



Representation and Ideology of Feminism in the Remake of the First Indonesian Heroine Character “Sri Asih”

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Abstract

The figure of Sri Asih became a pioneer in the symbolism of women's strength free from the influence of marital status, which was a reaction to the strong patriarchal culture in Indonesia. The figure of Sri Asih was then remade by Studio Bumi Langit and shown in Indonesian cinemas in 2022. The figure of Sri Asih was chosen because she is the first superhero figure from Indonesia. The aspects studied are the elements that form an identity, such as the representation of beauty, characteristics, and the role of women that appear in the figure of Sri Asih. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method and John Fiske's code theory. The urgency of this study is to reveal how the figure of Sri Asih is able to reconstruct the values of women's identity in Indonesian society in the millennial era. The purpose is to explain what codes of reality, representation, and ideology exist in the figure of Sri Asih, and the research study results are the ideas for applying John Fiske's code theory to the figure of Sri Asih. In conclusion, the ideology of feminism in the character of Sri Asih is represented in the form of women's empowerment, gender equality, rejection of violence against women and the collapse of gender stereotypes.

Keywords: feminism; Jhon Fiske; gender studies; representation; Sri Asih

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INTRODUCTION

Superhero movies are indeed not a new thing in the Indonesian movie industry. Several classic superhero films were born in the Indonesian movie industry decades ago. Some of them also feature female superhero characters. According to data taken from *www.filmindonesia.or.id*, the first superhero movie in Indonesia was a film with a heroine as the main

character, Sri Asih (1954), by RA Kosasih, directed by Turino Djunaedy & Tan Sing Hwat. After that, an Indonesian superhero character appeared who was inspired by the Superman character, namely Rama Superman Indonesia (1974). After that came the Indonesian superhero character inspired by the Superman character, *Rama Superman Indonesia* (1974). Then, successively, other superhero films appeared, such as *Gundala Putra Petir* (1981), *Darna Ajaib*

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(1982), and *Bionic Girl* (1982). The presence of this movie was, in fact, well-received by Indonesian movie audiences at that time and was proof that superhero stories had been part of Indonesian society for a long time (Nugroho, 2020). However, superhero and heroine characters from Indonesia are increasingly sinking because the movie industry in Indonesia experienced a slump from the 1980s to the 1990s. At that time, the national movie industry, especially the big screen, experienced a decline in creativity, starting from film content that was trapped in the theme of sexuality (semi-porn) and the domination of the horror genre combined with sensuality (erotic horror) (Toni 2011, 258).

The scarcity of superhero movies in Indonesia is associated with the domination of Hollywood superhero movies. Besides that, the big obstacle is the capital capacity and special effects technology (CGI) owned by Indonesia, which is not as good as Hollywood. This resulted in the production of superhero films in Indonesia at that time being relatively small. Only in 1998 did the movie *Saras 008* appear as the first female superhero movie to appear on television screens, and it marked the return of original Indonesian superhero films to the national movie industry (Nugroho, 2020). Slowly, this classic Indonesian heroine character is starting to be forgotten because of the many Hollywood superhero movies that are present in Indonesia.

Formerly, there was a heroine research that was done by an article titled "Reading the Message of Feminism in Wonder Woman Film". In the article, the researcher analysed the symbols of feminism in the character of Wonder Woman/Diana Prince, who appeared in the Wonder Woman film (2017). The article also discussed how the image of ideal beauty is represented in the character of Wonder Woman (Setyanto et al., 2019a). The author also conducted research on the object of the heroine character from Indonesia, namely Valentine. The article is entitled "Representation of Postfeminism in Indonesian Heroine Character: Case Study of Valentine Film". In

the article, the researcher focused on the discourse of Postfeminism theory and the efforts of "Westernization" in representing the Valentine character (Setyanto et al., 2019b). This study uses a different research object, the character of Sri Asih, so that it can get different findings and will complement the research that has been done previously.

