I'm not, like, the best dragon, ya know?: A deconstructionist reading of Disney's *Raya and the Last Dragon*

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ABSTRACT

Background: *Raya and the Last Dragon* is the first Disney movie inspired by traditional Southeast Asian cultures, somewhat under-represented in mainstream media. Hence, the movie is worth further investigation. **Purpose:** The study intends to read Disney's *Raya and the Last Dragon* using a deconstructionist lens. **Methods:** The study used qualitative analysis of audio-visual materials. The auditory and visual aspects of the movie are examined using a deconstructionist lens by watching and rewatching the movie with occasional note-taking. Data are presented in the forms of characters' dialogues, and screen captures of relevant scenes. **Results:** It found that, to a certain extent, the movie deconstructs dominant narratives. The most prosperous tribe, Heart's chief, chooses to promote trust and cooperation over violence. Then, against popular views associating toddlers with innocence, this movie presents a toddler as a con baby. It also seems to advocate the power of youngsters to make a difference in society. Though it seems to have feminist details through its two androgynous female warriors, Raya and Namaari, the same characters lead Kumandra to its downfall and eventual rise. It suggested that female warriors can achieve great things but also bring catastrophes. The movie, furthermore, portrays Sisu as an insecure yet trusting dragon, quite different from the typical portrayals of dragons often associated with power and destruction. However, the movie marginalizes the antagonists, the Druun, by not giving them the language to defend themselves from the judgmental assumptions of the talking characters. **Implications:** The movie carries hidden messages and could be used to challenge dominant narratives. It, however, could also be used to marginalize certain groups.

Keywords: *Raya and the Last Dragon*; deconstruction; analysis of audio-visual materials; Disney's animated movie

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INTRODUCTION

Walt Disney Animation Studios, primarily known as Disney, has produced many animated movies from the 20th century. Many studies have been conducted to analyze various Disney movies over the years (Brown, 2015; Davis, 2005, 2009; Inge, 2004; King, 1996), suggesting the prominence of Disney movies among scholars in cinema. A rather old yet relevant study by King (1996) examined nature-themed Disney movies. The study suggested that Disney "pioneered, engineered, and directed" empathy for animals through approaches and techniques of cinematography and story-telling. The author commented that even if Disney's movies are not naturalistically correct, they are humanistically correct, projecting such an authoritative vision and voice to the eye and ear of the audience. Another study by Davis (2005) delved into whether the stereotypical portrayals of women in typical Disney movies mirrored the view of Walt Disney, the founder. The author argued that the images of women in Disney movies reflected the attitudes of many writers, artists, directors, and producers at the Disney Studio, not only those of Walt Disney himself. On the contrary, evidence suggested Walt Disney's quite progressive view for his time, advocating for women's equal participation in the working world, including cinema.

That being said, adults may have been continuously exposed to Disney's animated movies during their childhood and formative years, which is very likely to have an impact (Gray, 2019). Several studies investigated the influence of Disney's movies on modern society (Bazzini et al., 2010; England et al., 2011; Hine et al., 2018; Maity, 2014; Robinson et al., 2007; Saleh & Salih, 2022; Siddique et al., 2021). A study by Robinson, for instance, analyzed 34 Disney animated movies from 1937 up to 2004 and found that most older characters were portrayed positively (Robinson et al., 2007). However, it was found that 42% of the older characters were portrayed negatively. The finding, they argued, helped explain why children had negative feelings towards older people. Analyzing 21 Disney movies and surveying 50 parents of young viewers of Disney movies, a study by Siddique et al. (2021) reported that Disney movies carried several prominent elements such as escape, jealousy, sexual content, and stereotyping. The study further suggested that with low guidance from the parents, children were at risk of being exposed to the content without filtering capability. The impacts included ignorance and unrealistic expectations.

