

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The dynamics of American society, characterized by social mobility, as well as racial and cultural diversity, create a complex and stratified social structure. In the study of social class dynamics, Goldschmidt (1955) explains that American culture emphasizes economic mobility and status to achieve a better social position. However, the ideal of equal opportunity is not fully reflected in reality, to access social mobility continues to be unequal. The stratification process in American society is not only dictated by economic variables but, more importantly, based on the person's race and cultural identity that significantly impacts the opportunity for achieving status and possessing certain resources and opportunities. According to Walzer and Miller (1995:19), the concept of social equality is associated with recognizing social diversity and understanding the role of social relations in the society. However, from the perspective of practical application, racial and cultural differences tend to influence one's social position and create the class stratification in combination with the issue of race and racism.

In order to understand better the mentioned social reality, it becomes essential to offer an expanded definition of racism. Generally, it involves the form of social inequality that is based on one's skin color, ethnic background, or place of origin and consequently affects one's right and freedoms (Faber et al., 2023). One of the features inherent to the concept of racism is the dominance of one race over another with regard to the distribution of resources (Cole, 1980).

Accordingly, the article by Firebaugh and Farrell (2016) is a clear example of the concept of systematic racism. The authors state that racial discrimination in terms of unequal housing is well-established in the context of current changes. From this perspective, it can be argued that systemic racial segregation and unequal living conditions systematically affect opportunities for particular racial groups. This means that racism is considered as the factor restricting people in social mobility and increasing the gap between different social classes. Therefore, racism becomes an important structural feature creating class inequality and social stratification.

Class and racial problems discussed above play an important role in contemporary society and become a topic of various cultural productions and narratives that aim to show what kind of social structure exists today. Issues of class and race are often raised in various films, books, or movies and become a part of collective experiences being passed down through generations.

In this case, David O. Russell's film *Amsterdam* (2022) raises the problems of class and racial inequalities discussed above. The protagonists of the film – Harold, Burt, and Valerie are representatives of different social groups. The first is Harold an African American lawyer experiencing discrimination on racial ground. Burt is a doctor who serves in the army and represents the lower class with restricted access to social networks. The heroine of the movie Valerie belongs to the rich elite.

The film takes place in the 1930s, which is an era in American history marked by the Great Depression, inequality, political conflict caused by racial tension and class struggles. This decade is also associated with the institution of racial segregation and discrimination due to Jim Crow laws. According to Elizabeth

Cook-Lynn (2014), who reviews Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow*, Jim Crow law is a racial regime, which contributed to the establishment of white supremacists' domination and institutional discrimination toward black people. Thus, despite being a fictional narrative, *Amsterdam* is placed within the socio-historical context, which involves the main features of the 1930s in America, such as economic crisis represented by the Great Depression and racial segregation according to Jim Crow laws.

Amsterdam (2022) portrays three characters – Harold, Burt, and Valerie, who represent the social environment of 1930s American society, including class division and racial differences. The period of their life is connected with instability in terms of economy and politics. Through the social contacts of these people, the film highlights some social aspects of the era, such as class stratification, racial difference, and social relationships.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, the problems of this study are divided into three primary analyses. The following are the research problems:

1. How are the intrinsic elements portrayed in *Amsterdam* (2022)?
2. How does the film *Amsterdam* (2022) portray class and racial struggle through the experiences of its characters?
3. What forms of resistance do the protagonists employ against class and racial struggle in *Amsterdam* (2022)?

1.3 Objectives of Study

Based on the research problems identified, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the intrinsic elements portrayed in *Amsterdam* (2022).
2. To analyze how the film *Amsterdam* (2022) portrays class and racial struggle through social inequality, elite domination, and structural oppression experienced by the characters.
3. To examine the forms of resistance employed by the protagonists against class and racial struggle in *Amsterdam* (2022).

1.4 Scope of the Study

This research focuses on analyzing the themes of class and racial struggle as portrayed in David O. Russell's film *Amsterdam* (2022). The study examines how the characters Harold, Burt, and Valerie who represent different racial and social backgrounds, experience class inequality and racial struggle in the American social context of 1930s. The analysis is centered on how these protagonists confront and against to the structural oppression shaped by social class and racism in society.

The research is limited to analyzing the 2022 film *Amsterdam* as a subject of investigation, applying theories proposed by Marxist Criticism to examine class and racial struggle among the protagonists of *Amsterdam* (2022). The Research is not conduct a complete historical examination of 1930s America but see the film as a reflection of social processes occurring in society. In order to strengthen the analysis and give the research academic foundations, it is planned to use the

secondary materials and sources related to class conflict, racial identity, and cultural dynamics in America.

