

## Ecocriticism On *Kumandra* as Environmental Sustainability in *Raya And The Last Dragon*

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### Abstract

There is a harmonious relationship between the environment and humans depicted in the film *Raya and the Last Dragon*. A good environmental lesson is represented through *Kumandra*. Therefore, This study aims to explore *Kumandra* as a symbol of environmental sustainability in the film. The analysis was carried out based on the theory of Ecocriticism. The theory is applied to find out the characters' harmonious relationship with nature. The harmonious life is symbolized by the place, *Kumandra*. Data collection was done by qualitative descriptive method. The results of the analysis show that *Kumandra* is illustrated as a place where the community can maintain a harmonious life with nature. In *Kumandra*, the community is depicted as maintaining environmental harmony and balance. Although, *Kumandra* has been divided due to greed and the struggle for dragon's gems, Benja and Raya still struggle to make all tribes return to what they used to be, namely *Kumandra*. Living in harmony in *Kumandra* brings peace, prosperity and unity for the people. It can be concluded that there are environmental lessons delivered by the film *Raya and the Last Dragon*.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, environment, harmony, nature, sustainability

### Introduction

Ideally, a literary work should provide education through moral messages to be conveyed from the storyline. Moral is the core element of literary works. The word moral is etymologically the same as ethics even though they are derived from different original languages, for that moral can be interpreted as the values and norms that become a guide for a person or a group in regulating their behavior (Nadya and Sari, 2019). This is not limited to certain literary works. All literary works, including films, should provide moral messages for the audience. Film is one of the audio-visual literary genres that serves as a communication act that aims at transferring ideas, knowledge, thoughts and messages. Film can be a medium of communication to transfer knowledge or ideas to the audience. Therefore, films can



be an important part of mass media for society. (Tawakal, et. al., 2021; Ramani, 2018).

This film is an animated film. The film *Raya and the Last Dragon* is able to present a lot of cultural diversity in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. This diversity is reflected in motifs, colors, architecture, food, to values, habits and customs that are very close to the daily lives of Southeast Asian people. In fact, to get the appropriate elements of culture, customs and nature, the film crew traveled throughout Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and Singapore. In addition, the production process of this film also involves a group of experts who help provide insight into the culture and customs of each country, consisting of anthropologists, architects, linguists, dancers, and traditional music players.

*Raya and the Last Dragon* is a Disney Princess film whose world is inspired by Southeast Asia. For this film, Walt Disney Animation Studios created a universe called *Kumandra*. The name *Kumandra* is derived from Sanskrit. In the film, *Kumandra* is once a United Kingdom in peace. Humans coexist with dragons who provide water, rain, and peace.

Then, comes Druun, an evil plague depicted in the form of purple-black smoke that spreads across *Kumandra*. Everything Druun touches turns to stone. The dragons fight to protect *Kumandra*. The dragon witness, Sisu creates a dragon gem. The gem contains magical powers to repel Druun. All the humans turned to stone return to be normal, except the Dragons. Since then, *Kumandra* has been divided into five different regions (Yusron, 2022).

Film is an animated film directed by Don Hall and Carlos Lopez Estrada with Paul Briggs and John Ripa, and produced by Osnat Shurer and Peter Del Vecho. *Raya and the Last Dragon* stars Kelly Marie Tran as the voice of Raya and Awkwafina as Sisu. In addition, not only showing excitement and suspense, this film also features some hilarious scenes shown by Sisu who is cheerful, humorous, and hilarious. Even so, Raya learns about trust from Sisu as the key to reuniting *Kumandra*. Various dialogues about trust between living things, including people who have betrayed, are trying to be shown continuously in this film.

Originally, *Kumandra* was a peaceful habitation area for humans and dragons to coexist. However, when an evil force depicted in the form of a pitch-black lump with purple light arrives, the dragons sacrifice their lives to save humanity. There was only one dragon who managed to use his magic power through the glowing stone to be able to save humans. *Kumandra* was split into five parts because the residents wanted to have the stone from the last dragon spirit. Then, 500 years later, the evil forces have again disturbed the peace of *Kumandra* and their fate depends on Raya. Raya goes on an adventure with his loyal friends, Tuk Tuk who is a half insect and an armadillo who has the ability to roll into a ball as a means of transportation. Even though they have managed to find the last dragon named Sisu, Raya's adventure has just begun. During his journey he meets new friends to fight together to reunite the land of *Kumandra* (Marvela, 2021).

