

Reception analysis of popular feminism in the series *Gadis Kretek* on Netflix

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ABSTRACT

Background: Feminism in popular culture is currently growing, one of which is through television or drama series. Active female advocates are increasingly creating female-centered and feminist content. The presence of feminism in popular culture makes this understanding more widely understood by the public. *Gadis Kretek* is one form of popular culture that can popularize feminism. **Purpose:** This research aims to find out how the audience interpreted the feminism issues contained in the *Gadis Kretek* series based on their perspectives and experiences, especially regarding the acceptance of feminism discourse, Jeng Yah as the key character of feminist heroism, and the *Gadis Kretek* series as the spearhead of the spread of popular feminism. **Method:** This descriptive qualitative research uses Stuart Hall's reception analysis of *Gadis Kretek's* six audiences. The data was collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews. **Results:** Based on the findings, all of them are in a dominant-hegemonic reading position, which agrees that Jeng Yah experienced many challenges in fighting for women's equality. This study shows that only two informants are in the dominant-hegemonic reading position when considering Jeng Yah as a key character of feminist heroism. At the same time, two are in a negotiated position, and two take an oppositional stance. The study also found that five informants were in the dominant-hegemonic position by agreeing that the series could be used to spread feminism in popular culture. In contrast, one informant disagreed and put her in the oppositional position. **Conclusion:** The audience of *Gadis Kretek's* series constructed the meaning of feminism through different perspectives and experiences. However, most informants saw *Gadis Kretek* as a means to spread popular feminism. **Implications:** This research can provide insights for feminist filmmakers in creating strong female characters and portraying the struggles and roles of women in a more accurate and empowered way in society.

Keywords: Drama series; Netflix; popular culture; popular feminism; reception analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2020, Netflix has been committed to emphasizing the diversity of representation its platform provides through its movies and series. Netflix emphasizes the importance of the company's commitment to represent its audience in all its diversity, whether ethnic, sexual, gender, or linguistic. It can be seen in Netflix original series such as *Dear White People*, *Sex Education*, and *Bridgerton*, which feature Black British characters. Through this effort, Netflix can introduce more diverse perspectives to international audiences and enrich the understanding of broader cultures (Asmar et al., 2023). It also opens up opportunities for viewers to learn more about the backgrounds of people or groups (Fraccari & Kerrigan, 2024).

Netflix has also implemented the idea of empowering marginalized groups by increasing the involvement of female directors in their productions. It has also improved the quality of representation on Netflix by portraying strong, ambitious, and independent female characters (Bucciferro, 2019; Pietaryte & Suzina, 2023; Zafar et al., 2025). One of the latest original series by Netflix Indonesia also tells the story of women's struggle using the background of Indonesian women's emancipation in ancient times. The series *Gadis Kretek* was popular on Netflix and has been trending for several weeks, in November 2023, on Netflix Indonesia and globally (Khasanah & Khusyairi, 2023). This series is also ranked top in Malaysia, Chile, Romania, Mexico, and Venezuela (Mellya,

2023).

Gadis Kretek (Cigarette Girl) is the first Indonesian Netflix original series directed by Kamila Andini and Ifa Isfansyah. The series is based on the novel of the same title written by Ratih Kumala. Netflix's attempt to present an original drama series featuring elements of Indonesian heritage is illustrated through the historical and cultural setting. Viewers are invited to experience the periodization of the Indonesian cigarette industry through the stories (Arumi et al., 2024). However, more than just telling the story of the Indonesian cigarette industry, *Gadis Kretek* brings out the deeper meaning of women's struggle through feminist discourses, which can be found in this series.

Gadis Kretek tells the story of a woman named Dasiyah (Jeng Yah)'s attachment to cigarettes. Jeng Yah was born into a family of cigarette entrepreneurs. Since childhood, she has been familiar with and interested in the cigarette industry. The cigarette industry is an industry that is closely associated with the label of masculinity and taboo for women, so women who smoke will be labeled badly by construction. Women's position is only as rollers. They are not allowed to make cigarette sauce and enter the sauce room because it will ruin the taste of the sauce since they are considered to have a poor taste for tobacco. Women are always associated and restricted to domestic work and have a different level of articulation than men. The division of labor, silencing, enslavement, and discrimination against women was the result of

the post-industrial revolution and postcolonial situation.