1.5 Previous Studies

In analyzing the film *Amsterdam* 2022, the researcher reviewed several previous studies that are relevant to the topics of class struggle and racial identity. Based on a literature search, the researcher found that there have been no studies that specifically examine the film *Amsterdam* as their material object. Therefore, the researcher used ten previous studies related to Marxism, social class, racism, systemic racism, and Jim Crow laws as relevant theoretical references. The discussion in this chapter serves to strengthen the scope and provide a comparative basis for the research being conducted.

The first study is an article entitled *Power and Class Conflict in Bullet Train (2022): A Marxist Analysis*, written by Aluyani Rose Titania Putri Lature and Irma Rahmawati (2026). This study focuses on the representation of power relations and class conflict in *Bullet Train*, directed by David Leitch. Using a qualitative descriptive method and Marxist theory, the researchers analyze the concepts of bourgeoisie and proletariat, exploitation, hegemony, and class struggle. It can be observed from the results that White Death serves as a representation of the bourgeoisie, who rules both the capital and power institutions, but Ladybug and other assassins portray the proletariat, who work in a capitalist regime under which they have little control. Based on the above, it is clear that the movie demonstrates capitalism's power structures and conflict among classes that exist within the current generation.

The second study is an undergraduate thesis titled *Social Class in De Villeneuve's The Beauty and The Beast* by Ezlyn Nazira (2022). In this piece of research, social classes within Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast* story are analyzed based on Karl Marx's social class theory in sociology of literature perspective. The major focus in this regard is on the interaction between bourgeois and proletariats classes in the described society. It can be stated from the outcomes of the study that there is an uneven power distribution in the described society whereby the bourgeois class controls and enjoys its freedom for achieving what it wants since the proletariat has no power and must accept their dominance.

The third study is an article entitled *An Analysis of Social Class and Discrimination in Juan Solanas' Movie Upside Down*, written by Muhammad Ali, Iskandar, and La Sunra (2023). Marx's theories have been used in the study to analyze the issue of social classes and discrimination in the movie. The result reveals a social system that consists of two classes: the bourgeoisie who possesses power, economic stability, and proper education, and the proletariat, characterized by hardship and discrimination. Social class differences cause social pressure, antagonism, and injustice.

The fourth study is a thesis entitled *Holly Golightly's Ambition to Achieve Social Standards of the American Socialite Class Based on Breakfast at Tiffany's (1961)* written by Aretha Salsabila Azzahra (2023). This thesis aims to explore social class mobility in the movie through the application of social class theory of Weber and Stuart Hall's representation theory. It shows that the character of Holly

develops her social status through lifestyle and fashion for achieving admission to the upper class. However, this paper makes an effort in analyzing the symbolism of social class but gives more attention to class aspirations rather than structural oppression.

The fifth paper is a research article entitled *Race & Prejudice: Constructing Race Identity in The Help (2011)* written by Arfian Dwi Saputra et al. (2024). This article analyses racism in the movie based on Allport's prejudice theory. As a result, it was found that the process of forming African-American racial identity is influenced by stereotypes and discrimination and, as a consequence, limits social mobility and opportunities for upward social movement.

The sixth study is an undergraduate thesis on the topic of *Black Racial Identity Development of the Character Chiron in Moonlight (2016) Movie* by Forsaria Prastika (2020). This research analyzes racial identity formation using Nigrescence theory by Cross. According to this theory, racial identity development occurs through experiences of marginalization and social pressure due to discrimination.

The seventh study under review includes the undergraduate thesis by Zul Karno Ra'is named *Representation of Racism in Dear White People Film (2018)*. In this study, attention is paid to the depiction of racism toward black people students and the forms of resistance realized through negotiation, protesting, and media activism. The findings show that collective resistance may be used as a tool for fighting against discriminative regulations. Still, the study is limited to discussing the campus settings and is not entirely related to institutional racism.

The eighth study under consideration is an article entitled Systemic Racism: The Portrayal of Racial Injustice Seen in American Son (2019) by Muqni Aini Hijriah (2024). With the help of critical race theory (CRT), the scholar conducts an analysis of systemic racism in the film. According to the results obtained in the paper, the author finds out that the institutions such as the justice system and police have been shown in the movie as discriminative ones. Although the analysis is relevant for the present research, the focus is made only on the police institution.