An earlier study involving 8-9-year-old UK children found that despite the shifted portrayal of old Disney princesses, such as Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty* movie, to 'newer' Disney princesses like Moana, the participants generally did not change their perceptions about the 'qualities' of the princess (Hine et al., 2018). Most of them did not regard the more androgynous Moana as a princess, suggesting that the narrative portraying a princess as

submissive, graceful, and servitude was more dominant. These findings suggested the significant impact Disney's animated movies have on society, perhaps also implying the relevance of conducting studies on Disney's movies.

Furthermore, recently, Disney seems to have diversified its spectrum of images of women from the submissive type, like Cinderella, to the more androgynous type, such as Moana in *Moana* (Musker & Clements, 2016). Movies is a powerful communication medium for the masses because it is audiovisual, namely pictures and sounds that are lively and capable of telling a lot quickly (Wanggay & Sugihartono, 2023). More recently, Disney also released *Raya and the Last Dragon,* a computer-animated movie directed by Don Hall and Carlos López Estrada. This movie is inspired by traditional Southeast Asian cultures (Hall & Estrada, 2021). It tells the journey of Raya, the titular character, in seeking Sisu, the fabled last surviving dragon, in her effort to banish evil spirits called the Druun, which turned into stones the majority of human beings in the land called Kumandra, including Chief Benja, Raya's father. The movie became one of the most streamed movies in 2021 (Hayes, 2021), suggesting the popularity of this movie among viewers.

Several studies analyzing various aspects of this particular movie have been conducted. Perhaps due to this movie being inspired by Southeast Asian countries, a first in a Disney movie, studies have thus far been overwhelmingly from Southeast Asian authors, especially those from Indonesia. The studies published by either national journals or proceedings analyzed the movie from various perspectives, such as semiotics (Atmaja, 2021; Susanto & Wiyanti, 2021), cultural representation (Fathanah et al., 2022; Sarwindah & Sihombing, 2022; Ulya & Rezaian, 2022), ecofeminism (Imroatina et al., 2022), feminism (Sihole & Kusuma, 2022), moral values (Karo-Karo & Wardana, 2022), and speech acts (Muhamad & Simatupang, 2022; Ratri & Bram, 2022).

Despite this plethora of studies on this movie, it seems necessary to investigate this movie through deconstructionist criticism. It is attributed to several factors. First, *Raya and the Last Dragon* is the first Disney movie inspired by traditional Southeast Asian cultures, which are probably under-represented in mainstream media compared to, for example, East Asian cultures. Hence, this movie is thus far quite rare and worth investigating more from a different lens than what has been conducted. Secondly, as a deconstructionist reading intends to uncover the unconscious dimension of texts (Barry, 2009), reading the movie from deconstructionist criticism can potentially open realizations on some contradictions and inconsistencies within the movie as well as how the movie, to a certain extent, fights against some dominant narratives in society. Besides, as seen from a plethora of literature on analyses of literary works, the use of a deconstructionist lens in analyzing such works is rather underwhelming compared to, for

example, feminism and ecocriticism, despite the potential. Among these few works employing deconstruction, it is, for example, employed to analyze novels (Pulido, 2011) and poetry (Heidar & Zamzia, 2012). The use of deconstruction to analyze movies is thus far quite scarce, albeit the fact that movies, especially animated Disney's, are, intuitively speaking, much more prevalent in mainstream society than specific literary works such as novels or poems. Hence, such works may have a more significant influence on society. For these reasons, this study intends to use deconstructionist criticism to read *Raya and the Last Dragon* movie.

RESEARCH METHODS

The present study employed a qualitative method of analyzing audio-visual material (Creswell, 2014) in the form of *Raya and the Last Dragon* movie (Hall & Estrada, 2021). The movie was closely analyzed through a deconstructionist lens, a poststructuralist criticism introduced by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (Habib, 2011). Deconstruction is interested in how a text, the movie in this context, among others, breaks down, reverses its arguments, depends on other texts, and conceals arguments that are very opposite of what they seem to show (Nayar, 2018).

