Representation of Feminism in the Mini Series *Ms. Marvel* (2022)

A GRADUATING PAPER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for Gaining the Bachelor

Degree in English Department

By:

Muhammad Abdul Aziz

20101050050

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

FACULTY OF ADAB AND CULTURAL SCIENCES

SUNAN KALIJAGA STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY

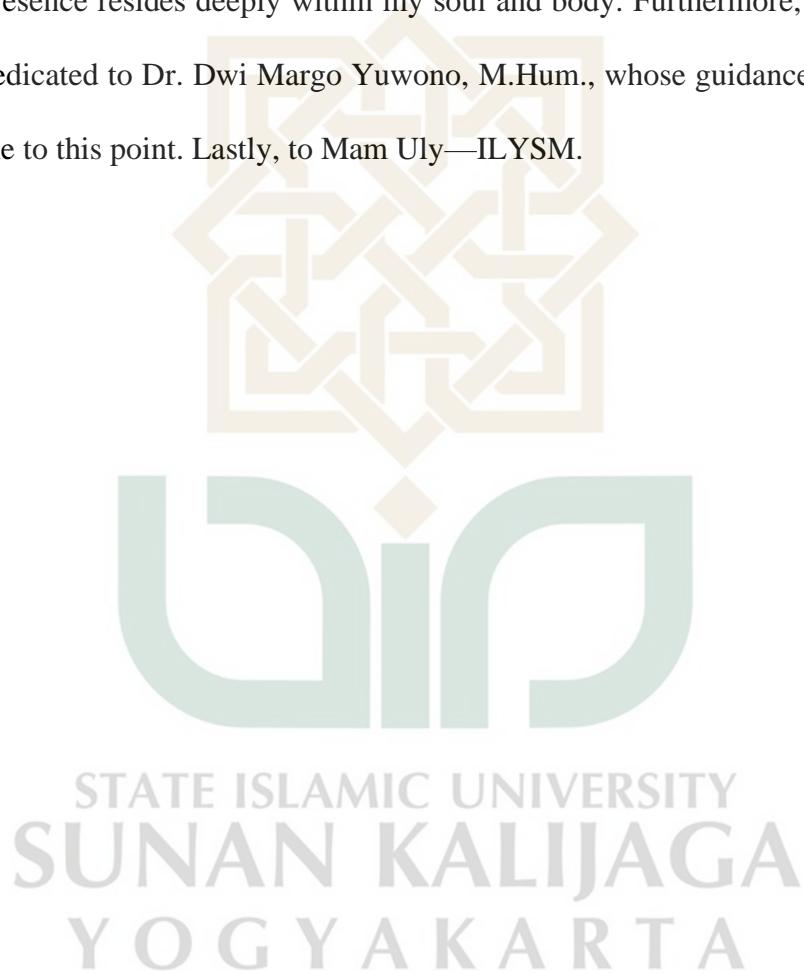**YOGYAKARTA**

2024

MOTTO

"Life is living"

(Urip iku urup) – Sunan Kalijaga

DEDICATION

With the grace of God Almighty and guided by the principle of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, I dedicate this thesis to myself as a response to the expectations of the universe. I also dedicate this work to my parents and brother, whose presence resides deeply within my soul and body. Furthermore, this thesis is dedicated to Dr. Dwi Margo Yuwono, M.Hum., whose guidance has brought me to this point. Lastly, to Mam Uly—ILYSM.