The movie *Sri Asih* (1954) pioneered female superhero movies and symbolised feminism in the era of Indonesian classic films. This proves that, since the 1950s, Indonesian film producers have included ideas on feminist issues such as women's empowerment and gender equality. Quoted in the classic book by Nani Soewondo entitled "Kedudukan Perempuan Indonesia dalam Hukum dan Masyarakat" (1955), at that time, the position of Indonesian women was determined mainly by marital status. Women at that time had to place their obligations as mothers and wives in the household, so the women had to sacrifice, obey and give in for the sake of their husbands and families (Soewondo, 1955). The idea of emancipation and gender equality (ideology of feminism) emerged through film media, represented by the classic heroine character *Sri Asih* (1954), who portrays a woman who is strong, tough and intelligent (Kristanto, 1995). *Sri Asih* is an icon of Indonesian feminism in the past. The figure of *Sri Asih* is essential to study because she became a pioneer of the symbolism of women's power, which began to be separated from the influence of marital status/marriage, which was a reaction to the strong patriarchal culture in Indonesia at that time.

Studio Bumi Langit then remade *Sri Asih*'s character in comic form. Then, in 2019, it was adapted to the Indonesian big screen and appeared for the first time in *Gundala* (2019). Even though it was only a cameo, for about 2 minutes, *Sri Asih*'s appearance was able to steal the audience's attention (scene stealer). The appearance of *Sri Asih* is also a guide for the future stand-alone film *Sri Asih*, which will become one universe of Indonesian superhe-

roes, namely Jagad Cinema Bumi Langit. Unfortunately, the stand-alone movie *Sri Asih*, originally planned to be released in 2020, had to be delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so it was only released in November 2022. The film *Sri Asih* (2022) is a remake of the classic movie *Sri Asih* (1954) but with a far-reaching approach—more modern and relevant today. *Sri Asih* (2022), directed by Upi, is a direct sequel to *Gundala* (2019). Several Indonesian film review sites, such as *kincir.com* and *cinecrib.com*, consider the movie *Sri Asih* (2022) one of Indonesia's best superhero movies.

The focus of this research will be related to the issue of existing identity representation in *Sri Asih*'s character, which is related to the elements that make up identity, such as representations of beauty, characteristics, and the role of women, with the help of John Fiske's code theory. This research is essential because it will reveal how the heroine character, apart from being a visual communication medium, can also reconstruct existing societal values, primarily related to the values of female identity in the millennial era through movie media.

This research aims to explain what representations and ideologies exist in *Sri Asih*'s character by using John Fiske's code theory. This research contributes ideas about applying John Fiske's code theory to the character of *Sri Asih*. This research will be a reference for future research on female characters in the film area. Moreover, this research uses code theory to explain how the code of reality, representation and ideology produced by signifiers operates. John Fiske's code theory approach is suitable because *Sri Asih* is not a purely imaginary figure (Setyanto et al., 2021). *Sri Asih* refers to reality, namely the female biological body represented by the figure of Pevita Pearce.

This research uses John Fiske's code theory. John Fiske put forward this theory in his book *The Codes of Television*, published in 1996 and has become an essential reference for many media writers today (Fiske, 1996). Although John Fiske's theo-

ry at that time focused more on television media, this theory is also relevant when used in feature films because television and widescreen press are the same when referring to the context of screen culture and representation.

METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative methodology. In descriptive qualitative research, meaning and description analysis processes are emphasised. The theoretical basis is used as a guide so that the research focus follows the facts under field data (Kriyantono, 2014). Qualitative studies are relevant because they can answer questions related to what, why and how culture, specifically about identity in society, can be formed through the media (Multi & Sarawak, 2016). The method used in collecting data in this research will be:

Observation: according to Harsja W. Bachtiar, careful observation can be considered one of the most suitable scientific research methods for sociocultural science researchers, especially in developing countries like Indonesia, due to relatively low research costs (Bachtiar, 1997). In this research context, the observation method is carried out by "observing closely" (not just looking at) every scene, dialogue, character and story in the film involving *Sri Asih*. The results from these observations will then be collected, grouped, and filtered according to which scene is relevant to this research topic: the concept of a new female identity. Apart from the movie, some supporting data will also be examined from the comic version because some of the background details in the film version are not told as entirely as the comic version (Ida, 2014).

