

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The oppression of black people itself has its roots in the days of slavery in the United States (Mattiacci & Oliveira, 2021, p.495). After the colonization of America and Africa, skin color developed from the racism that was manifested through the practice of slavery. Slavery was carried out in a systematic way where there was a separation between white slaves and black slaves. While white slaves were typically assigned to do household chores, black slaves were forced to work in the fields, enduring torture and relentless persecution. This systemic practice of slavery helped shape African Americans' skin color and created a social hierarchy where black people were forced to feel oppressed. As a result of slavery, African-American women were not exempt from oppression, and this historical backdrop of racial discrimination and oppression illuminated the struggles and representation of African Americans-in the early 20th century.

Oppression is the experience of widespread, repeated, and systemic injustice (Deutsch, 2006, p.10). David and Derthick (2014, p.3) stated that oppression arises when there exists an imbalance in power and privilege between groups, with one group possessing greater access, and this power and privilege are wielded to uphold the status quo (i.e., domination of one group over another). Throughout history, black women have faced oppression from various groups, particularly from white groups. Black women are women of Sub-Saharan African descent and the Afro-Diaspora. The term "black" has a definition that has evolved

over time and refers to the racial classification of people. Collins (1990, p.238) argued that black women are uniquely placed as they find themselves at the intersection where two significant and pervasive systems of oppression converge: race and gender.

Black women then organized to fight against oppression through a movement known as Black Feminism. In short, Black Feminism was a term used to describe the consciousness-raising and activism of African-American women who struggled against exploitation caused by racism and patriarchal hegemony. In her book, Collins explained the concept that triggered black feminists to fight against the oppression they experienced. The concept of resistance included self-definition, where Collins (1990, p.112) described the process of self-definition as a transformative journey towards a 'free mind' to emphasize its profound significance in shaping the collective consciousness of black women.

The oppression experienced and the resistance carried out by black women have been portrayed through various forms of media. One of these forms is movies, where the experiences of oppression and resistance can be shown in a vulnerable and powerful way. "Within Our Gates," directed by Oscar Micheaux, is one such movie that explores the oppression of black women. The American silent movie was released in 1920 when the early 90s was an era of racial injustice (especially racial prejudice).

One notable aspect of the movie "Within Our Gates" is that it belongs to the "race movies" genre, produced by and for African-American viewers. It is also a virtual arena in which the representation of African Americans in mass culture is

contested. The plot of "Within Our Gates" centers on a mixed-race schoolteacher named Sylvia Landry, who raises funds for a rural school in the Deep South for impoverished black children by traveling North. The presence of Sylvia Landry, an African-American woman, in the movie, provides insight into the portrait of white supremacist ideology that plagued American society in the early 20th century.

The writer aims to examine the oppression experienced by Sylvia Landry, the main character in the movie "Within Our Gates," while she travels to raise funds for a school on the verge of bankruptcy. This oppression includes experiences of racism, discrimination, rejection, and attempted sexual harassment. Additionally, the writer discusses how Sylvia Landry, as a black feminist, fought against the oppression she faced throughout her journey.

1.2. Research Problem

Based on the background of the study, the writer divided the problems in this study into three primary analyses. The followings are the formulation of the research:

1. How does "Within Our Gates" (1920) portray the intrinsic aspects?
2. What kind of oppression is experienced by a black woman named Sylvia Landry in "Within Our Gates" (1920)?
3. What form of resistance to the oppression experienced by the black woman appears in "Within Our Gates" (1920)?

1.3. Scopes of the Study

The scope of this study is to analyze the resistance of a black woman named Sylvia Landry in the face of oppression she experienced as an African-American woman in the movie "Within Our Gates" (1920). To narrow the analysis, the writer will only discuss black woman's oppression in terms of the matrix of domination and controlling images. Regarding the matrix of domination, Sylvia's experiences arise from intersecting forms based on social class, gender, and race. In contrast, controlling images expose negative stereotypes of black women, exemplified by Sylvia's encounter with two such images: the Mammy and the Black Lady. Furthermore, the writer will also analyze the forms of resistance of Sylvia Landry's character against this oppression, particularly concerning woman's consciousness and standpoint. The writer will examine the topics by concentrating on the movie's narrative and cinematography elements, as well as incorporating pertinent theories.

1.4. Aims of the Study

The purposes of this study are:

1. To find out the intrinsic aspects of "Within Our Gates" (1920).
2. To find out the kind of oppression toward the black woman as reflected by Sylvia Landry in "Within Our Gates" (1920).
3. To find out the forms of resistance to the oppression experienced by a black woman that appears in the movie "Within Our Gates" (1920).

1.5. Previous Studies

This research is not the first to discuss Oscar Micheaux's movie "Within Our Gates" (1920) because previously, there have been several studies using related

research objects. The research object examined by previous studies has similarities with the writer's research, but the topic of the problems discussed in those studies differs from that of the writer's discussion. Comparing these studies aims to discover the differences between previous and writer's research.