VALIDATION

KEMENTERIAN AGAMA
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI SUNAN KALIJAGA
FAKULTAS ADAB DAN ILMU BUDAYA
Jl. Marsda Adisucipto Telp. (0274) 513949 Fax. (0274) 552883 Yogyakarta 55281

PENGESAHAN TUGAS AKHIR

Nomor : B-2528/Un.02/DA/PP.00.9/12/2024

Tugas Akhir dengan judul   : Representation of Feminism in The Mini Series Ms. Marvel (2022)

yang dipersiapkan dan disusun oleh:

Nama   : MUHAMMAD ABDUL AZIZ
Nomor Induk Mahasiswa   : 20101050050
Telah diujikan pada   : Jumat, 13 Desember 2024
Nilai ujian Tugas Akhir   : A/B

dinyatakan telah diterima oleh Fakultas Adab dan Ilmu Budaya UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta

TIM UJIAN TUGAS AKHIR

Ketua Sidang

Dr. Dwi Margo Yuwono, M.Hum.
SIGNED

Valid ID: 676a73c08b77c

Penguji I

Dr. Witriani, S.S. M.Hum.
SIGNED

Valid ID: 676a692442403

Penguji II

Dr. Ulyati Retno Sari, S.S. M.Hum.
SIGNED

Valid ID: 676a498023a88

Yogyakarta, 13 Desember 2024
UIN Sunan Kalijaga
Dekan Fakultas Adab dan Ilmu Budaya

Prof. Dr. Nurdin, S.Ag., S.S., M.A.
SIGNED

Valid ID: 676a7a97ea9c8

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Yogyakarta, December 5, 2024

ammad Abdul Aziz

NIM: 20101050050

v

v

NOTA DINAS

NOTA DINAS

Hal: Skripsi
     a.n. Muhammad Abdul Aziz

                    Yth.
                    Dekan Fakultas Adab dan Ilmu Budaya
                    UIN Sunan Kalijaga
                    Di Yogyakarta

Assalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb

Setelah memeriksa, meneliti, dan memberikan arahan untuk perbaikan atas skripsi saudara:

    Nama   : Muhammad Abdul Aziz
    NIM   : 20101050050
    Prodi   : Sastra Inggris
    Fakultas   : Adab dan Ilmu Budaya
    Judul   : **Representation of Feminism in the Mini Series Ms. Marvel (2022)**

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                    Yogyakarta, 04 Desember 2024
                    Pembimbing

                    Dr. Dwi Margo Yuwono, M.Hum.
                    NIP: 19770419 200501 1 002

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Muhammad Abdul Aziz

NIM: 20101050050

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ABSTRACT

For the first time, the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) introduces a Muslim superhero, Kamala Khan, in the series *Ms. Marvel* (2022). Kamala is an American-Pakistani teenager living in Jersey City. She tries to balance her life between a multicultural society and her Pakistani Muslim family. This study looks at how the series shows feminism by focusing on issues like unfair treatment, discrimination, and stereotypes about women. This research is important to understand how popular shows like *Ms. Marvel* represent women's struggles and inspire positive change. The study also explores how the female characters in the series show their independence and take on important roles, such as leading and making decisions. The researcher uses a qualitative method to carefully examine the themes and characters in the series. Stuart Hall's theory of representation helps explain how the series creates meaning, while Rosemary Putnam Tong's feminist theory is used to connect the ideas to culture and society. The results show that *Ms. Marvel* talks about the problems women face, like inequality, but also highlights their strength and determination to overcome these issues. This series proves that stories in media can inspire change by showing strong and diverse women.

Keywords: Feminism, Women's Rights, *Ms. Marvel*, Representation, Equality

Representasi Feminisme pada Mini-Series "Ms. Marvel" (2022)