In other words, it concerns contradiction resisting meaning in how a text deconstructs itself (Nayar, 2018). In deconstructionists ' views, the meaning of a text is never stable. It is suspended. Deconstructionists focus on

instability and deferral of meaning (Habib, 2011; Nurgiyantoro, 2019). It is, among others, regarded as a way of reading and challenging interpretations of a text (Habib, 2011). For example, deconstruction is also interested in analyzing the silenced voice of the otherness in a text.

The following procedures were taken during the analysis. The first was the selection of a movie that had the potential to be deconstructed. It was done by watching several recent popular animated movies, such as *Pinocchio* (Toro & Gustafson, 2022), *The Sea Beast* (Williams, 2022), and *Soul* (Docter, 2020). Next, the selected movie, *Raya and the Last Dragon* was rewatched to identify parts or aspects of the movie which could be analyzed using deconstructionist criticism.

In total, the movie was watched three times. The first time was to grasp the idea of the movie in general. It was in the stage of selecting which movies to be further analyzed. The second time allowed for general note-taking on several parts of the movie that can be discussed further through the deconstructionist lens. The third time was to identify scenes and subtitles relevant to the arguments that would be put forward. It was achieved by occasionally pausing the movie for necessary note-taking. Furthermore, the findings are presented descriptively, and where necessary, the presentation of findings is supported with subtitles and/or screen captures of the movie's scenes for clarity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysing *Raya and the Last Dragon* using deconstructionist criticism, the present study found several themes warranting further comments. These themes can be seen in Table 1. In the following sections, the findings above are further analyzed.

Theme 1. Hospitality and sincerity, rather than power and oppression, are demonstrated by Heart, the most powerful tribe. Raya, the titular character, is the daughter of Benja, the chief of Heart tribes, the most prosperous one in Kumandra, a once-united land inhabited by four other tribes: Tail, Talon, Spine, and Fang. The names originate from the location of their respective lands along the dragon-shaped river flowing in Kumandra land. At the movie's beginning, it is revealed that the dragon gem blasting the evil spirits called Druun away is kept in the Heartland and that all the other four lands intend to steal the gem away. Despite that, Chief Benja invites them to share a meal without ill will. It can be seen from the following conversation between Raya and Chief Benja.

> Benja: I'm glad you feel prepared, dewdrop because I have something important. The other lands are on their way here as we speak.

Raya: I know exactly how we'll stop them. […]
Raya: Okay, so we'll need some crossbows and catapults and... Ooh! What about flaming catapults?
Benja: Or how about shrimp paste from Tail, lemongrass from Talon, bamboo shoots from Spine, chilies from Fang, and palm sugar from Heart?
Raya: Will we poison them?
Benja: No, we're not going to poison them, and we're not going to fight them.
We're going to share a meal with them.
Raya: Wait, what?
Benja: I invited them.
Raya: But they're our enemies.
Benja: They're only our enemies because they think the Dragon Gem magically brings us prosperity.
Raya: That's ridiculous. It doesn't do that.
Benja: They assume it does, just like we assume things about them. (Hall & Estrada, 2021, 00:08:38-00:10:14)

From the conversation excerpts, it can be seen that not only does Benja have a pure intention to invite the people from the other lands for a meal, but he also teaches Raya that conflict often comes from assumptions and prejudice toward others. It contrasts with the tendency of powerful groups who are likely to resort to threats and violence to get what they want, both as depicted in movies and the real world. For example, countries with stronger militaries often 'bully' their neighboring

Table 1 The Results of the Deconstructionist Reading of the Movie

Theme 1	Hospitality and sincerity, rather than power and oppression, are demonstrated by Heart, the most powerful tribe.
Theme 2	Little Noi, a toddler, is a con artist, and Boun, a 10-year-old, can be independent.
Theme 3	Raya and Namaari, two female children, were instrumental in the fall of the whole Kumandra land to the Druun and, eventually, the rise of the united Kumandra.
Theme 4	Sisu, the last surviving dragon, is pictured as an insecure, trusting, and human-sized dragon.
Theme 5	The Druun are marginalized in the story without a chance to defend themselves.

countries with weaker militaries. Likewise, those with relatively stronger economies sanction countries with weaker economies to get what they want.