In this series, Jeng Yah is presented as the main character of a progressive woman who transcends her era to break the masculine and taboo cigarette industry. Kamila Andini tries to present a female character who lives not just in the past but also today (Narasi, 2023) by highlighting Jeng Yah as a “hero” who can represent the spirit of the struggle of women today—especially those who feel represented by Jeng Yah, who are women working in masculine industries.

The struggle of female characters against the dominance of patriarchal culture in *Gadis Kretek* is often associated with feminism. Feminism is a movement that fights for women’s rights and against oppression and seeks to achieve gender equality in a patriarchal society (Cruz & Brown, 2016). Feminism is generally considered women’s efforts to demand equal rights with men and overcome subordination. Women are often perceived as being tied to the patriarchal system, so they need to defend themselves and recognize their unequal position (Riger, 1993). This movement arises from the assumption that women are inherently in a position of oppression and inequality in society. Feminist ideology has also spread through popular cultures, such as films and series such as *Eternals*, *Fleabag*, and *Barbie*, which center on women as characters and creators (D & I, 2016).

The existence of the media also acts as an

information dissemination agent that popularizes a culture so that whatever is shared by the media will be accepted by the community as a value or culture that can gain public attention. Television can convey specific meanings through its content to influence the audience to follow what is shown. McWilliam and Bickle (2017) stated the pleasure viewers derive from watching TV series to the ‘emotional sentimentality’ they experience. Nowadays, media are sympathetic to feminist TV studies, as they seem to be increasingly alert and responsible to the needs of audiences to overcome their poor track record of marginalizing women both on and off-screen.

Netflix became part of popular culture due to its broad reach, with over 200 million subscribers in more than 190 countries (Wayne, 2022). The surge in popularity associated with products, brands, and celebrities due to the airing of a movie or series is called the Netflix effect (Matrix, 2014). This effect can make television series previously only shown more popular and gain more consumers on Netflix, such as *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl* (Rom, 2024; Schwindt, 2016). In addition, original series such as *Squid Game* also created a huge impact, such as increasing the popularity of dalgona candy, which became a trend thanks to social media (Ahmed et al., 2022). Series or films and the Internet have been very successful cases of synergy in media convergence, as both media activate the audience to create a more participatory viewing culture (Fiolitha & Irwansyah, 2020).

Popular culture is likely to reflect or is knowingly aimed toward the public's tastes; thus far, wide variation in the relative popularity of these products exists (Askin & Mauskopf, 2017). Popular culture is born from the will of the media or what is commonly called capitalistic ideology and people's consumption behavior. The mass media usually shape it in the modern era, penetrating certain people's daily lives. Therefore, popular culture may influence the attitudes of individuals toward specific topics (Dewi et al., 2022). Since most popular culture production is complex and often involves many individuals, the products may trigger conflicts and have gaps for many people to analyze, including feminism.

The increased focus on diversity and representation of women in front of and behind the scenes means dedicated funding and opportunities for women-led and women-focused stories. Through this series, *Gadis Kretek* is one example of Netflix's efforts to support representation. The series tells a story set against the backdrop of Indonesian culture and includes characters and narratives that depict communities underrepresented in international media. As such, *Gadis Kretek* represents Netflix's intended form of "visibility" in supporting marginalized voices, such as those from cultures, social groups, or even gender equality, that have rarely received global attention. For practitioners, regardless of gender, securing this funding means proving that their work aligns with the need to serve

female screen creators and audiences.

The Center for the Study of Women in Film and Television in the United States shows that 32% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on independent films are women (Lauzen, 2021). Another example in Indonesia's film industry is that several films by Indonesian women filmmakers have won awards or played at international film festivals. It strengthens women filmmakers' position in the Indonesian and international film scene. One example is the film *Sekala Niskala*, which has won awards at the Toronto International Film Festival and Tokyo Filmex 2017; Kamila Andiri directed this film. In addition, the film *Dendam, Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas*, directed by Djenar Maesa Ayu, also won the Golden Leopard Award at the Locarno International Film Festival 2021 (Swaradesy & Rembulan, 2024). Through these efforts, popular feminism can be developed.