Documentation: Research data can also be obtained through facts stored in documents, namely books, news, photo/video archives, meeting results, souvenirs, journals, proceedings, activity notes and so on. These documents can be used to acquire information that occurred in the past related to research objects and be-

come essential references. Some of the critical documents in this research are video recordings of feminist lectures by Dr. Putri Arivia (Feminism Researcher and Founder of Women's Journal) organised by UGM Yogyakarta and documentation of a feminist interview by Citra Irlani on the Geolive Indonesia Youtube channel (Rahardjo, 2011). These documents will then be recorded, stored and grouped according to the problem of this research, namely the representation of women's identity and feminism.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of John Fiske's Code Theory

John Fiske's television code theory divides the screen code into three levels, namely:

Reality

Reality is a social code in which there is appearance, costume/dress, makeup, environment, behaviour, dialogue, movement, expression and voice. The reality code is the actual state or according to reality. In this research, the level of reality is also represented by the profile of the artist who plays the heroine character. What is her life like outside of the film? What are her career, achievements, physical appearance, how she dresses, and her background? The reality code is an actual picture of the artist's life behind the scenes, without any technical intervention from the film creators. The level of reality is an event marked as reality or the state as it is (encoded). It contains the appearance, clothing, environment, behaviour, gesture, and expression of a sign/text without manipulation and intervention from outside the actual elements. (Puspita, 2018).

Representation

Namely, the social code includes camera settings, lighting, editing, and music. The level of representation is represented by the heroine characters that appear in the film. What is her background, physical

appearance, strength, attitude and character? Representation is code in the form of scenes and dialogues performed by heroine characters that can be seen on the big screen. At this second level, the heroine's representation will be influenced by technical factors related to how the heroine character is "presented" on the screen in a complete film form. The second level is a reality simulation encoded electronically/technically (technical codes), so the display of signs/text has received intervention from other texts virtually outside of itself. Technical elements such as lighting, editing, and CGI/Special Effects are transmitted in a new code that changes reality. Other non-electronic elements such as scripts, roles, actions, dialogues, cinematography, and choreography will also influence this second level into new and more representative texts. (Fiske, 2002)

Ideology

The social code contains teachings related to values such as individualism, feminism, patriarchy, materialism, capitalism and other isms. In this research, ideological aspects will be found in the similar representation of the heroine characters. This ideological level can be found through existing analyses related to the first level (reality) and the second level (representation). At this third level, all the elements at the previous level will be coordinated and categorised into ideological codes. However, this third level often appears in forms that are not explicitly conveyed, so understanding the ideological level requires in-depth observation and analysis of a text/sign. (Setiawan et al., 2020)

In this analysis, if it is related to John Fiske's code theory, then all data regarding the artist who plays the heroine character is a level of reality. The data at the reality level are the artist's profile or background, the physical description of the artist, the awards held and photos of the artist in the real world. However, the data at the representation level is when the artist turns into a character in the movie. Data at the representation level includes character profiles

and backgrounds, synopsis, scene descriptions and film screenshots (Fiske, 2002). The ideological level will be explained in the analysis results related to the ideology of feminism in Sri Asih's character.