The ninth source under review represents the article entitled Depiction of Systemic Racism in Hidden Figures Movie by Theodore Melfi written by Ana Rahmalia (2024). For analyzing systemic discrimination, the researcher applies the qualitative descriptive approach. The results of the research suggest that systemic racism exists in public places, workplaces, and educational settings. Although the study contributes to revealing segregation policy effects on everyday routine, it is more focused on the policy itself.

Finally, the tenth study under consideration is an undergraduate thesis entitled Racial Segregation in Jim Crow Era as Depicted in A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry (2019). As regards the research methodology, Ulfauziyyah Awalia Ramadhani uses intrinsic elements (such as theme, character, and setting) as well as Jim Crow law theory and racial segregation to analyze the issues discussed in the work. It has been discovered that the white community tries to remain dominant by prohibiting the presence of a black family in the neighborhood.

From the review of the above literature, one would note that most research works either examine the issue of class struggle and racism separately in their

research. While some studies tend to focus on class struggle based on Marxist theory, other papers may highlight racism, systemic racism, and segregation, especially those that were experienced during the Jim Crow period. Nevertheless, very few researches have been done on the intersection of class struggle and racial identity in a particular film. The aim of the current research is to fill this gap by examining the experience of class struggle and racial identity from the perspective of the main characters in *Amsterdam*.

1.6 Research Method

To gather the data and information that support the discussion in this thesis, the researcher employs two methods: the Research Method and the Approach Method.

1.6.1 Data and Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary data sources are used in this research. For the primary data, the film *Amsterdam* (2022) is used to collect data including dialogue spoken by characters, and visual imagery depicting the class conflict of the three main characters (Harold, Burt and Valerie) and their racial struggle through their friendship. The visual data elements are analyzed through reference to camera distance and other cinematographic properties (e.g., extreme close-up, close-up, medium close-up, medium shot, medium long shot, long shot, extreme long shot) as well as sound and how these elements work together to create visual audio styles to support the creation of meaning in the film.

The secondary data for the study comprised academic research journal articles, books and papers published that relate to Marxism, class struggle, issues

relating to racial identity, cultural studies etc. to provide a theoretical framework and contextual background for analysis of the film.

1.6.2 Method of Data Collection

In this research, the data are collected in stages. The first stage includes viewing *Amsterdam* (2022) multiple times so that the author is able to become familiar with the order of events, characters, and social environment of the story. The second stage involves gathering literature related to class differences and race identity through a literature study research method. Afterward, the author identifies and records selected scenes and dialogues related to Harold, Burt and Valerie within issues of inequity, discrimination and solidarity. Once data has been collected, it is transcribed and classified according to the research questions. The next step is to analyse the data according to Marxist Criticism. Then the author is expected to draw conclusions based on the results of this analysis.

1.6.3 Method of Approach

Qualitative methodology with descriptive analysis is utilized for analyzing class and racial struggle in the movie *Amsterdam* (2022). The analysis is conducted through two approaches. First, the objective approach is applied to analyze the intrinsic elements such as character, theme, plot, setting and conflict are considered interrelated elements that together shape the meaning of the film. Second, the Marxist approach is applied through the framework of Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) and Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) development by Louis Althusser (1971, which focuses on how social and ideological structures operate to maintain

class dominance and racial discrimination in society. Through this framework, the analysis examines how class and racial struggle are portrayed through the experiences of the protagonists - Harold, Burt, and Valerie - and explores the forms of resistance they employ against the oppressive structure they encounter.

1.7 Organization of Writing

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of this thesis consists of the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, scope of the study, previous studies, method of study and writing organization.

CHAPTER II INTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The second chapter contains an explanation of narrative elements are used in the research. It includes intrinsic aspect such as, characters, theme, plot, setting, conflict, and cinematography elements consisting of camera distance, and sound aspects.

CHAPTER III EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter explains the extrinsic theories applied in the study, focusing on Marxist Criticism. Marxist Criticism through Althusser's (1971) Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) and Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) is used to analyze how class and racial struggle are portrayed through the experiences of the protagonists. These frameworks provide the social and cultural context of American society relevant to the narrative.

CHAPTER IV DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the analysis and findings of the research. It discusses how class struggle and racial identity are intertwined in the friendship of Harold, Burt, and Valerie. The discussion connects the intrinsic elements of the film with the extrinsic theoretical perspectives to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER V CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study by summarizing the main findings related to class and racial struggle, and friendship as solidarity in *Amsterdam* (2022). The chapter highlights how the film portrays the dominance of elite power through social institutions and racial discrimination, while friendship and solidarity across different classes and races become forms of resistance against oppression experienced by the main characters.

