

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In capitalist societies, the working class has always been pushed down by the upper class. The rich control money, jobs, power, land, banks, and most chances in life. Workers earn low pay wages, grueling hours with little safety or time off, dangerous workplaces, and limited opportunities for advancement or education. They often lived in slums, scavenged for food scraps, faced evictions and mass unemployment, lacked access to healthcare or schooling, and struggled daily for survival amid economic despair. During an economic crisis, the gap between the rich and the poor becomes even more visible. The Great Depression of the 1930s is one of the clearest examples of this.

This unfair system matches Karl Marx's idea of class struggle and class conflict. Marx believed that the tension between the rich and the poor was not accidental. It was built into the very structure of capitalist society, where those who own wealth and power will always work to protect their position. He argued that this tension would eventually push the working class to demand change and fight back against the system that oppressed them. The movie *The Boys in the Boat* (2023) clearly shows the social and economic realities of the 1930s Great Depression through the story of Joe Rantz, a young American Olympic rower from the University of Washington team.

1.2 Research Question

1. How does the film *The Boys in the Boat (2023)* represent the social and economic conditions of the working class during the Great Depression?
2. How do the conflicts between working-class characters and bourgeoisie characters in the film *The Boys in the Boat (2023)* reflect Karl Marx's theory of class conflict?
3. How do individuals experiencing social inequality and class struggle overcome these challenges in the film *The Boys in the Boat (2023)*?

1.3 Objectives

1. To describe how the film *The Boys in the Boat (2023)* represents the social and economic conditions of the working class during the Great Depression.
2. To examine how the conflicts between working-class characters and bourgeoisie characters in the film *The Boys in the Boat (2023)* reflect Karl Marx's theory of class conflict.
3. To analyze how individuals experiencing social inequality and class struggle overcome these challenges in the film *The Boys in the Boat (2023)*.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The scope and emphasis of the study highlights the intrinsic aspects of the film *The Boys in the Boat 2023*, a biographical sports drama directed by George Clooney and released by Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) and Amazon Studios. The intrinsic aspects of the film are analyzed through its narrative and cinematographic elements. The study will further examine the film's portrayal of poverty, fraud, and the struggle between the lower and upper classes.

1.5 Previous Studies

A Marxist analysis of *Minari* (2020) by Liya Nathania uses Marxist ideas to show a Korean-American working-class family's chase for the American Dream. It highlights class struggle, hard work at the chicken factory, feeling disconnected from their jobs (alienation), and wrong beliefs about success (false consciousness). Jacob and Monica's fights over money and family values show how capitalism creates problems in working families. The film connects personal troubles to bigger issues in a money driven world.

"Social Class Conflict in *The Purge* Movie 2013" by Khoridatul Bahiyyah (2017) analyzes "The Purge" movie through the lens of Marxist theory. The research investigates the complex relationships between upper and lower classes, focusing on oppression and resistance within the film's narrative. The study employs a qualitative

descriptive approach to examine twelve key scenes and dialogues, revealing how structural oppression manifests through ideological Marxist elements including racism, materialism, and radicalism, as well as economic Marxist principles. The researcher identifies two forms of lower-class resistance: war of position and war of movement. This analysis of class conflict in cinematic representation contributes to broader understanding of how media portrays social power dynamics and provides a methodological framework for analyzing class struggle in visual narratives.

"Conflicts Between Classes in the Movie Knives Out" by Frajna Puspita Firdaus examines Rian Johnson's film "Knives Out" (2019) through a sociological approach inspired by Jeffries and Ransford's social stratification theory. The research investigates how power, privilege, and legitimacy manifest in the interactions between the upper and working classes within the movie. The researcher analyzes dialogues and scenes to demonstrate how the film represents class differences through visual elements such as clothing and possessions, and how these differences construct discriminatory practices. The study reveals how social mobility operates within the narrative logic, examining both the possibilities for lower classes to move between social strata and the violence and fragility inherent in class confrontations. This analytical approach enriches understanding of how contemporary cinema portrays and engages with themes of social inequality and class mobility through its representation of class dynamics.

"Class Conflict in Parasite Film Using Marxist Criticism" by Gea Mutiara, Sri Mulyati, and Marsandi Manar (2022) examines how films serve as platforms for promoting cultural diversity, providing information, entertaining audiences, and

scrutinizing philosophical themes such as class conflict. The researchers analyze Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite*, which became one of the highest-rated films in its release year, to ascertain how the film depicts class conflict. The study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to conduct an in depth analysis of the themes portrayed in the film. The researchers utilize Marxist theory by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to interpret the events depicted in *Parasite*. The authors analyze how film narration and cinematic structure contribute to the representation of class discrimination in the movie.

