

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Film is one of the most popular forms of art and communication media in today's society. It serves as a medium for conveying messages to the audience and a source of entertainment, social commentary, or even education. According to Danesi (2011), as a mass medium, the film possesses aesthetic power due to its ability to present dialogue, music, scenery, and actions simultaneously in a visual and narrative manner. The stories in films, whether explicit or implicit, often draw from the social realities of people's lives and incorporate ideological elements, presented in an engaging way to offer new insights to the viewers (Mudjiono, 2011). Films can influence society by delivering hidden messages. Within various social segments, films can shape perspectives, behavior, and understanding of the world around us. They continuously capture evolving social realities and project them onto the screen (Sobur, 2004). This blend of social reality and reconstructed reality presented in film is referred to as representation.

Representation in film refers to how a specific topic, concept, or reality is depicted and presented, including how characters, events, places, or specific concepts are shown to the audience through the visual, narrative, and artistic elements in the medium of film. In this regard, Turner (2018) suggests that when film acts as a representation of society's reality, it not only transfers reality to the screen but also actively shapes and reimagines that reality with the codes,

conventions, and ideologies within its culture. Representation can significantly influence how we view, understand, and perceive various aspects of life from a particular perspective.

The United States is one of the countries with significant influence in the film industry, often referred to as Hollywood (Silver, 2007). Hollywood is an area in Los Angeles, California, widely recognized as the epicenter of the entertainment industry, particularly in film production. Hollywood films not only provide entertainment but also disseminate American cultural values, leading to the globalization of tastes and preferences. The film industry in the United States has continuously evolved with changing trends over time. It has embraced technological advancements such as CGI and recognized the importance of representation. There has also been a significant shift with the rise of streaming platforms. Many American films now emphasize inclusivity, adapt stories from other media like books, video games, or comics, and explore various themes, including social issues. One social issue that has been a focus in American filmmaking is black feminism.

Feminism is a social, political, and cultural movement advocating for gender equality and women's rights in various aspects of life, including voting rights, workplace equality, and the elimination of gender discrimination (Ilaa, 2021). Meanwhile, black feminism is a specific branch of the feminist movement that emphasizes the intersectionality of race and gender, focusing on Black women.

Black women face challenges and struggles that cannot be fully explained by a general feminist perspective. This movement strives to address gender inequality and confront the racism experienced by Black women while attempting to understand how gender and race discrimination intersect in their experiences.

Black feminism emerged as a response to the lack of understanding and attention within the general feminist movement, which often ignored racialised issues. According to Hooks, black women see black feminism as a logical political effort to combat the same oppression experienced by all women of colour (Hooks, 2015). In her book, “Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism” (2015), Hooks questioned the preferential treatment of white women compared to women of colour. This, in turn, led to various resistance for black women's justice such as the formation of the National Black Feminist Organisation (NBFO). This organisation was formed to provide a voice for black women and fight for equality and the elimination of racial and gender discrimination that they face in various fields of life.

Black feminism in America today has been steadily growing over the years. Today, the black women's social justice movement is one of the most impactful movements for marginalized communities such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo. Fighting for justice in today's modern world can be presented in various forms of media. In America, many movies are made to show the struggles of certain groups against injustice and inequality. Black feminism in American cinema raises unique issues faced by black women and voicing their aspirations without disregarding the differences in the diverse American society (Collins, 2022). One of the producers

and directors who often portray black people in his films is Felix Gary Gray. He has produced many films that not only represent the social circumstances experienced by black people but also provide implicit and explicit messages to the audience, one of which is the film “*Set It Off*” (1996).

The film “*Set It Off*” is a 1996 American heist crime action film that narrates the story of four African-American women—Stony, Frankie, Cleo, and T.T.—who turn to a life of crime by robbing a bank as a last-ditch effort in response to economic hardship and social injustice. “*Set It Off*” addresses several issues related to gender, race, and the lives of Black women in the United States. The film portrays the experiences of economically disadvantaged Black women in urban environments and explores social issues such as poverty, gender inequality, and violence.

In the film industry, awards are a form of recognition for achievements in filmmaking. “*Set It Off*” received nominations and awards at various ceremonies. It won several awards at the Acapulco Black Film Festival, including Best Actress for Queen Latifah and Best Director for F. Gary Gray. Additionally, the film won the Best Soundtrack award (Deseret News, 1997). While it may not have received major awards like the Oscars or Golden Globe, “*Set It Off*” is still recognized in awards that focus on films with representation and influence in the black community.

The film provides a clear depiction of how Black women experience double discrimination within society. This issue significantly motivates them to challenge

discrimination, giving rise to the Black feminist movement. This study aims to identify the principles of Black feminism in the main characters and analyze how economic and racial factors influence their decisions in confronting existing injustices portrayed in *“Set It Off”*. In this study, the researcher focuses on the experiences and struggles of the main character in facing discrimination that reflect the principles of Black feminism, and how these factors of inequality shape their experiences and motivate them to make extreme decisions to fight against an unjust system.

