

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

As a developed country, immigrants seeking a better life tend to perceive the United States of America as a desirable destination. This perception is rooted in historical contexts. In the late nineteenth century, the United States had distinct economic and political interests across the entire continent of America (Grosfoguel, 1999, p.507). During this period, the political elites of the United States convinced the Caribbean to participate in defense of the United States against European invasion (Estades-Font, 1988, in Grosfoguel, 1999, p.507). This historical backdrop is the root of the mass labor migration from the Caribbean to the United States, which first began in the early twentieth century.

Puerto Rico is one of the countries experiencing mass migration to the United States. The United States granted all Puerto Ricans US citizenship in 1917, and by the 1920s, there were roughly 30.000 migrants from Puerto Rico in the United States (Grosfoguel, 1999, p.508). However, the massive wave of Puerto Rican immigrants to the United States only began after World War II ended around the 1950s. The country's economic depression is one of the reasons for the migration. In addition, there was also a lack of opportunities in Puerto Rico. This is supported by Maldonado's (1976, p.14)

study, which found relative salaries and unemployment rate variations between Puerto Rico and the United States.

Initially, Puerto Ricans faced some of the most challenging socioeconomic situations in the United States (Grosfoguel, 1999, p.514). They have to deal with terrible living conditions, such as overpopulation and poor housing, a lack of institutional support for schooling, and inadequate medical care (Grosfoguel, 1999, p.515). However, Oropesa & Landale (2000, p.329) discovered in their research that Puerto Rican children who migrate to the United States have a lower chance of living in poverty than those who remain in Puerto Rico. This is because Puerto Ricans that relocate to the United States may be able to find better-paying jobs. As a result, the migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States continues to happen.

A subtle portrayal of Puerto Rican immigrants' life can be seen in the famous movie "*West Side Story*". Initially released in 1961, "*West Side Story*" is a movie adaptation of a stage play based on Arthur Laurents' book with the same title. The movie depicts the rivalry and hatred between the American-born Jets and the Puerto Rican Sharks. Trouble arises when Tony, one of the Jets' founders, and Maria, the sister of Sharks' leader Bernardo, fall in love. In the heat of the moment, the Sharks and Jets plan a rumble to determine who will rule the territory.

The existence of the American-born Jets and the Puerto Rican Sharks in the movie "*West Side Story*" provides insight into how Americans treated

Puerto Ricans in the 1950s. There are also depictions of the quality of life of Puerto Rican immigrants, as well as their perspectives on their new lifestyle in America. The writer aims to examine the conflicts that comes from the cross-cultural life shared between Americans and Puerto Ricans in the rural areas of New York in the 1950s. In addition, the writer also aims to understand better how someone's social identity may influence their actions and behaviors.

1.2. Research Problems

1. What are the intrinsic aspects found in the movie "*West Side Story*" (2021)?
2. What are the conflicts that arise from the cross-cultural life between white people and Puerto Ricans in the movie "*West Side Story*" (2021)?
3. How does social identity influence white people and Puerto Ricans' actions and views in the movie "*West Side Story*" (2021)?

1.3. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on analyzing two topics concerning the cross-cultural life between American and Puerto Ricans in the movie "*West Side Story*" (2021). First, the writer will analyze the conflict between the two cultures. Second, the writer will analyze the influence of social identity on the characters' actions. In order to analyze the topics, the writer will focus on

the narrative and cinematography aspects of the movie, as well as applying appropriate theories.

1.4. Aims of the Study

There are several aims of this study:

1. To analyze the intrinsic aspects of the movie “*West Side Story*” (2021).
2. To identify the conflicts that comes between white people and Puerto Ricans in the movie.
3. To gain an insight about the existence and influence of social identity within a group member.

1.5. Previous Studies

Few writers have previously performed research on the movie “*West Side Story*”. The said research will be presented in this chapter. The research presented in this chapter supports the scope of this study. Therefore, the review will mainly focus on several aspects, including the cultural aspects of the movie and the portrayal of Puerto Rican people and culture.