Muhammad Abdul Aziz 20101050050

ABSTRAK

Untuk pertama kalinya, Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) memperkenalkan seorang superhero Muslim, Kamala Khan, dalam serial *Ms. Marvel* (2022). Kamala adalah seorang remaja Amerika-Pakistan yang tinggal di Jersey City. Dia berusaha menyeimbangkan hidupnya antara masyarakat multikultural dan keluarganya yang berasal dari budaya Muslim Pakistan. Studi ini membahas bagaimana serial tersebut menampilkan feminisme dengan berfokus pada masalah seperti perlakuan tidak adil, diskriminasi, dan stereotip terhadap perempuan. Penelitian ini penting untuk memahami bagaimana acara populer seperti *Ms. Marvel* merepresentasikan perjuangan perempuan dan menginspirasi perubahan positif. Studi ini juga mengeksplorasi bagaimana karakter perempuan dalam serial ini menunjukkan kemandirian mereka dan mengambil peran penting, seperti memimpin dan membuat keputusan. Peneliti menggunakan metode kualitatif untuk secara cermat menganalisis tema dan karakter dalam serial ini. Teori representasi Stuart Hall membantu menjelaskan bagaimana makna dibentuk dalam serial ini, sementara teori feminisme dari Rosemary Putnam Tong digunakan untuk menghubungkan ide-ide tersebut dengan budaya dan masyarakat. Hasil dari studi ini menunjukkan bahwa *Ms. Marvel* membahas masalah-masalah yang dihadapi perempuan, seperti ketidaksetaraan, tetapi juga menyoroti kekuatan dan tekad mereka untuk mengatasi tantangan tersebut. Serial ini membuktikan bahwa cerita dalam media dapat menginspirasi perubahan dengan menampilkan perempuan yang kuat dan beragam.

Kata Kunci: Feminisme, Hak-Hak Perempuan, *Ms. Marvel*, Representasi, Kesetaraan

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of study

Patriarchal culture is not something new. This social system places men as the primary power holders and dominates various roles. In a patriarchal culture, men have a higher position than women (Halizah & Faralita, 2023). Patriarchal culture is also the basis of the feminist theory that is widely discussed today. Every feminist movement is against patriarchy because their goal is equality based on humanity, regardless of men and women, black and white races, Asian and African ethnicities, or their social status, all of which are shown in this series, which is set in Jersey City, America.

America, a multicultural country, was portrayed by Israel Zangwill in a theatrical performance held in 1909 :

> There she lies, the great melting pot—listen! Can't you hear the roaring and the bubbling? There gapes her mouth—The harbor where a thousand feeders come from the ends of the world to pour in their human freight. Ah, what a stirring and a seething! Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian, —black and yellow— . . East and West, North and South, the palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the cross—how the Great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flame! Here shall they all unite to build the Republic of man and the Kingdom of God. ...Peace, peace, to all you unborn millions, fated to fill this giant continent (Lee, 1995 p.35).

The conception of America as a multicultural country eventually led to differences in other classes. The assumption is that the white race is the superior race and brown or black skin becomes the third class (Tong, 2009).

According to Crenshaw (1997), the different dimensions of identity are not isolated but intertwine and overlap to create unique experiences of discrimination and disadvantage, emphasized Intersectionality. The theory explicitly addresses multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage that can compound themselves, creating obstacles that conventional thinking often fails to recognize. This became even more interesting when Marvel Studios finally released a mini-series entitled "Ms. Marvel" which tells the story of an Indian-Pakistani superhero during American Jersey City culture.

Marvel Studios introduces a Muslim female superhero to the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) for the first time. Ms. Marvel, a series based on the comic of the same name, tells the story of a Pakistani Muslim family that has moved to America. As a Muslim family, they continue to adhere to the teachings of Pakistani Islam, which strongly emphasizes protecting the dignity of women.

Kamala Khan, or Beta as her family affectionately calls her, loves Marvel stories and tales. Set in Jersey, the Islamic atmosphere is strongly felt in this movie. Coinciding with the election of mosque administrators, she and her sister Nakia Bahadir notice some odd things about the mosque. Starting from the porous walls of the mosque and the shabby-looking women's building, as well as the case of losing the footwear of several female worshipers, which is considered trivial. Nakia finally decided to run for the mosque's board. Marvel Studios raises the issue of stereotypes against American Muslim women and realizes the importance of gender equality. Both of these are presented epically

as Kamala Khan discovers superpowers and begins to learn to become a superhero.