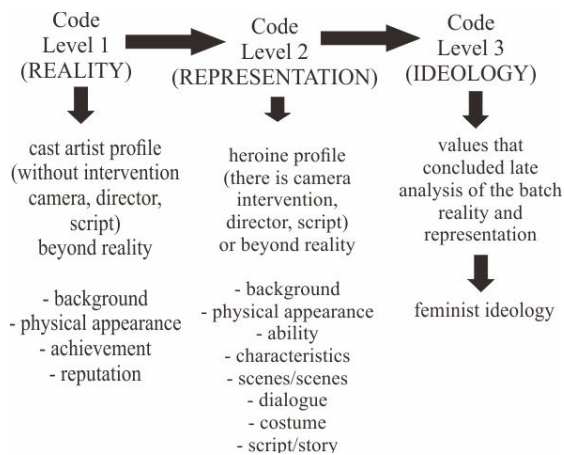


Figure 1. Operational Theory of John Fiske's Code on Sri Asih's Character

Analysis Level 1 Reality code: Pevita Pearce Profile

Alana / Sri Asih remake version in 2022, played by an artist named Pevita Cleo Eileen Pearce, better known as Pevita Pearce (born in Jakarta on October 6 1992, age 31 years), is a model and actor from Indonesia. She is the second of 3 children born to Bramwell Pearce from Wales, England, and Ernie Auliasari from Banjarmasin, Indonesia. In 2010, Pevita had a relationship with Anindyo Baskoro, a member of the band RAN, but it ended in 2012. In 2012, Pevita Pearce continued her studies in theatre in New York, USA. *Sri Asih* (2022) is a very ambitious movie for Pevita. Pevita shares her experience on her YouTube content while preparing for her role in *Sri Asih* (2022). When the film was made, Pevita did not have a martial arts background, so she had to do special training to train her muscles and learn martial arts from the choreography team of action actor Iko Uwais.

Pevita is the youngest nominee in the history of the Indonesian Film Festival for the Leading Character Movie award. Pevita is known through the movie *Denias, Senandung Di Atas Awan* (2006) as Angel.

This movie was Pevita's first experience acting in her first big screen film after previously she had a role in the soap *Mutiara Hati* (2007) as Tara. At the end of 2007, Pevita played again in the movie "*Lost in Love*", released in May 2008. In this film, Pevita takes the leading role of Tita and plays with Richard Kevin, who plays Adit. Pevita got Tita's role through a series of long selection processes, starting from around 1,100 applicants and continuing to the remaining eight people. In *Lost in Love* (2008) movie, Pevita was nominated as Best Actress at the 2008 Indonesian Film Festival.



Figure 2. Pevita Pearce, the artist who plays the remake version of Alana in *Sri Asih* (2022)

2014 was the year of the best achievement for Pevita because, in 2014, the artist won the Indonesian Choice Award for Actress of the Year, the Favorite Indonesian Actress at the Bandung Film Festival, and the Commendable Main Female Actor in the Cinema Film category. Pevita's newest film at the moment is a psychological thriller drama titled *Katarsis* (2023), which is being shown on the *video.com* streaming service. Pevita is also a model for beauty product advertisements for Garnier and TRESemme. At the reality level, Pevita is a figure who is accomplished, beautiful, highly educated, has a healthy lifestyle, and is intelligent, popular, and independent.

Analysis Level 2 Representation: Profile of Sri Asih

Sri Asih is a native Indonesian female superhero created by Indonesian Comics artist R.A. Kosasih. The character first appeared in comic form, published by Melodie Bandung Publishers in 1954. The character was adapted to the big screen in the same year the comic was published in 1954, directed by Turino Djunaedy. Sri Asih's role in the movie was played by Mimi Mariani. In 2019, Sri Asih reappeared as a cameo in the *Gundala* movie (2019) directed by Joko Anwar.



Figure 3. Cameo Sri Asih in the movie *Gundala* (2019)

In the original comic story, Sri Asih is the incarnation (alter ego) of Nani Wijaya, an innocent girl born into a wealthy family. It is said that Nani Wijaya is the reincarnation of Dewi Sri. Nani Wijaya can turn into Sri Asih when she utters the sacred word “Dewi Asih”. Sri Asih’s strength is equal to that of 250 adult men. She masters hand-to-hand martial arts, is invulnerable to weapons, can fly and has the ability of Lord Vishnu, namely to multiply and enlarge her body. However, in the cinema version of *Sri Asih* (2022), this character has changed. In the cinema version, Sri Asih’s character has a female alter ego named Alana.

Alana is a little girl born during the eruption of Mount Merapi, so she lost her parents and was adopted by a wealthy woman named Sarita Hamzah, an MMA martial arts trainer. Alana then grew up as a professional MMA athlete but experienced several psychological disorders, such as difficulty controlling anger and frequent

nightmares. As time passes, Alana realises that her nightmares and anger are memories from her past, related to an evil character named Dewi Api, played by Dian Sastrowardoyo.