Popular feminism is a way for women to depoliticize individual achievements and desires, where they are responsible for their success or failure (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017; Gill, 2016). Popular feminism can create a situation where female characters in films and series become popular thanks to the feminist discourse they raise (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017). Through the expression of feminism in these drama series, it is hoped that a spirit of solidarity against patriarchal norms is built and feminist issues begin to be raised in

mainstream popular discussions (Perkins et al., 2023; Perkins & Schreiber, 2019).

There has already been some research on popular feminism on Netflix. We found a study that examined popular feminism in Netflix Marvel's Jessica Jones series, which was aired on Netflix by Smith et al. (2021). They tried to analyze the representation of Jessica Jones as a feminist heroine aired on the Netflix streaming platform and think about its impact on the audience. In the study, the researchers first examined how streaming services (Netflix) offer new ways for audiences to engage with the encoding of messages in television series that challenge traditional gender norms and expectations. Using content analysis methods, Smith and colleagues added that spreading the ideas of feminism must be done sustainably and requires further analysis.

Much effort has been put into the current popular television feminism. A situation where women's advocates are actively negotiating on how to develop women-centered and feminist content in mainstream channels. Television stories are a social process of creative interpretation and negotiation (Fiske, 2011). Understanding and judgment are usually crowdsourced. Social conversations about a particular movie are important in social dynamics and meaning formation. Through this media, a person will be trapped in the imaginary world of the television series, living every scene until finally starting to feel inspiration, aspiration, and intellectual curiosity. From this,

the meaning slowly begins to be constructed by the audience (Matrix, 2014). This finding attracted us, the researchers, to see how the audience slowly constructed the meaning of feminism contained in the *Gadis Kretek* series. Because that is where we can see if the audience negotiates the same meanings that eventually lead to discussions of feminism so that the ideology becomes popular, the effort to achieve that goal can be made by exploring the audience's meaning of *Gadis Kretek* by using Stuart Hall's Reception analysis.

Reception analysis will focus on the encounter between text and reader or using the media and the audience. Reception analysis views audiences as producers of meaning who actively create meaning, not just as consumers of media content. Audiences interpret media texts according to their socio-cultural conditions and are influenced by their experiences (Aligwe et al., 2018). Researchers often use this study to create meaning or a deep understanding of media texts, especially movies (Bal & Avcu, 2023; Kharismawati & Wahidati, 2023; Suhaemi et al., 2023).

Based on Shaw (2017), Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model explains that audiences not only passively receive media but also actively give meanings that can be different from the intentions of the message makers. Audiences read messages in three ways: dominant hegemony, negotiated position, and oppositional position. Even if the media producer wants a dominant reading, the

audience may interpret the message differently. Decoders can reject messages and interpret them based on their experiences and backgrounds. It shows that both encoders and decoders see the message from different perspectives.

These three types of audience members can decode a given message. The first is the dominant or preferred reading, where the message is decoded with the same meaning as intended when it was encoded. Second, negotiated readings involve a mixture of preferred and rejected readings. Third is oppositional reading, where audience members interpret the message in a way opposite to what the producer intended.

Research by Dwita and Sommaliagustina (2018) used Stuart Hall's reception analysis to examine the gender feminism interpretation of *Kartini*'s audiences in Pekanbaru. Although not a series, the *Kartini* and *Gadis Kretek* Series have similar cultural and time settings; both are also available on Netflix Indonesia. The study involved eight informants who analyzed the feminist interpretation of the *Kartini* Movie. The results show that the interpretation of the messages varies depending on the informants' backgrounds, with most of the meanings understood in the domination position. In contrast, others are in a negotiation and opposition position. The findings support Hall's encoding-decoding theory, where the influence of an individual's background affects the message's meaning.

