

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background

Gender equality has become a global issue among people who fight for equal rights and opportunities regardless of gender identity (Sihotang et al., 2020). The gap between women and men becomes a basis for most people to carry out social discrimination based on gender in several fields (Siscawati et al., 2020). In education, as the basis of human rights, gender inequality is often found due to societal socio-cultural factors (Tuwor & Sossou, 2008). According to Tuwor and Sossou (2008), society still carries a patriarchal culture in which education for men should precede women, who are inferior and subordinate. Based on research conducted by Rina (2017) as cited in Julietta (2020), there is inequality for Indonesian girls in education based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics. Thus, this shows that gender inequality is still present in education.

In overcoming gender inequality in the educational field, gender awareness must be integrated into the education process for children as a form of fair and inclusive education. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2019), gender awareness refers to people's understanding of gender equality and the social discrimination toward gender roles. Thus, this awareness relates to the social phenomenon of gender inequality toward women (Martínez et al., 2010). However, gender awareness and equality have become part of education for children in Indonesia (Sihotang et al., 2020). It can be seen from the

government regulation, which states that everyone has equal rights to attend formal education in Indonesia regardless of their gender status (Sihotang et al., 2020). In addition, the inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment in Indonesia's National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJP) during the period 2000–2025 has proven that education in Indonesia has instilled gender awareness in children formally (Siscawati et al., 2020). Moreover, despite the inequality of gender cases that occur in society, for instance, in educational fields, governments are trying to design regulations that build a strong commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment (Syukri, 2021). With regulations from the government, there is no longer any reason that women do not have the opportunity to pursue an education

Meanwhile, providing an understanding of gender awareness to children can also be given in the family scope. As primary role models, parents must ensure that their children understand the diversity of gender roles and encourage them to explore more different gender roles (Rafferty, 2018). In encouraging children towards gender awareness, parents can carry out several activities, including playing with various kinds of toys (dolls or toy vehicles) or other activities related or not to their gender (Rafferty, 2018). In addition, parents can also take advantage of several learning media, such as films, to teach gender awareness to children because, according to Florack (2014), children love to learn something from films. Therefore, parents can ensure that their children learn about gender awareness properly through these activities.

Watching films as an activity to teach gender awareness to children provides an experience and some information by combining the visual and audio aspects

of each film scene (Bordwell et al., 2017). Through the visuals from the film, Caixia (2013) states that children can encourage themselves to do something from what they learn from the film. In line with this statement, Florack (2014) says that film can also be used for children's literacy in developing children's awareness and understanding of issues around them. As a result, watching films is an appropriate activity to teach children about gender issues that occur in society.

Furthermore, the Walt Disney Company, which has become one of the biggest film productions in the world, is related to the presence of films that help children understand social issues like gender and feminism. As Giroux (1999) stated, Disney films provide stories that help children discover who they are and what society is. Also, through its films, Disney inserts an excellent moral message for children through the movie characters (Giroux, 1999). Moreover, according to Xu (2021), for around 80 years, Disney has presented female characters representing gender issues that have a significant social impact on women worldwide.

However, Disney films between 1930 and 1985–1990, known as Disney Classics, always featured beautiful female characters, such as Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), Cinderella (1950), Sleeping Beauty (1959), and The Little Mermaid (1989) (Abdulqadr et al., 2021). In those films, Disney presented the princesses' characterizations as beautiful women and had a happy ending marriage (Abdulqadr et al., 2021). Meanwhile, in characterizing women as villains, Disney portrays them more like men (Wellman, 2020). Despite being a woman, the female villain has the strength and courage of a man

(Wellman, 2020). As a result, those Disney's classic animated films built society's misconceptions and stereotypes that women should have natural beauty and marriage to solve their problems (Berlianti, 2021). Therefore, this was the reason Disney was often criticized at the time for teaching children that the princess should be beautiful, weak, and have a happy ending.