"Class Struggle As Seen In Upside Down Movie" by Muhammad T. Mahfudz (2017) analyzes the film "Upside Down" and investigates its unique narrative framework featuring twin worlds, Up Top and Down Below, which are connected only by the Transworld corporation and serve as a metaphor for class division. The research applies Marxist theory complemented by Film theory to discuss how the bourgeoisie and proletariat are represented within this dual-world structure. The analysis demonstrates that class struggle emerges not simply from geographical separation but from systemic restrictions and differentiation. The study presents an interesting finding that proletariat status is determined by one's relationship to the means of production rather than geographical origin.

"Marxism and Sam Aihimegbe's Blood in the Creek" by Oluwagbemiro Isaiah Adesina (2017). The paper explains how Marxist theory, based on the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, can be used to analyze literature. Adesina says that most societies are split into classes that are always fighting for power. The paper looks at

Sam Aihimegbe's *Blood in the Creek* to see how it shows Marx's ideas about the clash between the rich and the working class, along with money, power, and social unfairness. The study shows that Marxism can help you see how capitalists, the government, their friends, and oil companies take advantage of the oil in Odi and other parts of the Niger Delta for their own gain, hurting the working class.

1.6 Method of Research

1.6.1 Data and Source of Data

The data analyzed in this thesis consists of qualitative data. As Flick (2014) states, qualitative data analysis involves the classification and interpretation of linguistic or visual material, such as text, images, and dialogues. The primary data comes from the American biographical sports drama film *The Boys in the Boat 2023*, directed by George Clooney, used as the main visual source. For transcription and quotations, the film's subtitles provide key references. Secondary data includes books, journals, articles, and other sources that support the theories applied in this study.

1.6.2 Method of Data Collection

Data collection uses content analysis focused on the film *The Boys in the Boat (2023)*, including transcription of key scenes. To gather supporting data for the thesis discussion, library research and content analysis methods are applied. According to Sugiyono (2008), library research involves collecting data from books, journals, manuscripts, and other relevant literature tied to the research subject.

1.6.3 Method of Approach

This study uses Karl Marx's theory of class conflict and class struggle to analyze *The Boys in the Boat* (2023) film. The theory comes from his book *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). It helps explain the relationships, struggles, and unfairness faced by characters from different social classes.

This method aligns with M.H. Abrams' objective approach, as outlined in his book *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Abrams describes the objective study of literature as an evaluation of a work as a self contained object, consisting of its internal elements and their interconnections. Judgments rely entirely on the artwork's intrinsic features (Abrams, 1971: 26). Thus, this analysis focuses on the interactions among characters, the progression of plot events, and the visual symbols that illustrate class conflict in line with Karl Marx's concepts.

1.7 Organization of the Writing

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of this thesis presents the background to the study and underscores the thematic preoccupation of social inequality and class struggle as represented in the film "*The Boys in the Boat* (2023)." This paper shall include a problem statement, a statement on the research objectives, and a review of related literature. The scope of the study and overall organization in writing are also drawn out in the chapter.

CHAPTER 2: INTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The intrinsic theoretical framework uses narrative and cinematographic analysis to examine how "*The Boys in the Boat (2023)*" internally constructs themes of social inequality. Following Abrams' theory, the framework analyzes how plot, character, setting, and theme work together. The plot structure emphasizes the social consequences of working class characters facing systemic barriers, while character analysis focuses on how class identity shapes their development. Setting functions both literally as 1930s Depression-era America and symbolically to reinforce class conflict themes. Cinematographic analysis uses Heiderich's framework to examine how visual techniques like close-ups create intimacy with working class characters while long shots emphasize their vulnerability within larger class structures. This approach reveals how the film's internal elements work together to expose class tensions through storytelling and visual techniques.

CHAPTER 3: EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The extrinsic framework applies Marx's conflict theory from *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) within 1930s America, examining how class struggle are clearly visible. Marx's bourgeoisie versus proletariat struggle creates tension between America's meritocratic ideals and systemic inequalities during the Great Depression. "*The Boys in the Boat*" exemplifies this through working class Washington rowers competing against privileged East Coast teams, demonstrating conflicts with class barriers. The film shows how Marx's collective action concept intersects with individualistic American ideals, transforming the rowing team into a symbol of proletarian resistance. This framework reveals how Depression era conditions intensified Marx's theorized class

conflicts, showing that merit-based success stories operate within capitalist contradictions that simultaneously challenge and legitimize systemic inequality.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and discussion with respect to the themes of social inequality and class struggle as represented in the movie *The Boys in the Boat* (2023).

It serves to analyze how such themes may be realized within the story line and character development, setting them into context with the general socio economic setting of the Great Depression.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the main discussions and findings of the thesis. It reflects on the implications of the study in terms of understanding social inequality and class struggle in American society, as depicted by the story "*The Boys in the Boat*", and further directions this research might take are discussed. These issues are also demonstrated to be of continuing relevance in present debate.