

CHAPTER 2

INTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Intrinsic Elements

Intrinsic elements are the internal components that construct meaning within a narrative text. It is an object to be analysed by its complexity, coherence, equilibrium, integrity, and the interrelations among its component elements (Abrams, 2011, p. 64). In this sense, cinema is a medium that presents theoretical arguments through visual and narrative means and not merely through written exposition. By analysing theme, plot, characters, conflicts, and setting as components of this theoretical project, this chapter establishes how the film *Origin* (2023) demonstrates how Isabel Wilkerson's caste framework operates across different societies and how each narrative element contributes to making it visible, depending on the social position of the characters within it.

2.1.1 Theme

A theme represents the meaning that unifies a narrative work. According to Abrams, the theme is "*a general concept or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, which an imaginative work is designed to involve and make persuasive to the reader*" (Abrams, 2011, p. 201). In cinematic works, the theme functions explicitly through dialogue and plot, and implicitly through visual symbolism, mise-en-scène, and structural patterns.

The primary theme of this thesis is the invisibility of caste beneath the racial framework, and how that invisibility is determined by cultural capital, habitus, and symbolic power operating within and across the fields. On the surface, America, Nazi Germany, and India appear to have nothing in common. Their languages, cultures, and histories are entirely different. But the film shows that underneath those differences, all three societies are held together by the same system that places certain groups at the top and keeps others permanently at the bottom. It demonstrates that to understand oppression, it requires looking beyond race to recognize hierarchies that persist across time and space.

2.1.2 Plot

Plot refers to the organized arrangement of events in a narrative, structured through cause-and-effect relationships rather than simple chronology. It is a rational construction of affective elements in which individual elements are strung along the story carcass to produce meaning and emotional response (Eisenstein, 1949, p. 8). Therefore, what is important in cinematic narrative is only how the events are constructed to produce a particular effect on the audience. The film *Origin's* plot is structured non-linearly, moving back and forth between Isabel Wilkerson's present-day research journey and three historical and geographical contexts: America's Jim Crow era, Nazi Germany before World War II, and contemporary India.

2.1.3 Character and Characterization

Character analysis in narrative theory examines how individual personalities function within fictional worlds to embody themes, drive plot development, and engage audiences through identification. In cinema, characters are creating causes and register effects within a film's narrative form, and their actions and reactions contribute strongly to engagement with the film (Bordwell and Thompson, 2024, p. 76). In the film *Origin* (2023), it constructs characters whose social positions determine their capacity to recognize caste, their accumulated cultural capital, and the habitus shaped by their specific field of existence.

The characters in the film *Origin* (2023) centre on Isabel as main character, whose research gradually constructs a framework for naming caste as a deep-seated structure of racism. Also, there are supporting characters who reveal that the capacity to understand caste as a system is never equal but is instead determined by the cultural capital and habitus shaped by one's social position. These supporting characters, including her mother, her cousin Marion, Miss Hale, and Al Bright's former teammate.

2.1.4 Conflict

2.1.4.1 Internal Conflict

In the film *Origin* (2023), Isabel's internal conflict operates on the level of what narrative theory identifies as a tension, where the intellectual drive to complete a project (which is her caste

framework) clashes with personal grief following the sudden loss of her husband Brett and her mother within the same year, a conflict that Abrams notes, "*opposing desires or values in the protagonist's own temperament*" collide (Abrams, 2011, p. 294). Yet the film insists that Isabel's personal losses deepen rather than interrupt her research as each encounter with caste's dehumanization, whether in India, Germany, or America, resonates with the loss she carries in her own body.

2.1.4.2 External Conflict

In the film *Origin* (2023), Isabel faces external conflict on two levels simultaneously, fitting what narrative theory describes as "*pitted against an important opponent*" or against "*the circumstances that stand between him and a goal he has set himself*" (Abrams, 2011, p. 294). The first is interpersonal, represented by Sabine, who argues that American slavery and the Holocaust belong to different structural categories, and by Marion, who insists that everything Isabel describes is simply racism. The second conflict is when Isabel is up against the caste system itself, a structure so deeply rooted across so many centuries, which shows that inequality is considered normal. This conflict does not reach a clean resolution by the end of the film, and there is no promise that caste will be dismantled. This open ending shows that caste is not a problem one person can solve but can be challenged through collective solidarity.

2.1.5 Setting

Setting refers to the temporal, spatial, and social contexts in which narrative events occur. The overall setting of a narrative or dramatic work is the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which its action occurs (Abrams and Harpham, 2011, p. 363). In the film *Origin* (2023), the setting's movement across three continents and three historical periods provides visual evidence for Wilkerson's claim that caste is not a uniquely American phenomenon but a global hierarchy.

2.1.5.1 Setting of Time

This setting of time addresses the historical period in which the narrative takes place. Film *Origin* (2023) moves between Isabel Wilkerson's present-day research journey and three historical contexts: the American Jim Crow era, Nazi Germany before World War II, and contemporary India. The film is structured side by side as structurally identical. This construction challenges the common tendency to understand racism as only happening in America, even though this pattern continues to show up in different places and different eras. The film's ability to move fluidly between these time periods allows it to build a visual argument about the caste system.

2.1.5.2 Setting of Place

The film's geographical movement across three continents (America, Germany, and India) serves as further evidence and

argument for Wilkerson's transnational approach to caste. The film *Origin* (2023) draws visual parallels between Jim Crow, Nazi institutions, and Indian settlements to reveal their structural similarities, as each space is governed by principles of segregation and the assignment of fixed positions within the same hierarchy.