B. Problem Formulation

In this undergraduate thesis, the researcher focuses on discussing some important problems which are:

1. How do the main characters in the film *“Set It Off”* exemplify Black feminist principles?
2. How do economic and racial factors influence the characters' decisions in confronting existing injustices?

C. Objectives of Study

The objectives of this undergraduate thesis are:

1. To identify examples of Black feminist principles within the main characters in the film *“Set It Off”*
2. To analyze how economic and racial factors influence the characters' decisions in confronting existing injustices

D. Scope of the Study

The scope of the study aims to direct the analysis to be more specific and focused on the topic to be discussed. In this study, the researcher focuses on the film "Set It Off" which aired in 1996. The theories used in this study are Critical Race Theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Feminist Economics by Marilyn Waring (1990). The essence of this research is to identify the principles of black feminism on the main character in the film and how economic and racial factors influence the character's decision in confronting injustice through scenes, dialogue, words and phrases in "*Set It Off*" film.

E. Review of the Related Studies

In this review of related studies, the researcher tries to look for other studies that are relevant to the thesis topics about black feminism. However, there are still differences in related studies by comparing them to prevent plagiarism. This undergraduate thesis is an original and new work by the researcher with related sources of study from books, theses, journals, and the internet.

The first study is from Ikhsano and Jakarudi (2020) entitled "*Representation of Black Feminism in Hidden Figures*". This study aims to find a representation of black feminism in the film *Hidden Figures*. The method used in this study is a critical paradigm with a qualitative approach. The data analysis technique used is Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis. In this research, the topics that will be focused on are sexism, racism, and classism. Through this topic, the film *Hidden Figures* shows how the four main characters experience discrimination in the form

of racism, sexism, and classism, as well as how they are connected to each other (intersectionality). The representation of black feminism in this film is depicted through the discrimination experienced by the main character in the form of racism, sexism, and classism.

The second study is from Kamil and Rochmaniah (2023) entitled “*Representation of Feminism in Enola Holmes Film 2 John Fiske’s Semiotic Analysis*”. This study aims to find out how the representation of feminism is shown in the film *Enola Holmes 2*. The method used in this research is qualitative descriptive, employing John Fiske's semiotic analysis. This semiotic analysis involves describing the depiction of feminism in various scenes within the film. The data collected in this study is obtained through semiotic analysis using John Fiske's theory of "The Codes of Television." In practice, the researcher utilizes codes related to appearance, makeup, personality, and behaviour to analyze sequences from the film *Enola Holmes 2*. Through this analysis, it is found that the codes and signs of feminism can be categorized under the first wave of feminism, considering the time background in this film, it is in 1888, or the 18th century. The film also addresses various social issues, including discrimination against women deemed unfair based on societal norms and culture, as depicted through scenes, dialogues, and other signs presented in the film.

The third study is from Pertiwi and Rosiandani (2022) entitled “*Black Feminism Reflected through The Narrator’s Responses of Women Oppression in Maya Angelou’s Memoir: A Letter To My Daughter*”. This study aims to elaborate Black feminist perspective toward women oppression in Maya Angelou’s memoir

entitled “*A Letter To My Daughter*”. This research employs a feminist critical approach by Lois Tyson to analyze the oppression experienced by Black women and the narrator's responses that reflect Black feminism. There are two main points discussed in this study: the oppression of women in the narrator's experiences in “*A Letter To My Daughter*” and the narrator's responses to the oppression of women that reflect Black feminism. This research provides an explanation of this oppression, identifies it in the form of the control of images and the regulation of Black women's bodies, as well as the narrator's critical perspective. The representation of Black feminism in this memoir is reflected through the narrator’s critical perspective, which centers on empowerment and self-definition.

The fourth study is from Amir, Rahman, and Azis (2022) entitled “*The Feminism of Afro-American in Audre Lorde’s Selected Poems*”. This research aims to discover the feminism of Afro-Americans in the selected poems of Audre Lorde by understanding the meaning and elaborating it with Lorde’s attitude towards feminism. The method used in this research is a structuralism approach, specifically the genetic structuralism approach, and applies Female Eunuch, a radical feminist theory by Germaine Greer. The results of this study indicate that these objects contain several poetic elements, such as figurative language, metaphors, diction, and tone, which primarily serve to enrich the meaning and atmosphere in order to address feminist issues within these poems. Therefore, this analysis demonstrates the significant way in which the author addresses feminism in her poetry. The first poem, “*A Woman Speaks*,” focuses on the idea of the image of Black women as a minority in American society and their struggle to be seen as equal, empowered,

and influential as men. The author uses figurative language as the dominant element in this work to transform her ideas about identity into self-awareness for women, despite the presence of negative sentiments. In the second poem, “*Coal*,” the author reflects on her personal perspective within the patriarchal ideology she has observed as a Black woman. Similar to the first poem, this one is also a celebration of her identity and self-expression. The last poem, “*Who Said It Was Simple*,” addresses intersectional issues in the society where the author lives, such as gender, class, age, and race. Based on the discussion, this research shows that Lorde uses her poems significantly to convey her feminist ideology through the medium of poetry.