Marvel Studios raises issues that are pretty strong in the Muslim community. Kamala Khan, who has a rebellious nature, is used as a stereotype breaker that women are destined to be weak. Nakia, who has a high sense of sympathy and social care, fights for the rights of women given makeshift facilities at the mosque where she lives. These two characters will be significant in the discussion presented this time. Using the representation approach written by Stuart Hall, we will dissect the content of the Ms. Marvel series.

To examine the series, the author uses representation or the concept used in social meaning through the processes and systems of signification available: Dialog, writing, video, film, and photography. In simple terms, representation is the product of meaning through language (Hall & Open University, 1997). Representation is one of the essential practices that produce and sustain culture. Culture is about experience. Language is a medium that becomes an institution for interpreting something and producing and changing meaning. Through language (written, spoken, or pictorial symbols), there is a process of expressing thoughts, concepts, and ideas about something. The meaning of something depends on how the researcher represents it (Gibbs, 2002).

1.2. Research Question

The research question of this study is How does the Ms. Marvel mini-series represent feminism?

1.3. Objective and Significance of Study

This research discusses how the Ms. Marvel series represents the inequality for women in Jersey City and how the characters try to overcome the existing stereotypes. The topic is then described by using the representation approach. According to Stuart Hall (1997), it is classified into three aspects: the reflective approach, which examines how inequality occurs in society. Then, the intentional approach is used, which is how the inequality is conveyed physically and symbolically. The last is the constructional approach, which is how the message can be conveyed through language that can be understood.

1.4. Literature Review

Here are some previous studies from both articles and theses containing the same theory or object. One of them is a thesis from Dinda Arum Mumpuni (2022) entitled *Representasi Ajaran Islam di Tengah Budaya Amerika dalam Serial "Ms. Marvel" (Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes)*. The topic discussed in the study aims to examine the representation of Islamic doctrine in American culture in the series "Ms. Marvel" using Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis and Stuart Hall's representation approach. The study found that the Islamic doctrine depicted in the series is not like in most American films that always depict Islamophobia in the form of violence or acts of terrorism, such

as the 9/11 tragedy. According to the research, the teachings of Islam in the movie are depicted through *Iman, Islam and Ihsan*. With that background, the researcher did not delve further into the inequality that occurred in the film because it focused on the representation of Islamic doctrine (Mumpuni, 2022).

Putri Dinda Safira (2023), in her thesis entitled *Representasi Muslim Minoritas dalam Film Ms.Marvel Karya Bisha K. Ali (Toleransi Beragama pada Muslim Pakistan Amerika).* This research discusses how the attitude of the American non-Muslim community views the Muslim minority community there. The research found that many non-Muslim characters have an attitude of tolerance, both in carrying out worship or during celebrations of holidays such as Eid. However, some characters have not been able to tolerate it. Like the American law enforcement officers. From the research, it is concluded that there are still those who underestimate the Muslim minority in America (Safira, 2023).

The article "Representation of Feminism in the Film Penyalin Cahaya" was written by Nevan Gonza, Fanny Lesmana and Daniel Budiana, who explained that in the film *Penyalin Cahaya*, there are several elements of feminism. This is proven by the courage of Sur, who tries to find the truth about the events she experienced after the party, and Grace, who dares to lead the Sun Theater. Research that uses semiotic methods in the form of television codes that John Fiske has written. The research used a Qualitative approach with the *Penyalin Cahaya* movie as the subject and the representation of feminism in the movie as the object (Gonza et al., 2022).

Another article entitled "Analysis of Feminism in the Film "The Hunting Ground" Reviewed from John Fiske's Version of Semiotics" was written by Rachim Herdini Fabianti. The article analyzes the film "The Hunting Ground", which tells the story of new students, especially women, who are the targets of rape and sexual violence on American campuses. Unfortunately, most campuses are apathetic and cover up the incident to maintain accreditation and credibility. This makes the research quite interesting because the movie also presents several interviews that researchers use as material that strengthens their research. The survivors finally dared to stand up to their campus and file a lawsuit for the case that befell them. It also became a sign of liberal feminism resulting from the incident. This research, which uses John Fiske's semiotic approach and qualitative methods, can attract readers because the discussion he raises is still very relevant today (Fabiyanti, 2020).