In this respect, the movie tried to deconstruct the idea that the stronger tend to oppress. Likewise, the weaker groups in this movie are portrayed as the ones with prejudice, suggesting that in society, at times, the weaker groups are the ones instilling unnecessary conflicts due to excessive prejudice. In the movie, Benja clearly states that Heartland is more prosperous not because it hosts the dragon gem but because the people from the other lands think Heart is prosperous because of the gem. Implicitly, it is suggested that the other four lands simply do not do enough to make their land prosperous and simply blame their poverty on the fact that their lands do not host the dragon gem.

In society, for example, some people may be poor not merely because of the oppression of the rich but because of their laziness or poverty mindset (Hoyt et al., 2023; Suryatna, 2022). For example, involving 1,361 participants in the United States, Hoyt et al. (2023) reported that a poverty mindset could justify economic inequalities. In comparison, growth mindsets of poverty were found to predict less stigma, partly through a lower level of blaming dispositional factors of poverty. Regarding the movie, it is argued that the poor, represented by the Tail, Talon, Spine, and Fang tribes, also had their share of the blame for their poverty.

Theme 2. Little Noi, a toddler, is a con artist, and Boun, a 10-year-old, can be independent. After finding Sisu, the last dragon, and collecting a piece of the dragon gem from Tail, Raya goes to Talon Land to get another piece from the chief of Talon Land, Dang Hai. Amidst the bustling night market of Talon, Raya accidentally encounters Little Noi.

> Noi: (Crying)
> Raya: (Seeing a baby alone in an alley) Whoa. What is the... Uh… Okay. (Going to the baby)
> Noi: (Cooing)
> Raya: Hey, baby, toddler, thing…...whatever you're called. It's late. What are you doing out here? Where are your parents? Hey, uh, whose baby... (Hall & Estrada, 2021, 00:44:45-00:45:07)

As Raya turned around, still holding Noi, she saw monkey-like creatures called the ongis stealing her dragon gem pieces. Soon after, Noi kicks Raya and runs away with her monkey friends carrying the dragon gem. The moment Raya realized Noi was a con artist can be seen in Figure 1. After quite a chase, however, Raya catches Noi and gets her gem pieces back. It is later revealed that Noi's family has been turned into stones, and she is alone with the dogs. In the end, Raya befriends Noi and the ongis, and together, they try to get the last piece of the gem held in Fang land.

Though Noi's being a con artist may be attributed to the absence of her family, who is turned into stones by the Druun, the portrayal of Little Noi as a con baby deconstructs the typical portrayal of toddlers or very young children, typically signifying innocence. The movie may bring a message that everybody can be bad

people. If not educated adequately from such a young age, mischievous young children may grow into bad people in the future. Through Noi's portrayal, this movie may also convey that being children does not automatically nullify their misbehaviors. Young children may not have understood what is right or wrong; however, their guardians or adults around them should be the ones guiding and educating them from an early age.

In comparison, the movie portrays another young character, Boun, though much older than Noi, as a hardworking 10-year-old self-made entrepreneur who, upon losing their family to the Druun, lives on his boat as its captain and a restaurateur. The following conversation excerpts depict Boun's self-introduction to Raya on his boat after Raya and Sisu can escape from the Fang people led by Namaari, Raya's long-term rival.

> Boun: Welcome to the world-famous Shrimp-orium. My name is Boun. I'll be your server today. Would you like to hear our daily specials?

