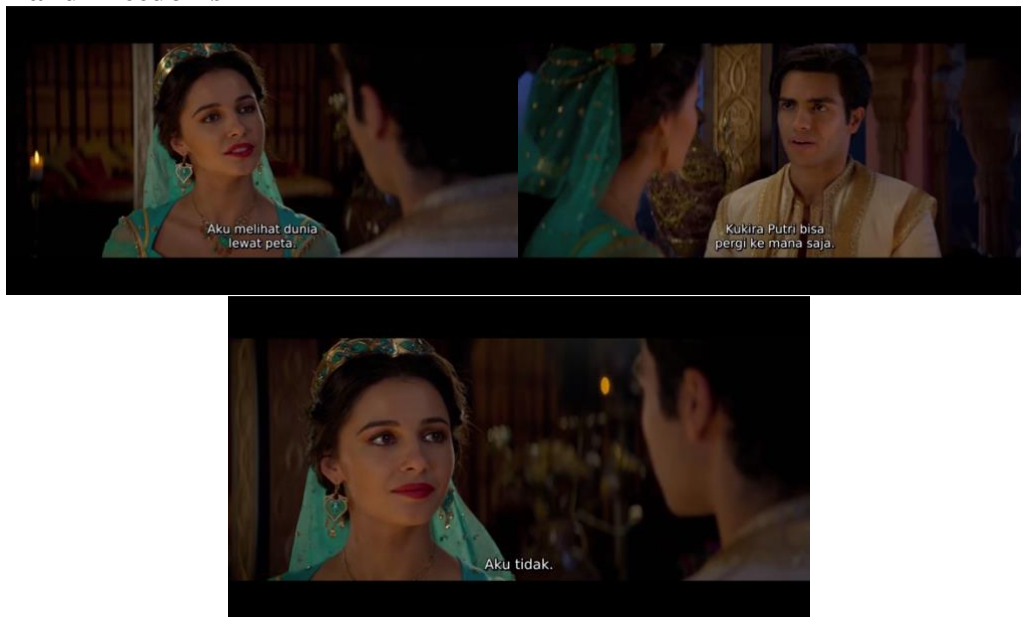


Figure 6. Conversation between Princess Jasmine and Prince Ali

Connotation: In this scene, Jasmine talks to Prince Ali about Prince Ali’s country of origin, the country of Ababwa, which actually does not exist in this world. Jasmine looks for the name of the country on her map but she doesn’t find the name of the country of Ababwa, then Jasmine asks Prince Ali to shows were his country of origin is. Prince Ali ask the genie to make the name of the city of Ababwa appear on the map, then the genie helps him and the name of the country appears on the map. Jasmine is surprised to see the country of Ababwa on her map. After that, Prince Ali says that he thinks the map is useless and impractical even though Jasmine knows this world through the map because she is not given the freedom to go anywhere even though she is a princess.

Denotation: in figure 4.6, Prince Ali says “I thought princesses could go anywhere” to Jasmine, Prince Ali thinks that a princess is free to go anywhere she wants. But that is not felt

by Princess Jasmine, she is not allowed and not given the opportunity and freedom to go anywhere even out the royal palace. She is prohibited from leaving the royal palace and spends her time only in the palace. Even though he lives a luxurious life, he feels tortured by the rules that limit him from socializing with his people.

Myth: Unconsciously, women's movement are in line with the path that has been determined by men. Even though freedom is important in today's era, women are still under the control of men (Winarti, 2020). Women do not have the freedom to go wherever they want. Women are required to follow the path of their lives that have been formed and dominated by men, down to the smallest details of their lives.

Discussion

Feminism is a movement that recognizes and seeks to end oppression, discrimination, and exploitation of women, with various schools of thought such as liberal, radical, Marxist, psychoanalytic, existentialist, multicultural, ecofeminism and postmodern. In the film "*Aladdin*" (2019) there is a depiction of the form of feminism. The results of the study show a picture of the social reality of women's lives who are trapped in patriarchal system. Through Princess Jasmine as a smart, brave and tough royal women in fighting for the rights of freedom, happiness, and the right to choose without being forced to follow the applicable rules. Changing the patriarchal system in her kingdom that women have the same position as men and can be involved in the kingdom political affairs. Princess Jasmine proves that women are not weak and are able to become leaders of the Agrabah kingdom for the welfare of their people. In the film "*Aladdin*" (2019) depicts the role of strong women from women's perspective. In this film, women have more space to define how they fight against the injustice that oppresses them. Princess Jasmine succeeded in changing the patriarchal traditions and culture that are deeply embedded in society which believes that only men have the opportunity to become leaders. It is not easy for women to make changes to become leaders. However, Princess Jasmine managed to change the royal rule about women not being able to lead and change the view that women should stay at home and follow all the rules that men say.

Discussion of findings based on theory after data is collected and linked to the semiotic theory put forward by Roland Barthes Theory, which consists of denotation, connotation, and myth. Then, the researcher finds the results of this study which discusses the related (1) The Equality Between Women and Men (2) Trust in Women as Leaders (3) Oppressing Women in The Name of Tradition (4) The Fate of Women (5) The Price of A Women (6) Women and Freedoms which has been previously explained in the results section.

CONCLUSION

This study attempts to understand how women are depicted or represented in the animated film "*Aladdin*" (2019). The results of the study show that there has been development in the depiction of women in Disney films. The film "*Aladdin*" (2019) appears as a film that tells story of a strong female warrior. This is a positive transformation from Disney films that often feature female characters who are vulnerable and need to be saved by men. From this film, six categorizations were found that describe female characters, namely (1) The Equality Between Women and Men (2) Trust in Women as Leaders (3) Oppressing Women in The Name of Tradition (4) The Fate of Women (5) The Price of A Women (6) Women and Freedoms. The trust given to women to become leaders can form independent and strong characters.

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