The movie “*West Side Story*” portrays a mix of Puerto Rican and American cultures, which is further analyzed by Flavin (2019) in her thesis. Flavin’s study focuses on examining how Puerto Ricans and their culture are portrayed in the movie. Flavin obtained the data from books, interviews, videos, websites, and scholarly articles. From the research, Flavin found that

the representation of the Puerto Rican culture throughout the movie is inaccurate.

The portrayal of Puerto Rican was also analyzed by Negron-Muntaner (2000). In the scholarly article he published, Negron-Muntaner claims that “*West Side Story*” is a morality play about everyday difficulties and not about Puerto Rican culture, migration, or communal life. Additionally, the music presented in the movie, even those sung by the Puerto Rican characters, is an American blend of a wide range of rhythms with no particular national background.

Brown (2010) brought a new perspective by analyzing “*West Side Story*” from a Puerto Rican's point of view. Brown noticed that the movie lacked the views of everyday Puerto Ricans and approached a group of young Puerto Rican women to find out their thoughts on it. The results revealed that the participants believed that “*West Side Story*” had a different meaning for them than it had for previous generations of Puerto Ricans.

Woller (2010) analyzed the gender, race, and tragedy in Hollywood's adaptation of “*West Side Story*” in her thesis. Woller's study focused on the music, combining cinematic and musical analysis to explore the movie's themes and identify data. Through the research, Woller discovered that Hollywood had altered the movie in a lot of ways. Furthermore, Woller found that the conversion from musical stage to movie had an impact on the

story's depiction and portrayals of gender, ethnicity, as well as Puerto Rican and white American characters.

Furthermore, Oja (2009) analyzed life in America in the late 1950s in an article she published. Comparing *West Side Story* to *The Music Man*, another musical with the same setting, she discovered that they both offer a glimpse into the complexities of America in the late 1950s. Both musicals portrayed the United States as a complex and conflicting country.

This study differs from the previous studies as the writer applies the social identity theory to analyze the underlying factor of the conflict that comes between white people and Puerto Ricans in 1950s America. Therefore, the main focus of the study is analyzing the conflicts and the character behavior from a social identity perspective. This particular perspective had not been used before by any of the researchers.

1.6. Research Methods

This study utilized two different research methods to collect and analyze data from the study's object. The methods used are classified into two categories: method of research and method of approach.

1.6.1. Data and Sources of Data

This research will focus on utilizing qualitative data in the form of dialogues. Pictures of relevant scenes that fit the analysis will further support

the data. The primary source of the data is the movie “*West Side Story*” (2021) and the official script written by Tony Kushner.

1.6.2. Method of Collecting the Data

To gather the data, the writer conducted a non-participant observation by watching the movie “*West Side Story*” various times while taking notes on some important findings. The writer used the 2021 revival of “*West Side Story*” by Stephen Spielberg. The data collected from the movie is used as the primary data for this study. Furthermore, in order to gather the secondary data, the writer conducted a library research. This method involves analyzing and comprehending data available from books, theories, and papers that has a close relationship with the primary data (George, 2008, p.6). The secondary data for this study was obtained from various sources, including books, journals, theses, and scientific articles.

1.6.3. Method of Approach

The writer utilized sociological approach to analyze the data. In analyzing movies, sociological approach can be utilized to explore the underlying themes of identity, interaction, inequality, and institutions (Sutherland & Feltey, 2013, p.4), which could be find in the movie’s storyline. In this study, this approach is utilized to analyze and comprehend the conflict that arises from the cross-cultural lives of Americans and Puerto

Ricans in "*West Side Story*." Furthermore, the writer will utilize the social identity theory to identify how it influences the characters in the movie.

1.7. Organization of the Writing

This study will be divided into the following chapters:

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains seven sub-chapters, which are the 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 FRAMEWORKS

This chapter contains a review of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks that are utilized to explain the narrative and cinematographic aspects of the movie.

CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS

This is the study's main chapter which covers the movie's discussion and findings. The findings and data will be analyzed by referring to the theories from the previous chapter.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

This chapter sums up the overall content of the study.