Based on the following examples and data, an audience reception analysis was suggested

to interpret the feminism issues contained in the *Gadis Kretek* series based on informant perspectives and experiences, especially regarding the acceptance of feminism discourse, Jeng Yah as the key character of feminist heroism, and the *Gadis Kretek* series as the spearhead of the spread of popular feminism.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is conducted with six informants of *Gadis Kretek* using semi-structured in-depth interviews as the data collection technique and purposive sampling as the sampling method. A descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because it provides an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena, which, in this case, are related to audience perceptions and interpretations of the representation of feminism in the media. Fadli (2021) describes qualitative research methodology as a framework to answer questions related to narrative data obtained through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. Meanwhile, qualitative descriptive research is also identified as mainly suitable for research questions focused on finding the who, what, and where of events or experiences and gaining informants' perceptions regarding a poorly understood phenomenon. Qualitative descriptive is a fitting goal when a straight description of a phenomenon is wished for, or information is sought to evolve and refine questionnaires or interventions; it is also categorized as less theory-driven than other

approaches (Kim et al., 2017). Descriptive insights are needed because they consist of explanations, arguments, perspectives, and textual materials to analyze the representation of feminism in the *Gadis Kretek* series.

This research uses Stuart Hall's reception analysis that focuses on decoding the six informants for the *Gadis Kretek* series so that the informants can accept the messages that the series tries to convey to be applied in everyday life. The interview transcripts were analyzed according to Stuart Hall's theory, which states decoding involves perception, thinking, and interpretation. The involvement of age, gender, education, and experience can also help in interpreting messages. Media consumer decoding models can be categorized into three types of readings. These include dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional readings (Durham & Kellner, 2006).

The informants were selected based on criteria, which is the audience of *Gadis Kretek*, who are also interested in Indonesian films and series, to explore different interpretations of the feminist values in the *Gadis Kretek* series. The informants were divided into two categories, *Gadis Kretek* fans, and non-fans,

to see the differences in interpreting feminist messages. Fans are expected to have a deeper understanding and emotional attachment, while non-fans provide a more objective perspective free from affection bias towards the series. By categorizing informants, this research can map differences in the interpretation of feminist values and provide richer insights into how informants from different backgrounds shape the meanings of the media they consume, also, with an in-depth exploration of how attachment to a series can affect the way feminism is represented in Indonesian films or series.

Researchers took more female informants than males to see how a woman interprets feminism contained in the *Gadis Kretek* series, considering that this series highlights how women struggle against patriarchy and show the existence of women in the public sphere (Harris et al., 2024; Kurniawati et al., 2024). We also maintain the presence of male interviewees to explore how men perceive and accept the feminist issues presented in the series differently.

All six informants were interviewed by telephone on December 16–17, 2023. The informant data can be seen in Table 1. The

Table 1 Informant Identity

| No | Initial | Age | Gender | Category |
|----|-------------|-----|--------|----------|
| 1 | Informant 1 | 22 | Male | Non-fans |
| 2 | Informant 2 | 20 | Female | Fans |
| 3 | Informant 3 | 28 | Female | Fans |
| 4 | Informant 4 | 20 | Male | Non-fans |
| 5 | Informant 5 | 20 | Female | Non-fans |
| 6 | Informant 6 | 20 | Female | Fans |

Source: Processed by Author, 2023

researcher then collected and categorized the data obtained from the interviews. Categorization is done so that similarities or differences in data are easily visible and the study results are easier to reach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The informants interpreted feminism based on their perspectives and experiences. They all agreed that Jeng Yah faced many challenges in her fight for women's equality in *Gadis Kretek*. She was mistreated, humiliated, and pressured to meet societal standards. Her efforts to pursue her dreams were often underestimated. Informant 1 noted that Jeng Yah was pushed to fulfill traditional roles, with the ideal woman expected to handle household chores and care for her husband.