Table 1. Data on Role, Appearance and Characteristics of Sri Asih

Physical appearance	Role in the Story
Pretty face	Single women
Fair skin	An orphan who a
sharp nose	martial arts trainer
Tall	adopted
Slim	a reincarnated girl
black hair	of Dewi Sri
Long hair	
Jobs and statuses	Characteristics
Daughter	Lead
Queen	Initiative
Socialite	Daredevil
Professional MMA	Competent
Athlete	Emotional
Member of the Patriot	Independent
group (Indonesian	tough
version of Avengers)	Gentle
Hero	sympathetic

Apart from the Table 1, the representation of women in the character Sri Asih can also be obtained from in-depth observation through several scenes and dialogues in the film *Sri Asih* (2022). From several observations, the researchers found that there were at least four critical aspects in Sri Asih’s representation, namely (1) Representation of ideal beauty, (2) Representation of physical strength and ability, (3) Representation of heroic values, and (4) Representation of love and motherhood. Here is the explanation:

Representation of Ideal Beauty

In the book “Gother Gender” by A. Nunuk Murtiarti, beauty is explained as one of the most important things for women; therefore, women will try their best to have a beautiful appearance because beauty is something synonymous with women (Murniati, 2004). In an interview with Iqbal Muhammad Hamdan, an Indonesian film producer and CEO of Catchlight Picture Indonesia, it was revealed that in making

commercial films, one of the producers' considerations in selecting a female cast is the popularity and beauty qualifications of the artist. The problem is that beauty is a myth because beauty is impermanent, changing, relative and not universal. According to Naomi Wolf, beauty standards can evolve at any time because each individual has different tastes regarding beauty (Wolf, 2013).

Famous Indonesian fashion photographer Jerry Aurum has almost the same opinion; according to Jerry Aurum, although women's beauty is relative, often the camera (through the eyes of photographers and filmmakers) has its particular standards, so what is beautiful "according to the camera" is frequently different from what is beautiful according to most people (Aurum, 2016). That's why society needs direction or references regarding beauty; modern women usually have references to beauty through various media representations, such as advertisements, magazines, beauty contests, and movies (Murtono, 2010). Sri Asih's character is considered one of the references in ideal beauty standards because of her popularity aspect. At the representational level, the ideal beauty of Sri Asih always displays caucasoid facial features that tend to be a slender, sharp nose, bright skin, even teeth, slim body shape, small belly circumference, a height above 165cm, long hair, wide eyes, has no eye bags, smooth skin without wrinkles, long legs and relatively large breast size.

Representation of Strength and Physical Ability

As a superhero character, Sri Asih certainly has powers above the average human being. Sri Asih's character is the incarnation of Dewi Asih, who has various extraordinary abilities such as martial arts expert, super strength, eternal life, being able to fly, super speed, the ability to recover quickly, and body duplication skills. This representation of strength and physical ability was shown before Alana became Sri Asih when Alana refused bribes and intimidation from Mateo's men to lose in

the third round. In the movie, Alana finally accepts a challenge from Mateo because of intimidation against Alana's team and her mother. Even through his men, Mateo offers several bribes so that Alana loses to Mateo. However, because she is very angry with Mateo, Alana hits Mateo with all her might, which makes Mateo fall over and lose badly.



Figure 4. Alana Beats Mateo in an MMA match

Heroic Representation

The patriotism/heroism value is one of the main values that drives stories in superhero-themed movies. If you take the big theme from superhero movies, the story's outline is about how good fights evil and the struggle in the battle with evil entities. The story in the movie *Sri Asih* (2022) is also spiced with typical values of patriotism, such as the importance of building teamwork, represented through the collaboration of the characters Alana, Tangguh and Kala. Meanwhile, the evil entity in Sri Asih's story is represented by the villain characters Dewi Api, Prayogo and Mateo. Other values that we can see in Sri Asih's character related to patriotism are leadership, fighting spirit, always having the courage to face fear, never giving up, and being willing to sacrifice for the benefit of the people.

Representation of Love (motherhood)

Bourdieu said that women have a great tendency towards love (romanticism) and affection/motherhood. This happens because women have a great interest in love/affection. Love promises freedom for women from the domination of masculini-

ty; love also offers an alternative to raising social status in the form of marriage because, in a masculine society, women can be circulated from the bottom up through marriage (Bourdieu, 1998). In addition, the closeness of women to stereotypes of affection/motherhood) is also evidenced through research/study entitled "*Women and Men Differ in Relative Strengths in Wisdom Profiles: A Study of 659 Adults Across the Lifespan*" Researchers found that, in general, women have elements of stronger traits related to love (romance), compassion and self-reflection. Meanwhile, men scored stronger in terms of cognitive and emotional regulation (Treichler et al., 2021).