This research aims to fill the void of previous research. Different from previous research, this research discusses the Ms. Marvel series representing feminism that occurs due to racial, ethnic and religious differences that occur in the story setting of Jersey City, America. In addition, this research will also discuss some of the stereotypes of women that exist there and how the characters in this series break these stereotypes.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

1.5.1. Representation

Hall suggests that representation is not a mere reflection of reality but

an active process of meaning-making, where cultural texts shape and influence our understanding of the world (Hall & Open University, 1997). By analyzing these representations, we can identify the ideologies and power dynamics that inform the narrative (Anna, 2021). This approach also considers the potential for multiple interpretations and contestation of meaning. Different viewers may interpret the representation of social classes in diverse ways, influenced by their social backgrounds and perspectives.

Stuart Hall (1997) also suggests three approaches that can be used to dissect representations: the reflective approach, the intentional approach, and the constructionist approach. The reflective approach illustrates that every object in the real world has a meaning that can be conceptualized into language. Language can be likened to a mirror of this meaning. Then, the intentional approach depends more on the emotional state of the speaker, writer or person making the representation. Because the real meaning still comes from their dimension. The constructionist approach emphasizes how meaning is constructed through language. The constructionist approach confirms that reality has material aspects and symbolic practices where meaning, representation and language emerge.

1.5.2. Feminism

Feminism is an ideology that realizes the low position of women in society and the desire to improve or change this situation. Feminism comes from the Latin word *femina*, which means having female characteristics.

In general, feminism refers to an ideology of women's liberation because inherent in all its approaches is the belief that women experience injustice because of their gender (Kasiyan, 2008. p.73). The word feminism was first coined by utopian socialist activist Charles Fourier in 1837. Then, the movement in Europe moved to America and developed rapidly since the publication of the book entitled *The Subjection of Women* (1869) by John Stuart Mill. This struggle marked the birth of the feminist movement in the first wave.

The schools of feminism are very diverse and have different things to be concerned about. Rosemarie Putnam Tong (2009) divides the flow and feminist thought into eight major sections,

a. Liberal Feminism

    This theory says that freedom and equality are rooted in rationality, and "women are rational beings", too, so they demand the same rights as men. Here, women must be educated to compete for opportunities to enter the principles of masculinity (Women in Development).

b. Radical Feminism: Libertarian and Cultural Perspectives

    This emerged because women's oppression comes from men, which is considered to be rooted in the male gender and its patriarchal ideology, as well as physical control over women, which is a system of sexual hierarchy where men have superior power and economic privilege. Radical feminism opposes existing political and social organizations in general because they are inherently tied to patriarchy. As such,

radical feminists tend to be sceptical of political action within the current system and instead tend to focus on cultural change that undermines patriarchy and its associated hierarchical structures.

c. Marxist and Socialist Feminism: Classical and Contemporary

Marxist feminism rejects the idea of biology as the basis for gender distinctions. In this school, women's oppression is part of class oppression in production relations, so women's issues are always placed in the framework of criticism of capitalism.

d. Psychoanalytic Feminism

This emphasizes the differences between women and men physically and psychologically, in this case criticizing the theory put forward by Sigmund Freud about women who are full of sexism and tend to be patriarchal, such as the term penis envy, masculine complex, and consider women inferior.

e. Care-Focused Feminism

This focuses on how society systematically shapes different identities and behaviors between men and women because they are biologically different, so services to meet women's needs must be provided.

f. Multicultural, Global and Postcolonial Feminism

Multicultural feminism focuses on the view that in a country like America, not all women are created or constructed equally. It depends not only on race and ethnicity but also on sexual identity, gender identity, generality, religion, level of education, occupation or profession, marital status and more.

g. Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is an understanding of the relationship between women and the universe, especially in terms of powerlessness and unfair treatment of both. The term ecofeminism was first introduced in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne. In its application, ecofeminism applies an ethic of care to realize social justice ecologically, prioritizing the value of femininity and opposing patriarchal culture.

h. Post-modern and Third Wave Feminism

Postmodern feminism, like postmodernism, rejects essentialism and binary opposition because they are patriarchal constructs that oppress women. Postmodern feminism aims to dissect the causes of gender inequality based on society, culture and language by analyzing society, language and written works to identify existing biases. Postmodern feminist theory explains that sex and gender are socially constructed through language. As a result, different societies have different constructions of both sex and gender.

1.5.3. Film

The film was born as part of the development of technology. Film was invented due to the development of photographic principles and projectors. In 1888, Thomas Edison first developed a moving image camera when he made a 15-second movie that recorded one of his assistants sneezing. A movie is a series of images that move to form a story, also called a Movie or Video.

According to Alfathoni (2020), the elements of film formation can be

divided into narrative and cinematic elements.

a. Narrative Elements

The narrative element relates to the story aspect or theme of the movie. In this case, elements such as character, problem, conflict, location, and time are the elements. All of them are combined in one story that is arranged with a clear and organized flow so that the audience can understand what is conveyed.

b. Cinematic Elements

Cinematic elements are technical aspects in the production of a movie consisting of :

1) Mise en scene has four main elements: Setting, lighting, costumes, and make-up,

2) Sinematografi, which involves photographic techniques for film, such as the selection of action and camera angles and the use of visual effects (Sikov, 2010),

3) Editing, which is the transition of an image (shot) to another image, grading to adjust the colour of each scene, adding the effects needed and arranging other things so that the message can be conveyed, and

4) Sound is anything in the movie that we can capture through our sense of hearing.

Film structure refers to how a story is organized and presented in a

film. Several elements make film structure:

a. Shot

A shot is part of a long series of images recorded in just one take. Technically, a shot is when the cameraman starts pressing the record button until he presses the record button again.

b. Scene

A short segment of an entire story that shows one continuous action bound together by space, time, content (story), theme, character, or motif. A scene generally consists of several interconnected shots.

c. Sequence

A large segment that shows one complete event. A sequence generally consists of several interconnected scenes. In literature, a sequence can be defined as a chapter or sub-chapter.

1.6. Research Method

1.6.1. Type of Research

The research method in this study is descriptive qualitative. Qualitative research methods are methods used to identify people's experiences, beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes. This method is a method of inquiry to understand the meaning of social phenomena. Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data, such as words, images, and sounds, to gain insight into the subject of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Thus, the researcher will find it easier to determine and analyze this series through various scenes, describing

various events and reviewing them with a feminist approach.

1.6.2. Data Sources

The main data used in this research is the Ms. Marvel mini-series, which is the object of study. The data is taken from scenes, dialogue, settings and other things in the series. Because all elements in the movie can certainly contain meaning (Sikov, 2010).

1.6.3. Data Collection Technique

Closely reading each scene in the Ms. Marvel mini-series is the author's method in the data collection process. First, watch the series to get an overall picture of the story, theme, and topic. Then, the scenes related to the representation of feminism in the series will be determined. Collect all data related to the scene, such as screenshots, dialogue, time, and scene descriptions, in the database as much as possible. Then, the collected data will be sorted according to the discussion relevant to the researcher's objectives.

1.6.4. Data Analysis Technique

After all the data is compiled and grouped, the author begins the analysis by describing the representation of inequality in the Ms. Marvel series by referring to the theory of multicultural and global feminism, which focuses on differences in race, ethnicity, and religion as inequality in women. Then, the author will analyze the existence of female stereotypes that occur and how the existing characters break these

stereotypes. The author will provide data such as images, scenes, and dialogue to support the arguments.