The surrounding environment encourages Jeng Yah to fulfill specific roles; for example, in the clove industry, women are only allowed to roll cigarettes, and in the household, women only cook, beautify themselves, and care for children. From there, Jeng Yah seems restricted from doing what she wants. In addition, she is also put down; for example, she is not allowed to enter the blue door to make cigarette sauce because women are considered to ruin the taste. (Informant 1, Non-fan, December 16, 2023)

According to the interview, Informant 4 believes the series shows how deeply ingrained patriarchy is, particularly in Javanese society. For example, Jeng Yah's parents expect her to learn household chores and advise her to stop working, claiming it is a man's job. Three other informants (Informants 1, 2, and 5) agreed,

noting that the portrayal of women in *Gadis Kretek* mirrors societal expectations of the time. One informant shared that women were expected to be obedient and subordinate to men, a mindset that persists in conservative Javanese society. Another informant pointed out that Jeng Yah's experiences mirrored those of her grandmother, who was expected to be a good wife.

Javanese women are always prioritized for the home, so if women are mentioned in Javanese customs, then women are seen as at least able to be homemakers, good wives, and able to take care of the needs of the house. (Informant 5, Non-fan, December 16, 2023)

If you look at the time of Eyang, Eyang seems to be more focused on caring for housework. You could say Eyang is like Jeng Yah, so she is still directed to be a 'good wife,' so she has to focus more on being able to cook, take care of children, and so on. (Informant 1, Non-fan, December 16, 2023)

Indeed, the position of Javanese women at that time was that they were considered obedient, following what was directed to them, and women were still below men. However, I think some of these things are still felt today in some families. This culture is mainly felt by people who are native to Java and are still strong in traditional values, especially as experienced by my grandmother. Usually, my grandmother or my elders still practice that. (Informant 2, Fan, December 17, 2023)

In *Gadis Kretek*, the character Jeng Yah represents several things experienced by the informants, which are marked by restrictions on a woman's behavior or actions. Two of the six informants and the people around them still feel it. Informant 2 revealed that Jeng Yah

describes herself as sometimes restricted in taking specific actions and fighting for what she wants. There are still specific rules that she must obey as a woman. Meanwhile, Informant 5 feels that women, including herself, still have double standards and criticism.

I relate to Jeng Yah because I feel that women still get double standards and criticism for their behavior or actions, including mine. (Informant 5, Non-fan, December 16, 2023)

I feel that Jeng Yah's character represents me, but not everything, just in some things, for example, in fighting for what she wants, and I feel that not everything has to be done by men and women is limited. In addition, as a person who can be considered free and likes to travel, I find it difficult to get permission to do that. I was also told to learn to cook and do other housework, but I do not want to focus on that now. (Informant 2, Fans, December 17, 2023)

The perception or meaning obtained by informants related to feminism states that women can choose what they want. Feminism in *Gadis Kretek* is depicted through the character Jeng Yah, which can be seen from the persistence and her hard work that always tries to prove her ability to Raja, her father, and the surrounding community that women can also make cigarette sauce. Jeng Yah's actions are a form of resistance to the patriarchal culture that is still embraced. In the context of feminism, Jeng Yah's character is considered positive because it illustrates that women can also do men's work.

I see positive things from Jeng Yah and *Gadis Kretek*, such as women being able to work like men and not just being homemakers in the kitchen. I interpret the feminism of

Gadis Kretek as a form of resistance to patriarchy through Jeng Yah only at the beginning of the series. (Informant 4, Non-fan, December 17, 2023)

Feminism does not mean equality, but women have the right to choose what they choose; that is called feminism. (Informant 3, Fan, December 16, 2023)

Women can and are allowed to have ambitions and have the freedom to pursue them just like men. (Informant 1, Non-fan, December 16, 2023)

The informants saw feminism as resistance against patriarchal culture, advocating for women's rights and freedom from societal control. All informants viewed *Gadis Kretek* as a feminist series highlighting the patriarchal situation in 1960s Javanese society during the rise of the cigarette industry. They felt that the ideal standards for women still exist, even within themselves, indicating that patriarchal culture persists, though it is less rigid than before. As a result, some informants believed women should continue fighting for their desires and their right to freedom.