Raya: Yes, please!
Boun: We got shrimp, we got congee. We got a shrimp congee that won't quit.
Raya: The captain, where is the captain?
Boun: Let me go get him. (Swinging himself on the pole of his boat) What's up, my new customers? I'm Captain Boun, the owner, chef, and chief financial officer of the Shrimp-orium. (Hall & Estrada, 2021, 00:36:04-00:36:28)

Boun, despite losing his family, strives to continue living independently. This portrayal contradicts the beliefs on the inability of young people to make a decision. It also implicitly deconstructs the view associating young children with dependence and spoiledness. Especially in today's modern world with the improved quality economy of parents in some parts of the world, young children may live an easier life than their parents had during their childhood. It could lead them to be spoiled and unable to do many things independently. Hence, it is argued that through the portrayal of Boun, the movie, whether purposely or not, tries to promote the idea that young children can do things responsibly.

Source: Hall & Estrada (2021)
Figure 1 Little Noi kicking Raya's hat-covered face

This theme highlighted that appearances could be deceiving, and there may be more to things than meets the eye. An innocent-looking young kind could be a thief. On the contrary, a seemingly weak young kid may be hardworking. This theme may resemble what happens in real life. For example, Kennedy et al. (2020) mentioned that among several risk factors attributed to child delinquency, trauma and such environmental factors as family and surroundings play a role in leading children to delinquency. It was precisely what happened to Little Noi, who lost her family because of the Druun and thus lost guardians and the possibility of proper education from the immediate family.

Theme 3. Raya and Namaari, two female children, were instrumental in the fall of the whole Kumandra land to the Druun and, eventually, the rise of the united Kumandra. At the beginning of the movie, when Benja invites people from the other four lands for a peace meeting in Heartland, Raya befriends Namaari, the daughter of the chieftess of Fang land. Namaari gives Raya a dragon necklace as a sign of friendship. Trusting her, Raya shows Namaari the dragon gems. However, Namaari betrays her, setting events leading to the gem being shattered into five pieces and the return of the Druun.

> Young Raya: Come with me, dep la. I wanna show you something.
> Young Namaari: The spirit of Sisu. I can feel it
> Young Raya: It's the last bit of dragon magic left in the whole world.
> Young Namaari: I see why Heart guards it so closely. Thank you, dep la. You've been very helpful… Maybe we could have been friends in a different world, but I have to do what's right for Fang. (Hall & Estrada, 2021, 00:15:01-00:15:50)

Following that, the people from Fang, Tail, Talon, and Spine gather where the gem is kept due to Namaari's signal for her Fang guards to see the dragon gem. Upon seeing it, they try to snatch the gem for their land, breaking it into five small pieces, thus releasing the Druun for the first time in 500 years. Their fights can be seen in Figure 2.

Fast forward to six years after the gem is shattered and the Druun turns most of the people into stones, Raya finally finds Sisu, the last surviving dragon, and together they collect the gem pieces. However, Sisu is accidentally killed
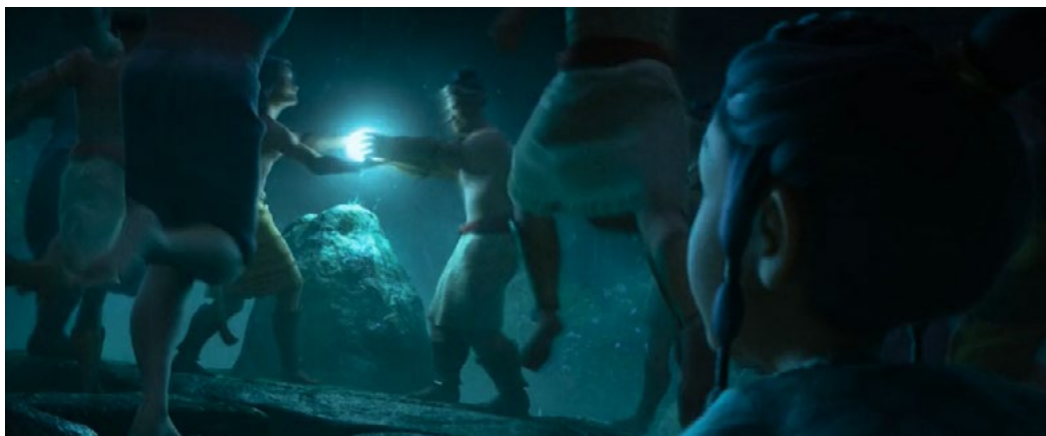
Source: Hall & Estrada (2021)