This film reflects the harmonious life with nature in *Kumandra*. This film conveys a message about harmonious coexistence with nature in *Kumandra*. *Kumandra* is a land of imagination that depicts the prosperity of its people who live in a peaceful environment. However, because of greed, hatred and power, this



country is divided. Raya and Benja, his father, struggle to restore a harmonious life like *Kumandra* again. This is the object of this research. The research analyzes the role of *Kumandra* as a symbol of the message about environmental sustainability that must be conveyed to the audience. This is an environmental message conveyed in this film. This problem will be analyzed from the ecocriticism approach. This is motivated by the awareness that humans and the environment and nature are closely related.

Therefore, the film *Raya and the Last Dragon* can be an instrument to raise awareness of the relationship between humans and nature or the environment. For this reason, this research is conducted. As it is proposed that art and literature can be employed as reliable instruments to foster environmental responsibility and awareness among individuals (Arafah, & Kaharuddin, 2019; Özdemir, 2006). Literature touches everything in whole scope, including about environmental problem from which it becomes one important aspect which is popular now and relevant with earth safety for the future. Therefore, in the mid-eighties, some people began to be conscious and they started to relate literature and environment in response to that problem. As it is hoped that this study can be as environmental education or lesson. Following this, environmental education may improve human awareness and participation in environmental protection, popularize environmental protection knowledge and skills, and thus help achieve sustainable development International Science Council (2020).

The new term of ecocriticism was invented by William Rueckert in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* in 1978. “The conceptual and practical problem is to find the grounds upon which two communities– the human, the natural–can coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere” (Rueckert in Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996: 107). According to Glotfelty (Muhlisin, 2022; Pamungkas et al., 2019; Siwi & Ekalestari, 2022) ecocriticism discusses interconnections between nature and culture, especially the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a theoretical discourse, it deals with human and the non-human relationship. This statement explains about the position of ecocriticism towards literature.

Ecocriticism is purposely to explore the interconnectedness between human and nature. Therefore, through ecocriticism within literature, we do self-realization of our behavior to nature (Mishra and Sarangi, 2017). Garrard (2012) states, “Ecocritics can help with the definition, exploration, and even resolution of broader ecological problem.” In the theory, the connection between human and nature is like subject and object. Humans posit nature as their object. This pushes and that literature plays important role in solving environmental problems. Through literature, environmental awareness can be raised (Siwi, et. al, 2022). Then, the objective of the ecocriticism is to investigate the environmental issues, cultural issues concerning environmental and attitude toward nature presented in literary works (Kerridge & Sammells, 1998; Mambrol, 2016; Muhlisin, 2022)). Therefore, this study is to investigate such issues presented through *Kumandra* in the film *Raya and the Last Dragon* by applying the theory of ecocriticism.

## Method



This study applied descriptive qualitative method as data collection techniques. Data analysis of qualitative descriptive research, unlike other qualitative approaches, does not use a pre-existing set of rules that have been generated from the philosophical or epistemological stance of the discipline that creates the specific qualitative research approach. Rather, qualitative descriptive research is purely data derived in that codes which are generated from the data in the course of the study. Like other qualitative research approaches, qualitative descriptive studies are generally characterized by simultaneous data collection and analysis (Lambert and Lambert, 2013). Then, the data were taken from both script and visual scene of the film *Raya and the Last Dragon*. The data were collected through heuristic and hermeneutic reading techniques (Nurgiyantoro, 2019). It means that the data were collected by reading and making notes of some important points related to the study.

Then, the data were analyzed by grouping data based on the characteristics of each research indicator. In the data analysis, there are four points as research indicators in this study. After the data were grouped, the presentation and the conclusion were drawn. In analyzing data, the concept of ecocriticism initially proposed by Rueckert and developed by other researchers was used in this study. The analysis of data is emphasized to find out how the connection between environment and the characters in the film is raised. And, this interconnectedness is based on ecocriticism perspective as presented in *Kumandra* in the film.