Based on the information obtained through the six informants, they all have the same perspective on the character of Jeng Yah, who is trying to be shown to the public. The character that informants see towards Jeng Yah is formed, namely as a character with an authoritarian personality but has a strong stance seen by the unyielding nature, does not care about the views of others, becomes an independent person, and focuses on herself and dreams. However, despite Jeng Yah's seemingly great nature, she often gets unfair treatment from the people

around her neighborhood. It is because she is a woman who is seen as having the same abilities and weaknesses as other women; women are considered unequal to the abilities and power of men, so Jeng Yah is underestimated and demeaned. In addition to being a very rational figure with what she wants to do, her character can be emulated by the way she tries to prove that women also dare to fight against the strong patriarchal standards, both for women in the past and present. This overall opinion can be seen from the opinions of Informants 2 and 5, who said that is the dominant-hegemonic reading position.

The character of Jeng Yah is described as someone with a strong and independent stance. I feel that Jeng Yah also has a motivation that is right, namely, to fight the patriarchy that exists in her environment. This is evidenced by Jeng Yah, who remains ambitious in achieving her goals despite her failures. (Informant 5, non-fan, December 16, 2023)

Jeng Yah's character is brave, hard-working, unyielding, and strong despite being mistreated, underestimated, and considered just a woman who knows nothing in the world of clove. She fights for her dreams, dares to fight patriarchy, and has a strong vision and mission. I like Jeng Yah's character. (Informant 2, fan, December 16, 2023)

However, Jeng Yah is seen as a positive character who represents women. However, she seems to have a change in character; this is supported by two of the six informants (Informants 3 and 4) who saw a form of change in her. It can be seen in Jeng Yah, who fully trusts the character of Raja, which makes women

individuals who are too dependent on male figures. Jeng Yah's behavior also looks more feminine when she meets Raja than when they first meet, but Jeng Yah's feminine behavior is seen as only being done to Raja. Thus, there is criticism that Jeng Yah's character can be easily defeated by love. Although she had been disappointed by Raja because the sauce recipe had been stolen, some informants regretted Jeng Yah's resilience that in one meeting to get back with Raja, her stance could be immediately shattered and considered unable to let go of her love; this then hindered the goals and focus on the ideals and values of the struggle for women's emancipation that Jeng Yah's character had been building.

She is disappointed with Jeng Yah's character because there are inconsistencies when she meets Raja, for example, when they meet at the train station and end up kissing, even though Raja is already married. If only Jeng Yah had remained firm and not lulled by love, she as a woman would still be able to stand on her own without unnecessary or past feelings. (Informant 3, fan, December 16, 2023)

Informants 3 and 4 feel the hope and strength of feminism that has been slowly developed and shown by Jeng Yah is finally lost because she hopes too much in a man like Raja; Jeng Yah is then considered to have failed to bring feminism by some informants. Jeng Yah is also seen as a stubborn character to herself and those around her. Thus, Informant 4 said that.

Jeng Yah has turned into an arrogant person with a big ego, so Jeng Yah's attitude is often shown in a bad direction or side.

(Informant 4, non-fan, December 17, 2023)

Therefore, Informants 3 and 4 are classified into the oppositional reading, where they reject Jeng Yah's inconsistent personality as a key character of feminist heroism.

Meanwhile, Informants 1 and 6 are in the negotiated reading position. Informant 6 herself admitted that she did not quite grasp Jeng Yah's feminist side. Meanwhile, Informant 1 thinks that Jeng Yah's falling in love with Raja does not show her weakness as a feminist. Informant 1 also admits that this situation is complex.

It is not a weakness of feminism, in my opinion, because feminism is a movement; this is more about Jeng Yah's character, who puts too much trust in Raja. However, it is complex, to be honest; it could lead to discussion from Jeng Yah's actions if women still depend on men. So, it is more about the weak side of Jeng Yah's personality. (Informant 1, non-fan, December 16, 2023)

Then, three (Informants 1, 2, and 5) out of six informants seem to accept the feminist factors that Jeng Yah has shown in this series. This is supported by the way Jeng Yah carries the idea of feminism, seen in her firm and purposeful personality, her courage in defending herself against male domination or power, and the efforts she has made to get whatever she wants.