Figure 2 People Trying to Snatch the Dragon Gem, Breaking It in the Process

in Fang, draining away the water in Kumandra and causing the Druun to overrun the whole realm freely. Only those carrying the pieces of the gem can get away, and even so, the power of the gem fades away as the last dragon dies. At this moment, it is Namaari who reassembles the pieces given by Raya, Boun, Little Noi, and Tong – a Spine warrior, into one, unleashing a shockwave spreading across the land and blasting all the Druun away and conjuring up a rain, reviving everyone including the stoned dragons and the dead Sisu. With the dragons back to life and the waters of Kumandra land back, people once again unified as Kumandra after 500 years.

From this, it can be seen that two young women, Raya and Namaari, were instrumental in the downfall of Kumandra to the Druun and its rise as a unified Kumandra, once again, with dragons. On the one hand, it can be interpreted that the movie carries a feminist agenda, depicting two female characters as androgynous warriors instead of submissive and servitude princesses. On the other hand, one may argue that through the portrayal of these two female characters, the movie also conveys that female warriors, just like male ones, can make mistakes. Like their male counterparts, they may do some wonders but also bring catastrophes. In other words, in a way, interestingly, this movie carries a feminist agenda whilst at the same time deconstructing it.

It may be interesting to note, however, that it is both Raya and Namaari, not their parents, who eventually do and undo the damage to Kumandra. It signifies the shift of power from adults to children. From a closer look, two of Raya's friends helping her to gather the pieces of the dragon gem are young children, a ten-year-old Boun and Little Noi, with the adult Tong coming the last. It is against what typically happens in real life, where adults, especially males, generally seem to dictate how the world is run. As an illustration, related to gender, data from the World Economic Forum (2023) suggested, among others, in 2023, that women had closed 68.4% of the gap to men in terms of educational attainment, economic participation, health, and survival, as well as political empowerment. However, the number only slowly progressed by .3% from 2022, and it was estimated that at the current rate, 131 years would be needed to close the global gender gap entirely. Regarding this, through the third theme, the movie tried to challenge oppressive structures and work towards a more just world

Theme 4. Sisu, the last surviving dragon, is pictured as an insecure, trusting, and human-sized dragon. In this movie, Sisu, the last surviving dragon, is pictured with a somewhat insecure personality. It can be seen from the conversation between Sisu and Raya right after Raya successfully summons her.

> Raya: Well, we still have a big chunk of it (dragon gem)!
> Sisu: Would that make you feel better?
> Raya: Can't you just make another one?
> Sisu: No, I can't just make another one.
> Raya: But you're a dragon.
> Sisu: I'm gonna be real with you, all right?

I'm not, like, the best dragon, ya know?
Raya: But you saved the world.
Sisu: I did do that. That's true. But have you ever done a group project, but there's, like, that one kid who didn't pitch in as much but still ended up with the same grade? Yeah, I wasn't the one who made the gem. I just turned it in. (Hall & Estrada, 2021, 00:27:08-00:27:41)

Furthermore, she is also pictured as a trusting, human-sized dragon without exceptional physical strength, though she is a strong swimmer. Even the way she speaks sometimes seems to suggest that she is humorous. The visual depiction of Sisu can be seen in Figure 3. The portrayal of Sisu in this movie contrasts with the typical portrayals of dragons in several movies and television series.