Figure 5. Alana Holding a Girl Named Ina in the Ending of the *Sri Asih* (2022)

Although Sri Asih's character is depicted as strong, tough and good at fighting, she is also described as a figure full of love. Scenes that show a representation of love can be found in the opening scene, namely when Sri Asih helps her colleague named Tangguh from bullying at the orphanage, as well as the scene when Sri Asih takes a girl named Ina who is the child of one of the flat occupants who gets lost in the ending film.

Level 3 Analysis: Ideology

The Values of Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in the Character of Sri Asih

Through the representation shown by the character Sri Asih, we can see clearly that the character Sri Asih is a symbol filled with messages of women's empowerment

and gender equality. The representation seen in Sri Asih's character combines the ideal traits of men and women. Women's empowerment can be interpreted as the view that women must also be able to have good resources so that they can receive equal treatment and that there is no discrimination based on sex or gender choices that are natural. (Setyanto & Haryadi, 2020)

Through the representation of the character Sri Asih, women are invited to move up, not just to look attractive but also to become successful individuals who contribute to society. So, the message appears that women must also be empowered (Jane & Kencana, 2021). All of us, men and women, have the same opportunity to participate, control, build and benefit from development. These messages were conveyed to the public to fight against the patriarchal system that still exists in Indonesia today.



Figure 6. Femininity and masculinity preferences have blended, "melted" and become equal

Through the character of Sri Asih, values (ideology) emerge that invite women to be empowered, aware and able to claim their rights to equality so that they can move forward, have equal opportunities in social, economic and political life, so that every human being on this earth has equal human rights and have the same conditions in terms of ownership of goods, opportunities, access to resources and benefits in all fields (Puspitawati, 2012). From the representation of the character Sri Asih,

it can be seen that femininity now has no difference and has melted with masculinity. So today's women should be able to have more societal roles, such as access to education and employment, and the same rights as men (Indriyani & Rakhmawati, 2018). If a new awareness of equality can be formed, men and women must work together equally (Rokhmansyah, 2016).

The representation of women in the character Sri Asih is described as having stereotyped traits of masculinity, such as strong, hard, active, tough, rational, competitive, independent, empowered and able to lead. Even though it has the characteristics of masculinity, the depiction of women in heroine characters does not necessarily eliminate positive traditional feminine values such as depictions of wise, sympathetic, kind, sensual and compassionate traits adapted from the figure of a mother (motherhood). Even through Sri Asih's character, we are also shown that women can also get jobs that have been synonymous with men, such as MMA athletes. Every representation of the nature of Sri Asih proves that femininity and masculinity have "melted", mixed, overlapped and equalled. This also proves that the concept of traditional femininity is considered to have collapsed and is irrelevant in presenting women today because women and men are increasingly balanced (Beasley, 1999).

CONCLUSIONS

From these various representations, it can be concluded that the spirit of feminism ideology can never be separated from the early history of the creation of the character Sri Asih in the past. Feminism is a movement aimed at developing, determining and defending women's rights in all fields. In every representation of Sri Asih's character, there are many ideas related to feminism. Several values are typical of the ideology of feminism raised, namely women's empowerment, gender equality, rejection of violence against women and the dissolution of gender stereotypes. Sri

Asih's character is a manifestation of feminist thoughts, which contain a struggle over the domination of masculinity, which is called malestream in the world of entertainment, especially film. Through the character of Sri Asih, feminism also finally has a foothold to reach the realm of representation in various popular cultural media, such as comics and films, because those have a wide range of consumers. Thus, it is hoped that the messages of feminism in the character of Sri Asih can be conveyed to more people and have a big impact on life.

As a theme or research object, the findings in this research, especially related to the representation of women's identity, are still relatively narrow because they only involve one sample, namely Sri Asih. So, there are still great opportunities that will open potential and further research spaces that will enrich the body of knowledge related to media studies, gender and even visual communication design (DKV). For example, local characters from Jagad Cinema Bumi Langit and Western superhero characters from DC and Marvel, so the findings of representations from other characters will increase the number of references and enrich the results of this research.

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