## Findings and Discussions

### *Kumandra* as a Symbol of Environmental Sustainability in the Movie

More specifically, environmental sustainability could be defined as a condition of balance, resilience, and interconnectedness that allows human society to satisfy its needs while neither exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems to continue to regenerate the services necessary to meet those needs nor by our actions diminishing biological diversity (Morelli, 2011). This film tells a story of Raya who lives in the fantasy land of *Kumandra*. In *Kumandra*, dragons live peacefully with humans. One day, an evil comes to people in *Kumandra*. The land is illustrated as a world of peace. Humans live in harmony with nature and the environment in *Kumandra*. It is a representation of the state of society living in harmony and prosperity along with the environment. It is a re-imagined earth inhabited by an ancient civilization. A warrior named Raya is determined to find the last dragon. *Kumandra* appears in the beginning of the movie. The following shows the introduction of *Kumandra* in the introduction of the movie by the protagonist which is illustrated in the scene below. At the beginning of the movie, at 00:01:46, Raya gave a statement that *Kumandra* was heaven.





Figure 1. *Kumandra*

*Raya* : *This is what we used to be. When our land was whole, and we lived harmoniously alongside... dragons. Magical creatures who brought us water and rain and peace. It was paradise (00:01:46).*

The illustration above is told in the introduction of the film. There, Raya states that *Kumandra* was heaven. Images are displayed to visualize the perfect state of harmony between man and nature. This is in line with the preliminary statement that *Kumandra* seems a heaven. Of course, the imagination of heaven will lead to perfect condition, harmony, balance, and peace. It becomes the first message for the audience that this movie indirectly visualizes that humans must continue to strive a harmonious life with nature and the environment. The sustainability must be maintained. This movie educates from the first visual that shows about the message of preserving nature for a prosperous life. The message is symbolized by *Kumandra*.

It has become the life goal for people in all tribes in the film *Raya and the Last Dragon*. All community in the movie want *Kumandra* again. It becomes the main goal of uniting the separated dragon gems. Raya, the protagonist, is on an adventure looking for separated pieces of the lost gem in various lands to restore things like *Kumandra* that once existed. It is believed by Raya's father that they can realize the peace of the universe again as before. His father believes that they are once a nation that lives in harmony. This spirit of unity is also passed on to Raya. This hope is expressed by his father to Raya which appears at 10 minutes past 46 seconds.

*Benja* : *I believe that we can be Kumandra again (00:10:46).*

Raya and her father are trying hard to realize sustainable life in a harmonious and prosperous environment. It describes what has ever happened in *Kumandra*. In this movie, it is described that *Kumandra* is an ideal world to live in because all humans, dragons, nature and other creatures can live side by side. The sustainability of the ecosystem in *Kumandra* is illustrated as a condition of peace and prosperity. This can be studied from the conversation between Raya and her father in the following scene. Benja tells Raya that he will invite all the tribes to gather and assure them that *Kumandra* can be recreated so that they can live more peacefully and prosperously. After *Kumandra* is created, environmental sustainability can also be created so that the harmony of life can be felt by all tribes. This can be seen in the following scene.



Figure 2. Raya and her Father Talking about Inviting Other Tribes

*Raya* : *That's ridiculous. It doesn't do that.*

*Benja* : *Raya, there's a reason why each land is named after a part of the dragon. We were once unified. Harmoniously as one, Kumandra. (00:09:23)*

In addition, another scene shows that Raya and her father are trying to embody *Kumandra* again. They want to unite all the tribes again so that they can live side by side. They can reunite like before and live prosperously like the prosperity that once existed in *Kumandra*. This dream is expressed by Raya's father when giving a speech in front of all the tribes. Raya's father invites all tribes to attend Heart to build trust with one another so that their dream of realizing *Kumandra* can be achieved. Her father wants a peaceful, a harmonious, and a prosperous life for all tribes. He hopes that all beings can live side by side with nature and the environment. This message is conveyed in the following scene.



Figure 3. Benja's Speech to Welcome Other Tribes

*Benja* : *Today, we can be Kumandra once more (00:11:28).*

The dream of Raya's father, Benja is strongly opposed by all the tribes. They want their own tribe to be prosperous. All tribes are fighting over each other for dragon gem to maintain their survival. They attack each other to get the orb. In fact, they dare to rob him of the Heart tribe. Fighting for the dragon gem occurs among the tribes because Raya brings Namari, the daughter of the queen of the Fang tribe, to see the dragon gem kept in a secret place by the Heart. This fighting brings about the dragon gem to break into pieces. They are also attacked by Druun. Everyone there runs out to save themselves. This shows that harmony in life cannot be realized if we are too greedy for our own group. In other words, through this film, an environmental message is conveyed that harmony and sustainability cannot be realized if we are not united. If all tribes or groups trust and support each other, harmonious life and sustainability will be able to create. In addition, the benefits of

environmental sustainability can be felt by all humans, tribes or groups. However, this must be pursued and agreed together. This is illustrated in the following scene. Benja, Raya's father, tries to convince all tribes or groups to join to create a harmonious life by realizing *Kumandra*.