For example, in an earlier Disney movie, *Alice in Wonderland* (Burton, 2010), Jabberwocky, the dragon of the Red Queen, is depicted as a large-winged and fierce-looking animal. It can be seen in Figure 4. Similarly, in a worldwide popular television series, *Game of Thrones* (Benioff & Weiss, 2017), dragons are constantly portrayed as powerful fire-breathing creatures that can invoke a lot of damage. They also signify power to whoever has them. In Figure 5, it can be seen that a dragon in *Game of Thrones* can cause massive destruction.

These images are in striking contrast with that of Sisu. In this movie, she seems just as vulnerable as human beings. She can even

Source: Hall & Estrada (2021)
Figure 3 Sisu is an Insecure, Human-Sized, Trusting Dragon

Source: (Burton, 2010)
Figure 4 A Fierce-Looking Dragon, Jabberwocky, in Alice in Wonderland

be killed with a regular bolt from a crossbow before she is revived by the power of the assembled dragon gem towards the end of the movie. Sisu and all the dragons of Kumandra are seen as magical creatures bringing water, rain, and peace, in striking contrast with most dragons in mainstream media, who are seen as 'muted' creatures bringing destruction. The movie also gives voice to Sisu through her ability to converse with human beings, hence her ability to communicate her thoughts and feelings. This movie seems to provide viewers with a dragon portrayal that is the exact opposite of those in other movies or television series, somehow balancing the portrayal of dragons in

mainstream media.

Theme 5. The Druun are marginalized in the story without a chance to defend themselves. Albeit the movie has quite many deconstructionist ideas, it seems to fail to give voice to the Druun. The Druun do not talk and are not given any background story about their origin. The Druun are depicted in the movie as evil spirits turning humans into stones. They are depicted simply as mindless, randomly shaped dark purple-black clouds turning humans in their path into stones. The visual portrayal can be seen in Figure 6. At the very beginning of the movie, Raya, as the narrator, narrates the background story of Kumandra, stating the

Source: Benioff & Weiss (2017)
Figure 5 A Fire-Breathing Dragon Destroying an Army in Game of Thrones
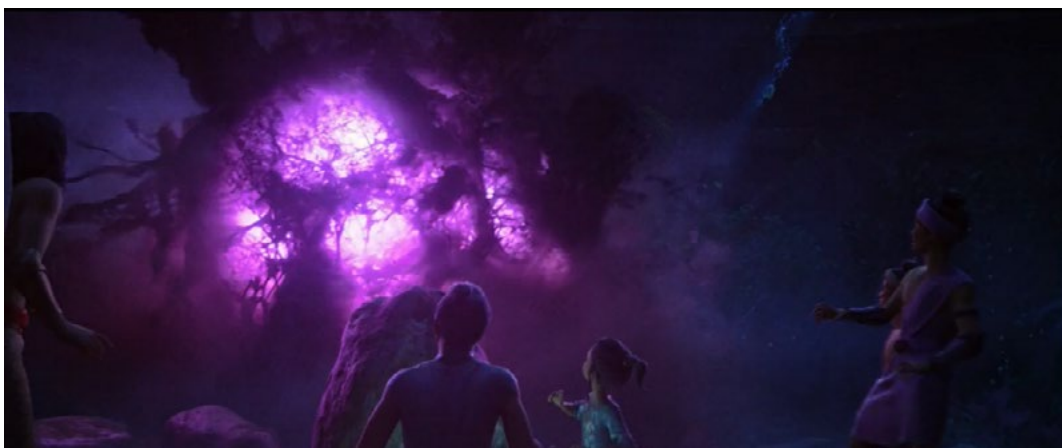
Source: Hall & Estrada (2021)
Figure 6 The Druun Reappearing as the Dragon Gem Breaks into Pieces

Druun as a mindless plague.

> Raya (Narrator): It was paradise. But then, the Druun came. But then, the Druun came, multiplying as they consumed life and turned everyone they touched into stone. (Hall & Estrada, 2021, 00:01:43-00:02:00)

Later in the movie, the only account of them is from Sisu as she converses with Boun on his boat on the way to Talon's land.