When facing criticism from society, Disney has made a breakthrough in characterizing princess characters in recent years (Youssef, 2020). According to Youssef (2020), at the end of the era of Disney classics in 1998, Disney released a new animated film entitled *Mulan* as a breakthrough for a female character who has a different character from the previous Disney princess character. As the main character, *Mulan* was shown as a not-female girl and more like a man, for instance, when she acted to be a kingdom warrior to replace her father (Syafinah & Susilowati, 2021). Furthermore, in the modern era, there is *Merida* in *Brave* (2012), which also showed the depiction of a princess character who is brave, strong, and rebellious (Apriliana & Sutrisno, 2020). Through those films, Disney has succeeded in making a breakthrough against changes in public opinion towards female figures in recent years and has become the medium for children to understand gender and feminism issues in society's lives.

Concerning the Disney film as children's media in understanding gender and feminism issues, *Maleficent* as the Disney villain presents feminism in her character. There have been several studies that have tried to find feminism in the characterization of *Maleficent*. One of them was Arora and Manshi (2020), who analysed the portrayal of *Maleficent* (2014) through an ecofeminist lens.

According to Arora and Manshi (2020), Maleficent showed her ecofeminism side through her actions as the ruler of the Moors. Besides, although she is a villain because Stephan betrayed her love, she still loved Aurora and became her Godmother (Arora & Manshi, 2020). The other study that also analysed the characterization of Maleficent (2014) is David (2020) but on the postmodern feminism side. David (2020) found that Maleficent, as the main character, is described as a powerful character and does not care about her status as a woman or villain.

Moreover, Maleficent's status as a villain can be turned into a good, loving godmother and even become Aurora's, true love. Even though Maleficent's gender is a woman, she becomes Aurora's true love and kisses her to be free from her curse. Maleficent has a postmodern feminist side, as evidenced by this. Meanwhile, Julietta (2020) found that Maleficent (2014) has liberal feminism on its side. Maleficent's characterization shows her as being independent, brave, and strong. Therefore, based on those related studies, this study only focuses on the representation of feminist ideology in the characterization of Maleficent to give children an understanding of gender and feminism issues.

Maleficent is known as a Disney villain in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). She has immense power to protect and destroy anything in her path. Meanwhile, in *Maleficent* (2014), the characterization displayed by Maleficent has changed significantly. It is marked by how Maleficent becomes Aurora's godmother and even becomes part of a kiss that signifies Aurora's, true love. Moreover, in Disney's 2019 *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*, Maleficent also showed her character as a protective mother to the Moors. She is willing to use her strength



and sacrifice her life to save the Moors from the destruction caused by humans. The way Maleficent protected the Moors, which is the environment where fairies and other living beings live, makes Maleficent considered to have feminist traits, especially ecofeminism.

According to Tong (2009), ecofeminism shows how women relate to nature. In addition, Mies and Shiva (2014), who succeeded in reconstructing the ecofeminism perspective, stated that all women's actions and struggles against injustice would be based on ecological principles from nature. In this film, Maleficent showed her power to protect the Moors and Aurora from Queen Ingrith's evil plan to destroy the Moors. Through the phoenix's blood, as part of nature's power, she had strong power against Queen Ingrith. Moreover, Maleficent's way of repairing the war-damaged environment also shows the side of ecofeminism on the part of nature conservation. Since Disney's 2019 *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* has become a good Disney film for children, a comprehensive feminist study of the film is needed. Based on the background above, this study aims to examine the representation of the feminist characterization of Maleficent in Disney's 2019 *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* through the lens of ecofeminism.

## 1.2 Problem Identification

Gender equality is a phenomenon that has become a global issue in the world. Most people struggle to achieve gender equality in various fields, one of which is education. Cases of gender inequality in education are widespread in Indonesia. It is because of the patriarchal culture that is still present in society. However, several activities can help the community raise awareness about

gender equality over time. In education or family, one of the activities that can interest people in gender awareness is watching films. The film is a medium that often represents social issues that occur in society. Disney's 2019 *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*, produced by the Walt Disney Company, is one of the films that represent the issue of gender awareness or feminism through the characterization of its characters. Maleficent's portrayal in the film reflects feminist issues, specifically ecofeminism. Maleficent demonstrates how natural forces play a significant role in showing her strength and identity as Godmother and ruler of the Moors. Therefore, this study will discuss more deeply the values of feminism contained in the characterization of the main character of the film, Maleficent.