Figure 4. Benja's Effort to Make other tribes sure about *Kumandra*

*Benja* : Listen to me! We have a choice. We can tear each other apart, or we can come together and build a better world. It's not too late. I still believe we can be *Kumandra* again (00:17:21-23).

Creating harmony and balance is the main idea of the entire series of stories in this movie. Here, the main character looks very eager to build peace and harmony between all tribes and nature or the environment. This is strong evidence that the story in *Raya and the Last Dragon* can provide education to the audience through the message of the harmony of life with nature and the environment. Maintaining balance and harmony with the environment is the dream of every human being in order to live a prosperous and peaceful life. This moral message is certainly very useful for the audience, especially children. This is an animated movie where the target audience is children. This is a very good opportunity that environmental harmony and maintaining sustainability can be socialized through animated movies. Indeed, such message is contained in *Raya and the Last Dragon*. This environmental harmony must be maintained continuously. This is symbolized by the existing harmonization of *Kumandra*. And, this is the purpose of the story in this movie. Therefore, this movie requires environmental learning.

### **Environmental Lesson from *Kumandra*: Harmony with Nature to Bring Peace, Prosperity and Unity**

Rueckert (Mishra, 2016) has the opinion that human and nature should live in harmony. One of the most important aspects of rearticulating human development is to emphasize the need for fairness to nature and other living beings. We cannot develop unless our lives become reconnected and in balance, cooperation and harmony with nature. A good balance between indigenous knowledge and modern science and technology can take us a long way towards this new vision of sustainable human development, says a Professor of Ecology in International Science Council (2020). In line with these opinions, the film *Raya and the Last Dragon* can present such harmonious life with nature by symbolizing a life in *Kumandra*.

*Kumandra* is the main reason why the protagonist has an adventure and sacrifices herself to unite the pieces of the dragon gem. This is done by Raya because of her father's message and hope that they could bring *Kumandra* back



before the battle for the gem stone occurs which causes them to be re-attacked by Drunn. This incident results in the survival of all tribes because many people turn to stone. Examining the importance of *Kumandra* for all tribes, the following are lessons about the sustainability of environmental life described by *Kumandra*:

### Peace

The name *Kumandra* is derived from Sanskrit. In *Raya and the Last Dragon*, the movie, *Kumandra* was once a United Kingdom in peace. Humans coexist with dragons who provide water, rain, and peace. It depicts a life in harmony with nature. In fact, at the beginning of the introduction to the story in the movie, *Raya* introduces *Kumandra* as the land of heaven. At that time, all the dragons sacrificed themselves to save the people in *Kumandra*. But, it turns out that there is a dragon that is still alive, named Sisu. Then, *Raya* the warrior tries to restore the peace of *Kumandra* assisted by Sisu the last dragon.

*Raya* : *It was paradise. (00:01:46)*

From this expression, we can imagine how harmonious life is in *Kumandra* illustrated as heaven. The visualization at the beginning of the story that illustrates how harmonious life in *Kumandra* is depicted is presented in such an way. It is seen that they live very peacefully with the dragons and other living things.

*Raya* : *This is what we used to be. When our land was whole, and we lived harmoniously alongside... dragons. Magical creatures who brought us water and rain and peace. (00:01:45)*

*Raya's* expression above illustrates how lucky living in *Kumandra* is. They can coexist with other creatures in harmony and peace. However, this harmony is destroyed because of the greed of the tribes who want natural wealth only for their own tribe. They fight each other for dragon gems. The gems are considered able to give prosperity. This suggests that *Kumandra* is a symbol of harmony in life. In this film, the incident of the loss of harmony in *Kumandra* becomes a valuable lesson that harmony with nature must be maintained. In addition, from this film, we learn that greed can destroy the harmony of life itself. Living in harmony and peace with nature does not mean getting everything according to our own desires. It is when you can maintain the continuity of harmony with the environment. This is what can be learned from *Kumandra*.