2.1.5.3 Setting of Social Background

In the film *Origin* (2023), the social background consists of three contexts (American segregation, Nazi Germany, and Indian caste society). Here, the film reveals that their mechanisms of social control are identical: hereditary status assignment, occupational restriction, marriage prohibition, and systematic dehumanization. Each society uses a different word to explain why certain people must be kept below others. In America, it is race. In Germany, it was blood. In India, it is impurity.

2.2 Cinematography

Visual decisions shape how a film looks and what it communicates, including where the camera is placed, how the shot is framed, how light is used, and how the image is composed. The true language of film is not found in the written script, but in what is constructed visually: the arrangement of bodies in space, movement, and the way individual shots are edited together into a sequence (Eisenstein, 1982, p. 10).

2.2.1 Camera Distance (Shots)

Camera distance refers to how far the camera is positioned from its subject, which determines how much of the scene is visible and how the viewer relates emotionally to what is on screen. The long shot, medium shot, and close-up each serve a distinct purpose, because each one positions the viewer differently in relation to the subject and communicates a different perspective on what is being shown (Eisenstein, 1982, p. 150). By shifting between these scenes, *Origin* (2023) shows that closer shots emphasize emotional intimacy and detail, while distant shots provide spatial context and demonstrate relationships between subjects and their environments.

2.2.1.1 Close-up Shot

The close-up is used to create a sense of psychological intimacy between the viewer and the character. The shot through which a character ultimately reveals or conceals who they are (Eisenstein, 1982, p. 150). In the film *Origin* (2023), close-ups are used to capture the moments of vulnerability that dialogue alone cannot fully convey. By bringing the viewer this close to a character's face and expression, these shots make the film's theoretical argument about caste feel personal, turning something intellectual into something the audience can feel in their body as they watch.

2.2.1.2 Extreme Close-up Shot

Extreme close-up shots show specific details of a face or physical object and magnify them, so it is impossible to ignore them. Film built mostly on wider shots, an extreme close-up carries significant force precisely because it breaks from the visual rhythm the viewer has been following (Bordwell and Thompson, 2024, p. 189). In the film *Origin* (2023), this shot draws attention to documents, physical markers, or archival materials that serve as concrete evidence of the Wilkerson's pillars of caste.

2.2.1.3 Medium Shot

The medium shot frames characters from roughly the waist up, giving the viewer enough visual to see both a person's expression and their body language at the same time. This framing draws the viewer into a closer relationship with the people on screen (Eisenstein, 1982, p. 150). In *Origin* (2023), the filmmaker uses medium shots throughout the conversations between Isabel and the people she talks to, placing the viewer directly inside those exchanges. It makes the debates about caste recognition feel like something the audience is part of.

2.2.1.4 Medium-Long Shot

The medium-long shot frames the full body of a character alongside the environment they are in. It keeps the human figure visible while also showing enough of the surroundings to establish where and how that person exists within their world (Bordwell and Thompson, 2024, p. 189). In *Origin* (2023), the filmmaker uses this framing in the historical scenes depicting segregated American spaces, Nazi institutional environments, and Indian caste settings. By showing characters within these spaces, the shot communicates that a person's position in the caste hierarchy is not simply a personal condition, but something assigned and maintained by the social world they inhabit.

2.2.1.5 Long Shot

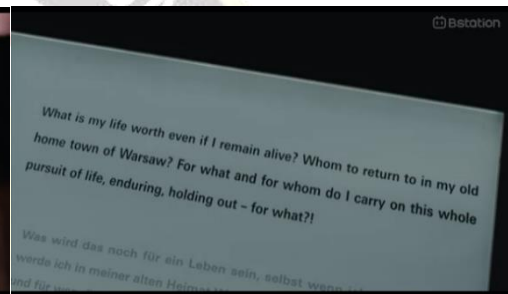
The long shot serves to establish scale and context, which means "*to convey the general scope of the phenomenon*" (Eisenstein, 1982, p. 150). In the film *Origin* (2023), this technique positions individual characters as small figures within social landscapes, visually articulating how caste systems dwarf individuals. For instance, a long shot depicting a crowd during a Nazi rally emphasizes the individual's precarious place within the social order and makes the systemic nature of oppression felt before any dialogue names it.

2.2.1.6 Extreme Long Shot

Extreme long shots create visual impact by showing entire institutional complexes, geographical landscapes, or crowd scenes that represent the scope of caste systems. Bordwell and Thompson explain that in the extreme long shot, "*making it the natural framing for landscapes, bird's-eye views of cities, and other vistas*" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2024, p. 189).



Picture 2.2.1.1 Close-Up Shots



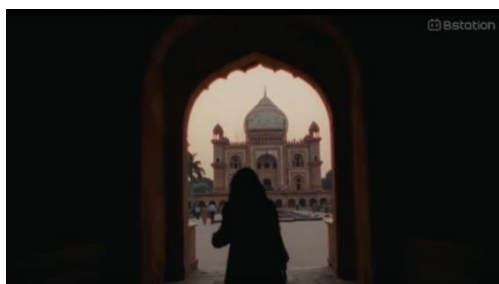
Picture 2.2.1.2 Extreme Close-up Shot



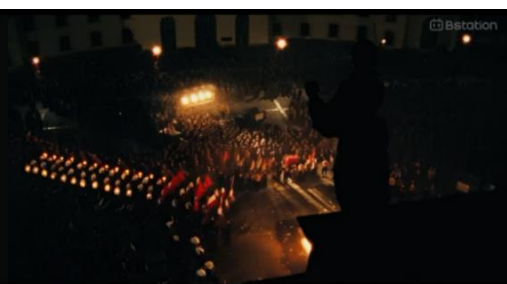
Picture 2.2.1.3 Medium Shot



Picture 2.2.1.4 Medium Long Shot



Picture 2.2.1.5 Long Shot



Picture 2.2.1.6 Extreme Long Shot