Informants 3, 4, and 6 thought that Jeng Yah did not bring a decisive feminist factor; according to them, several characters could bring feminism more appropriately. The first character, Arum, shows more feminist values in her actions. Since Arum grew up without a

father, she has constantly trained herself to be versatile. She also has a high sense of caring, is not arrogant, and is patient, which is shown by how she becomes a doctor for the community and her family, namely Rukayah. Arum shows that women can be whatever they want, even under challenging conditions. The second character is Rukayah, who represents the value of feminism because of the independence she shows in her way (for example, by taking care of her mother and Arum when Jeng Yah is not around). Her concern for the people around her (for example, ensuring that the people around her can be happy and can fight for what they want), Rukayah also has a friendly personality and prioritizes the interests of her family above anything else. The last character who is also considered to represent feminism is Purwanti; according to informant, Purwanti's character has strength in her determination to defend her rights and will, where Purwanti does not care about the opinions of others who are hostile to her or can shake her stance, Purwanti seems to be able to know and understand what decisions and solutions are suitable for her and her feelings as a woman (behind her good and bad traits). This is evidenced in the statement from Informant 3.

When Arum was repairing the leaking roof tiles, Lebas offered to help. However, Arum told him to help mop the floor only because she felt that she could do the work and it was also her responsibility, so it appears that even though she refused his offer, she still accepted his kindness by helping him do other work. (Informant 3, fan, December 16, 2023)

All the informants except Informant 4 felt that *Gadis Kretek* succeeded in recalling the struggle and spirit of women's emancipation in the past. This memory then reawakens women's spirits and makes them correct how they respond to gender inequality that persists today. It leads to the conclusion that Informants 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 are in the position of hegemonic dominant reading. These realizations were further elaborated by the informants we interviewed.

Yes, it is appropriate. Because the modern thinking of women today is in line with the character presented through Jeng Yah (the existence of feminism, not wanting double standards and getting a promising career, defending yourself), it has represented women today with women being able to have a good plan for themselves and their future. (Informant 5, non-fan, December 16, 2023)

If it is a habit, I have not yet; if it is a mindset, I think more if we as girls can accept the statement that because we are girls, we are limited, we cannot do a,b,c, etc. We have the right to do what we want to achieve because it is not only boys who can do some things; girls can, too. (Informant 2, fan, December 17, 2023)

If we look at the confessions of both of them, we can see that Jeng Yah's position, which is limited in her movement and workspace, does not remain silent. However, she tries to do everything possible to get the same position as men in the masculine industrial space she likes. Both female and male audiences interpret Jeng Yah's struggle for female emancipation. It was further conveyed by one male informant who said:

If you imagine how you want to do and can or can pursue it, do not be afraid to pursue

it, whether it is against society's standards. Women can and are allowed to have ambitions and have the freedom to pursue them just like men. (Informant 1, non-fan, December 16, 2023)

The feminist discourse brought by movies or series about the struggle for women's emancipation set in the past is not new in the Indonesian film industry. Two of the six informants felt they could easily accept the memory of the struggle and spirit of women's emancipation like this, which is inseparable from the role of the movie *Kartini*. Informant 3 added that accepting the feminist discourse in the *Gadis Kretek* series became easier because she had previously watched *Kartini*, which she considered the "core" of Indonesian feminist films.

Although most felt there was an influence on the revival of the spirit of the struggle for women's emancipation through this series, two of our six informants criticized the change in Jeng Yah's character. Informants 3 and 4 considered Jeng Yah's character to be inconsistent. At the story's beginning, Jeng Yah is shown to be independent and determined and only struggles to get her position as a sauce maker. However, Jeng Yah's character changes into having no stand and letting herself be involved in a romance with Raja, who later betrayed her. Even so, Informant 3 can still feel that the feminist discourses in this series are enough to represent women's struggle to break the patriarchal wall through other feminist characters and discourses. Informant 3 felt

that the feminist discourses of *Gadis Kretek* were more numerous and assertive in the series than in the novel. Informant 3 only focused his disappointment on the inconsistency of Jeng Yah's character. Informant 3's reading as a fan here was found interesting. Informant 3, who has read the novel first and realized the difference with the execution of the series. It is only obtained through the experience and reading of Informant 3, who labels herself as a fan of *Gadis Kretek*.