### Prosperity

*Kumandra* is a place like a dragon's body. There flows river beautifully. Heart, as the name suggested, is in the heart of the dragon in the *Kumandra* map. Heart is told as a magical area full of rocks that form natural formations to protect the dragon jewels or orb. In creating the Heart area in *Raya and the Last Dragon*, Walt Disney Animation Studios was inspired by the rocks in Ha Long Bay, Vietnam, and also the Mekong River which is the longest in Southeast Asia (Yusron, 2022). The following is an illustration of the land of the Heart tribe.







Figure 5. Heart (Doc. of Walt Disney Animation Studios)

As the name suggested, Heart, is the heart of *Kumandra*. The land of Heart is more prosperous compared to other tribes such as Fang, Spine, Talon, and Tail. Heart is the land of dragon gem guardians. This tribe has better natural wealth than the others. This is also expressed by a Talon tribal leader. He says that the Heart tribe is very lucky to have all the natural wealth. The Heart does not feel the suffering of other tribes because this tribe is considered to have prosperity because of the dragon gem.

*The Chief of Talon Tribe :The land of Heart already has everything.  
(00:11:50)*

However, according to Benja, Heart is more prosperous than the others not because they have dragon gem. Dragons are not the cause of their prosperity. The leader of the Heart believes that prosperity is the result of their belief in the goodness of nature. They always maintain balance with nature. This results in good environmental sustainability for their tribe. They still apply the harmony of life with nature as ever in *Kumandra*. Benja and his people still adhere to the principle of harmony in living with other creatures and nature. This statement is implied when Benja and Raya have a conversation when he wants to invite another tribe to the land of Heart. Here is a snippet of the conversation.

*Benja :They're only our enemies because they think the Dragon Gemstone 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.  
(00:10:11-13) .....*

*Benja :Listen, if we don't stop and learn to trust one another again,  
it's only a matter of time before we tear each other apart.  
(00:10:33)*

From the conversation above, Benja wants that all tribes no longer fight over the dragon gem. They must trust each other to live side to side for the survival of all tribes and other creatures. Therefore, as a country that stores and protects dragon gems, Benja always tries to protect them including the dragon gem. In addition, he also continues to make sure that they must live in harmony together to achieve prosperity like *Kumandra*. This is the lesson given from *Raya and the Last Dragon*. Living in harmony with nature can create good natural harmony and sustainability. Finally, this brings about prosperity.

## Unity

The main idea of *Raya's* story is supported by how the character seems to have a close relationship with her family and has great respect for her father. This is shown when she helps her father to unite all nations but is betrayed by the people. She tries hard to find a way to save her father and the people who are turned to stone. (Saraswati, et.al., 2021).

*Benja* : *Raya, there's a reason why each land is named after a part of the dragon. We were once unified. Harmoniously as one, Kumandra (00:10:23).*

Benja desperately wants all tribes to unite. He does not want all tribes to split up because of the dragon gem. Therefore, he invites all tribes to come to the land of Heart. He wants to invite all tribes to make peace and unite to create a harmonious life with nature. This is based on Benja's belief that *Kumandra* is a land where all tribes, dragons, and other creatures live together and in harmony. They does not fall apart until the battle for the dragon gem takes place. Benja does not want this incident to happen again so he invites all tribes to unite like the one in *Kumandra*. Fortunately, at the end of the story, everyone is then able to reunite with their lost loved ones, including *Raya* and her father. The dragons and the tribes then peacefully gather at Heart to celebrate and join together to form *Kumandra* once again. This is the message that living in harmony with nature means being one with all creatures. It also teaches us that it is important for us to live together and in harmony with nature. Finally, we have to be united to make the harmony come true.

## Conclusion

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that *Kumandra* in the film *Raya and the Last Dragon* implies an environmental lesson. This moral lesson teaches us that we should maintain harmonious life with nature. Such harmony results in peace, prosperity and unity. The lesson from the film can build human's realization of environmental sustainability. Living in *Kumandra* is illustrated as heavenly life. Everything in *Kumandra* lives in harmony and balance. The leader of the Heart tribe hopes to achieve such environmental harmony again after all tribes are divided because of greed, hatred, and power of dragon gems. For that, we recommend that all tribes are united and support each other to build *Kumandra* again. This also implies that all human should be united to preserve the environmental sustainability. All in all, through the film *Raya and the Last Dragon*, it is proven that film can be as means of communicating to bring an environmental lesson (Ramani, 2018; Tawakal, et.al., 2021).

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