The first journal article to use research object related to the movie "Within Our Gates" by Oscar Micheaux was written by Register (1995). Register's study focuses on how critics and scholars perceived Oscar Micheaux before the 1970s and his critical profile from the 1970s to the 1990s. As the first prominent African-American feature filmmaker, Micheaux has been judged by classic film standards, even though his films differ from classic cinema, as seen in "Within Our Gates" (1920). It was through their assessment of Micheaux in literature and film before the 1960s that scholars suggested he had been misread and misinterpreted.

Flory D. (2005) also uses the same research object but with a different discussion. In his writing, he states that a connection between race, rationality, and melodrama can be established through specific historical conditions that prepare film audiences for certain aesthetic responses to the movie genre. In his film "Within Our Gates," Micheaux aims to represent black individuals who were not portrayed in the movie; instead, black people were depicted as stereotypes such as mammies, shiftless servants, loyal retainers, and entertainers. His strategies for creating black identities offer hope that we might yet identify the cognitive tools needed for recognizing and acknowledging black individuals as fully human.

On the other hand, Siomopoulos A. (2006) recounts that in the last decade, film scholars have focused an increasing amount of critical attention on Oscar Micheaux's 1920 silent movie "Within Our Gates" as an influential African-American response to D. W. Griffith's notoriously racist film "The Birth of a Nation" (1915). Oscar Micheaux's "Within Our Gates" rebuts Griffith's portrayal of black violence and corruption with a story of African Americans' injustices in a racist society. The intricate style of Micheaux's editing also makes for a more politically critical audience than the audience constructed by classic Hollywood-style Griffith films.

Last, Gustafsson T. (2008) emphasized the stereotypical images of black people who did not have the same roles in Sweden as in the United States in the 1920s. The perception of black people as lesser human beings was so powerful that there were no objections to this image. In contrast, in the United States, this image was contested by African Americans, most notably in the black silent film industry, with Oscar Micheaux's "Within Our Gates" (1920) as its forerunner.

This research differs from previous studies because there has yet to be previous research on the writer's chosen topic. Most existing research focuses on the point of view of the filmmaker, Oscar Micheaux, and it explores aspects such as his style of filmmaking, how critics critique his films, and audience response to his movie "Within Our Gates." In contrast, this study will focus on the perspective of the main character in the film, Sylvia Landry. As a black feminist, she faces challenges on her journey to raise funds for a school for black children. In this study, the writer will examine how the racial issues affecting the lives of the main

character in "Within Our Gates" (1920) intersect with her efforts to combat these racial problems.

1.6. Research Method

This study collected data from the study's object and analyzed it using two different research methods. The two types of methods employed are the method of collecting the data and the method of approach.

1.6.1. Data and the Source of Data

This research will focus on utilizing qualitative data in the form of scenes in the movie. The data will be further supported with pictures of relevant scenes and narration by a narrator that is fit the analysis. The primary source of the data is the movie "Within Our Gates" (1920) and the official script written by Oscar Micheaux.

1.6.2. Method of Collecting the Data

The writer collected data by repeatedly watching the movie "Within Our Gates" by Oscar Micheaux and making written observations about significant discoveries. Furthermore, the writer records the narration and pays attention to the expressions and body language shown by the character Sylvia Landry to find out the resistance to the oppression she experienced. This type of method of collecting data is called nonparticipation observation. Williams states that nonparticipation observation is a relatively unobtrusive qualitative research strategy to collect primary data about a specific aspect of the social realm while avoiding direct engagement with the individuals involved (2008, p.561). In addition to using the movie as the primary data of research, the writer also uses library research

methods as secondary data in collecting data and information that can support the analysis of this research. According to George (2008, p.1), library research entails a structured inquiry that employs specific tools, rules, and techniques. The writer uses books, journals, articles, and theses to strengthen the analysis.

1.6.3. Method of Approach

The writer utilized Guerin's exponential approach and Collins' feminist approach to analyze Oscar Micheaux's "Within Our Gates" related to the scope of the research. The term "exponent" originates from the Latin word *exponere*, "to put forth," carrying a figurative connotation of explanation cf. "expound" (Guerin, 2005, p.143). It means examining the most meaningful images and patterns to comprehend the intrinsic aspects of literary work. While feminism advocates for gender equality, it opposes contradictory, oppressive, dominating, hegemonic, unjust, and violent forms of oppression (Collins, 1990, p.26). The writer uses the feminist approach to analyze the struggles of the African-American woman fighting to have the freedom to actualize herself in all aspects of life, as reflected by Sylvia Landry in "Within Our Gates." Therefore, the feminist approach, in support of Collins' Black Feminist Thought theory, will be utilized to examine the extrinsic aspects.

1.7. Organization of the Writing

The writer arranged this paper by dividing it into several chapters. The chapters are as follows:

Chapter I INTRODUCTION

The first chapter consists of background of the study, research problem, scope of the study, aims of the study, previous studies, research method, and organization of the writing.

Chapter II THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The second chapter consists of the theories used to analyze the research object. It consists of relevant and precise theories used to explain the narrative and cinematographic aspects of the movie.

Chapter III RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The third chapter contains an analysis of the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the movie, along with evidence to strengthen the analysis discussed. The analysis shown refers to the theories from the previous chapter.

Chapter IV CONCLUSION

The fourth chapter contains conclusions from all the discussions and analyses in the previous chapters.