### **1.3 Scope of the Study**

This research focused on Maleficent's characterization as the main character in Disney's *Maleficent*, directed by Joachim Ronning (2019), and the characterizations will be studied to determine Maleficent's ecofeminist characterization. As a result, this research focused on Maleficent's portrayal as an ecofeminist in Joachim Ronning's Disney film *Maleficent* (2019).

### **1.4 Statements of Research Question**

Based on the research background, there are two research questions needed to be answered by this study, namely:

- 1.4.1 What are the characterizations of Maleficent in Disney's 2019 *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*?
- 1.4.2 What are Maleficent's characterizations as ecofeminist in Disney's film *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*?

## 1.5 Objectives of the Study

Based on the statements of research question, there are two objectives of this study, namely:

1.5.1 To investigate the characterizations of Maleficent in Disney's 2019 *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*

1.5.2 To analyse Maleficent's characterizations as ecofeminist in Disney's 2019 *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*

## 1.6 Definition of Key Term

### 1.6.1 Ecofeminism

According to Tong (2009), ecofeminism refers to how nature relates to women. Thus, ecofeminists believe that all-natural events are associated with the oppression of women in general. Moreover, this study discusses the characterization side of the relationship between the natural forces possessed by Maleficent and the actions she takes as the main character of the film.

### 1.6.2 Character and Characterization

According to Gill (1995), a character refers to someone whose identity is shown based on a particular literary work. This character is shown by the appearance, action, name, and conversation in the depiction of literary creation. In this study, the main character used the main character from Disney's 2019 *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* as the academic work. Meanwhile, characterization is the process of developing a character (Gill, 1995). Therefore, this study's characterization refers to a literary character featured in Disney's 2019 *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*.



### **1.6.3 Film**

According to Bordwell et al. (2017), the film is a combination of visual, sound, and character aspects that produces a variety of experiences, values, and information for the audience. Furthermore, in this study, the film refers to how films present several social issues, namely feminism, to viewers who are learning to understand gender awareness.

## **1.7 Significances of the Study**

### **1.7.1 Theoretical Significances**

#### **1.7.1.1 Feminist Ideologies**

This study could contribute to people's understanding of feminist ideology, also known as feminism. Bressler (1994) states that feminism refers to the struggle of women to get equal rights with men. Then, understanding feminism from the analysis of this film can contribute to people who want to understand gender awareness optimally.

#### **1.7.1.2 Literacy Skills**

This study could provide a deeper understanding of literacy skills as one of the 21st-century skills, including information, media, and ICT skills. According to Pilgrim and Martinez (2013), literacy skills are the ability to obtain and understand various information using technology. Thus, the results of this film analysis study are expected to be able to contribute to society about the implication of this skill in everyday life.

#### **1.7.1.3 Language Learning**

This study might help people improve their language learning skills, for instance, speaking, listening, vocabulary mastery, etc., because, through

film, people can learn anything they need. Therefore, through this study, people can be encouraged to be interested in language learning.

## **1.7.2 Practical Significances**

### **1.7.2.1 For Students**

This study could provide benefits for students by allowing them to learn more about social issues that occur in their society, especially gender or feminism issues. Moreover, according to Florack (2014) the film is an exciting learning medium for children to get information or understand situations in their community. Thus, it is hoped that students will better understand gender issues to prevent them from being bullied, which refers to gender inequality.

### **1.7.2.2 For Teachers**

This study could possibly provide benefits for teachers who use films as a medium of learning for their students. As stated by Caixia (2013), the combination of visual and audio aspects presented by films can be used to encourage children to learn. Then, according to Bordwell et al. (2017), most films raise real stories and social issues that occur in society. Thus, teachers can use films to teach moral values and social issues to their students.

### **1.7.2.3 For Society**

This study could make the public aware of the implied message conveyed by the film because it not only provides entertainment for the audience but can educate them. Therefore, the result of the film's analysis

in this study can provide information about feminism's values, especially ecofeminism.

#### 1.7.2.4 For Other Researchers

Other researchers will be able to use this research to conduct other film analyses and ecofeminism studies as a result of this study. This study may be used as a reference for film analysis, particularly in the field of film criticism and research, with a feminist perspective on filmmaking.