1.7. Paper Organization

This research is divided into four chapters: Introduction, Intrinsic Element, Analysis, and Conclusion. Introduction includes the reason why the author chose the discussion, the object of study, some things related to the theory and content of previous research that contains objects or theories similar to what the author discusses, as well as the research method that the author chose, data collection and analysis and presentation of the results of the discussion. In the next chapter, this research will thoroughly discuss the Ms. Marvel series, including themes, plots, characters, and characteristics. In the next chapter, the author will present the results of the analysis that the author has done in the form of the representation of feminism in the Ms. Marvel series. At the end of the chapter, the author will present the results of this research.
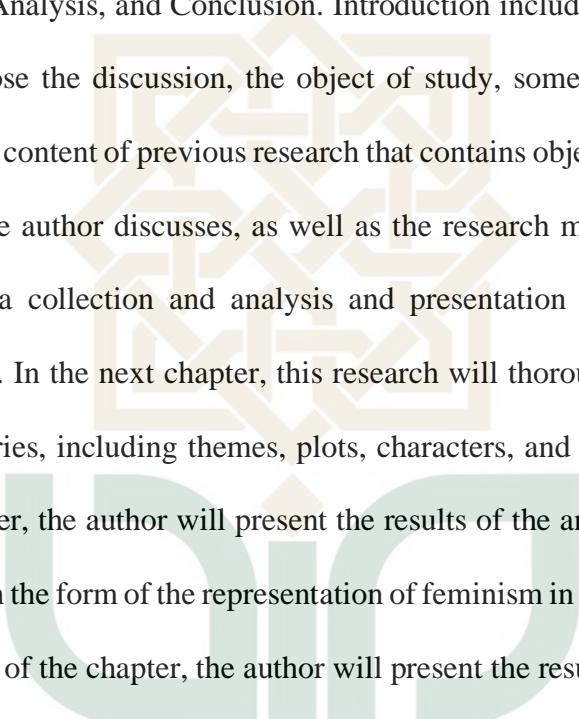
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.1. Conclusion

In the research of the representation of feminism in the Ms. Marvel series (2020), the researcher can conclude that several inequalities are the cause of the feminism movement depicted in the Ms. Marvel series in a constructional way that emphasizes Saussure's concept of sign and signifies. With society's belief that women are 'the other' or 'second class human', the Ms. Marvel series provides a sign that aligns with society's thoughts about women who must focus on the domestic sphere. Intersection is caused by race, beliefs, and wealth differences, which ultimately affect social constructs. Women with white skin will be treated differently from women of colour. Likewise, women who have minority beliefs will be treated differently from women who have majority beliefs.

In addition to representing inequality, the Ms. Marvel series also displays the goals of feminism with an intentional approach. The Ms. Marvel series incorporates the author's desire to break the societal stigma that women are weak and unempowered. The characters depict independent women with physical and mental strength who struggle to realize their desire to protect humanity. Ms Marvel's characteristics as a woman of Pakistani descent and Muslim faith were designed to break the stigma of previously emerged intersections. Ms. Marvel is presented in many male superheroes who are always portrayed as masculine and always help weak women. It becomes a

counter-stereotype that appears in society. In addition, some characters are shown as women who realize the inequality of facilities and public services for women and finally participate in democracy, which leads them to change the fate of Muslim women. Thus, from this research, we can understand the representation of inequality and the realization of feminist goals in the Ms. Marvel series.

4.2. Suggestion

After completing this research, the researcher realizes that the author's limitation in making this research more ideal is the lack of literacy, knowledge, and understanding related to film, superheroes, and feminism. The author hopes that future researchers examining the Ms. Marvel Series will focus on the characters to be studied. Genetic structuralism might be an interesting theory as the leading theory that also examines the background of the scriptwriter and how the Ms. Marvel series can be studied with the social conditions of the setting in the series. That way, future researchers can also examine the truth of Stuart Hall's Representation theory in this study as comparative data.

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