> Boun: What is Druun, anyway?
> Sisu: A plague. Born from human discord. They've always been here. Waiting for a moment of weakness to attack. They're like the opposite of dragons. Instead of bringing water and life to the world, they're like a relentless fire that consumes everything in its wake until there's nothing left except ash and stone.
> Boun: They took my family.
> Sisu: They took mine, too (Hall & Estrada, 2021, 00:41:36-00:42:16)

This account about the Druun by Sisu contradicts what Benja says to Raya much earlier in the movie, that the conflict among the five lands in Kumandra stems from a negative assumption about others. Though one may argue that comparing human characters and that so-called "mindless" clouds do not seem to be apple-to-apple, in a Disney world where even a dragon can talk, this movie seems to silence the 'voice' of the Druun. The Druun are narrated to be blasted away by the power of the dragon gem, and once the gem is broken into small pieces, they are once again released after 500 years. They hate water, seem to know where people are, and chase them to turn them into stones. For example, there is a scene where the Druun suddenly appears in front of Raya in the middle of a desert in Tail Land. It can be seen in Figure 7.

Hence, Sisu's account of the Druun being a plague, without any thoughts, could be one-sided. Besides, Sisu clearly states that the Druun is the exact opposite of dragons, her kind. Whilst the Druun brings destruction, dragons bring life. At that moment, she is privileging her kind and distancing them from the Druun by othering them through the power of language. It seems to be unfair to judge the Druun in their absence. Sisu monopolizes the discourse, marginalizing the Druun without any 'chance' for them to 'fight back' using the language.

Two Disney movies, *Maleficent* (Stromberg, 2014) and *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* (Ronning, 2019), have given a voice to an antagonist

Source: Hall & Estrada (2021)

Figure 7 The Druun Suddenly Appearing in Front of Raya in the Middle of a Desert

character, Maleficent. The movies gave sensible reasons for her wrath and 'rebranded' her as a kind mother figure for Aurora, a princess whom Maleficent tried to harm in *Sleeping Beauty*. In comparison, despite advocating several silenced voices, Hall and Estrada's (2021) *Raya and the Last Dragon* failed to give justice to the main antagonist, depicting it as a mindless entity solely bringing destruction.

As a whole, Hall and Estrada's (2021) *Raya and the Last Dragon* contains several details suggesting deconstructionist views. For example, the movie advocates, among others, gender equality and the potential of youngsters as the driving force towards change. The movie also deconstructs the idea of toddlers being always innocent by portraying Little Noi as a con baby. It also diverts from presenting the typical portrayal of dragons as mighty beasts possessing immense strength and capability to cause massive destruction by presenting Sisu as a somewhat insecure, not very smart, and physically weak dragon. However, in the process, it seems to silence the voice of the Druun antagonists by not giving them the necessary channels to defend themselves against the accounts of Sisu and Raya at the beginning of the movie.

CONCLUSION

Hall and Estrada's (2021) *Raya and the Last Dragon* has, to a certain extent, exhibited several deconstructionist details, either by presenting underrepresented and marginalized

groups or giving certain groups different and even opposite portrayals to the typical one. After all, the release of this movie is in itself a deconstructionist move by Disney as it introduces traditional Southeast Asian cultures to worldwide audiences, which are thus far underrepresented compared to, for example, their East Asian counterparts.

Furthermore, the following suggestions can be put forward regarding deconstruction studies. Deconstructionist criticism can be employed to analyze texts, movies, and television series that massively penetrate today's modern society, which may be a strategic object of deconstructionist analysis. It may open up multiple directions for future studies on deconstructions. Considering one of the natures of deconstruction on voicing the silenced voices in texts, skills of deconstructing texts can make people aware of injustice around them and thus potentially promote social justice. For this reason, introducing deconstructionist ideas to children, albeit slowly and perhaps in a simplified way, could be beneficial as they are continuously exposed to various stereotypes portrayed in media that may impact their way of thinking.

Data Availability Statement
Not applicable

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