Unlike Informant 3, Informant 4 believes that the romance portion of Jeng Yah and Raja obscures the relationship between Jeng Yah and cigarettes, and the series ends with her as a romantic melodrama of a cigarette sauce maker. Informant 4 felt that the feminist discourse was only received at the beginning of the series. Therefore, according to Informant 4, the series could not evoke the spirit of women's emancipation because of what she saw in the series; in the end, Jeng Yah could not get what she was fighting for. This view puts Informant 4 in the oppositional reading position.

However, later researchers found the views of other informants who said that even though Jeng Yah was down, the character could still get up and continue her life, as one of the female informants said:

It has presented today's women with women with a good plan for themselves and their future; even if the plan is unsuitable, today's women can find another way out. (Informant 2, fan, December 17, 2023)

Furthermore, Informant 1 felt that the series' large-scale popularity would lead to

discussions in cyberspace or the real world, even if it were about Jeng Yah's foolishness in her romance with Raja. The series indirectly encourages women not to be lulled into a false sense of romance that can harm them. It is what we understand as popular feminism that can be promoted through this series.

CONCLUSION

Netflix recently showed how women struggled in the 1960s through the series *Gadis Kretek*. *Gadis Kretek* is the first Indonesian Netflix original series directed by Kamila Andini and Ifa Isfansyah. This series is based on a novel by Ratih Kumala with the same title. The feminist discourse in this series has been depicted to overcome the forms of patriarchy at that time. This research shows meanings related to feminism in *Gadis Kretek* constructed by informants through different perspectives and experiences using Stuart Hall's Reception Theory.

All the informants in the dominant-hegemonic position feel that there are many challenges in fighting for women's equality. Informants interpret feminism as a movement fighting for women's rights to gain freedom and get out of the existing rules in society as a form of resistance to patriarchal culture.

In portraying how the informants interpret Jeng Yah as a key character of feminist heroism, we found that Informants 2 and 5 are in dominant-hegemonic reading positions. Informants 2 and 5 regarded Jeng Yah as a character who can be emulated by the way she

tries to prove that women also dare to fight against the strong patriarchal standards in the surrounding environment, both for women in the past and present. So, Jeng Yah is already a key character of feminist heroism in *Gadis Kretek*. Meanwhile, Informants 3 and 4 are in oppositional reading positions and think Jeng Yah's character changes when she meets Raja. It can be seen when Jeng Yah fully trusts the character of Raja, which seems to make women individuals who are too dependent on male figures. Informants 3 and 4 admitted they could not consider Jeng Yah a key character of feminist heroism in *Gadis Kretek*. Besides that, Informants 1 and 6 are categorized in negotiated reading positions. Informant 6 admitted that she did not quite grasp the feminist side of Jeng Yah. Meanwhile, Informant 1 thinks that Jeng Yah's falling in love with Raja does not show Jeng Yah's weakness as a feminist and the situation's complexity. In addition, the informants also offered alternative names that could be used as key feminist heroism characters other than Jeng Yah, such as Arum, Rukayah, and Purwanti.

In portraying how the informants think about *Gadis Kretek* as a spearhead for spreading popular feminism, we found that all the informants are in dominant-hegemonic reading positions except Informant 4. Four informants in dominant-hegemonic reading positions agree that *Gadis Kretek* can be used as a spearhead for the spread of popular feminism. Informant 4, in oppositional reading positions, thinks the romance portion of Jeng Yah and Raja obscures

the relationship between Jeng Yah and the cigarette. Ultimately, she sees the series as a romantic melodrama of a cigarette sauce maker.

In this research, the number of male and female informants is unbalanced. We could also not find male informants who were fans of *Gadis Kretek*. Based on our limitations in informants, we suggest that future research consider the distribution of informant characteristics. We recommend further exploration of opposing readings of the dominant ideology in *Gadis Kretek*, such as the view that Jeng Yah's character is weakened by her romance with Raja and how this affects perceptions of feminism. Further analysis of the relationship between gender relations, romance, and dominant characters could provide new insights into audiences' perceptions of feminism in films or drama series.

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