The fifth study is from Sellami Oumaima entitled “A Racial and Psychological Study of DuVernay's Mini Film Series *When They See Us* (2023)”. This research aims to explore Ava DuVernay's movie, “*When They See Us*” and the bias nature of the criminal justice system in America against people of color and how it impacted their lives and their psychology. This research methodological theories are critical race theory, race based traumatic stress theory, post-traumatic stress disorder, post incarceration syndrome and Freud's defense mechanisms. The study analyzes the experiences of the Central Park Five as it relates to racism and justice inequality, and how racism, microaggression and implicit bias lead discrimination and brutalization of people of color by the American justice system. As it sought to understand the relationship and the connection between trauma and racism, and how the experience of the five boys ruined their lives, their relationships and left them traumatized.

The similarity between the five previous studies and this research is that they both discuss feminism, whereas this study will specifically concentrate on black woman's feminism. The first, second and fifth studies in the review of related studies share a commonality in terms of their object of study, which is a movie. However, they differ in the theories employed. The first study, by Ikhsano and Jakarudi (2020), entitled "*Representation of Black Feminism in Hidden Figures*", uses a critical paradigm with a qualitative approach and the integration of black feminism with the face-negotiations theory. The second study, by Kamil and Rochmaniah (2023), entitled "*Representation of Feminism in Enola Holmes Film: John Fiske's Semiotic Analysis*," employs a semiotic approach. The fifth study, by Sellami Oumaima, entitled "*A Racial and Psychological Study of DuVernay's Mini Film Series When They See Us (2023)*," uses critical race theory, race based traumatic stress theory, post-traumatic stress disorder, post incarceration syndrome and Freud's defense mechanisms, while this current study employs critical race theory (CRT) developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw and feminist economic by Marilyn Waring.

In contrast, the third and fourth studies in this review of related studies differ from the current study in terms of their chosen objects of study. The third study, by Pertiwi and Rosiandani (2022), entitled "*Black Feminism Reflected through The Narrator's Responses of Women Oppression in Maya Angelou's Memoir: A Letter To My Daughter*" focuses on memoirs, using a feminist criticism approach. The fourth study, by Amir, Rahman, and Azis (2022), entitled "*The Feminism of Afro-American in Audre Lorde's Selected Poems*," examines poems as the object of

study, utilizing structuralism approach. Overall, the researcher contributes an original work with a different object and theory compared to previous studies, with the hope that it will be valuable for future research.

F. Research Method

The researcher used a qualitative method in conducting this research. Qualitative research is a method that focuses on in-depth observation. According to Creswell (2016), research methodology is a method used to explore and understand the meanings attributed by a group of individuals or a community related to social or human issues. On the other hand, Moleong (2014) argues that qualitative research is a procedure in research that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words regarding the behaviour of observable individuals. The qualitative research method was chosen because it aims to understand social phenomena present in the research object, emphasizing detailed descriptions that lead to interrelated variables, and the issues under investigation require data that is not take number or quantitative.

1. Data and Source of Data

Data is information or facts used in addressing a research question. Data sources in research are the subjects from which the data is obtained for research purposes (Arikunto, 2013). The researcher utilized books, theses, journals, and the internet as references for this research. The data in this study consists of subtitles and captures containing representations of black

feminism in the film “*Set It Off*.” Meanwhile, the data source was derived from the film “*Set It Off*.”

2. Data Collecting Technique

The data collection method is the method used in this research to collect data. In qualitative research, data collection approaches include in-depth interviews, document analysis, observation, and analysis of audio-visual materials (Creswell, 2016). The researcher used data collection techniques involving observation, document review, and audio-visual analysis in the film “*Set It Off*.” The steps required in data collection are as follows:

- a. Finding the movie script and scenes from “*Set It Off*”

The researcher found the movie script from the Scripts website and watched the movie on Prime Video, an Amazon streaming platform.

- b. Understanding critical race theory and feminist economics theory

At this step, the researcher comprehended the critical race theory (CRT) and feminist economics theories to be used in analyzing the script and scenes of the film “*Set It Off*.”

- c. Understanding the movie script and scene in “*Set It Off*”

The researcher gained an in-depth understanding of the script and scenes to deepen their comprehension of the film “*Set It Off*.”

- d. Finding out and Identifying all the subtitles/scripts, captures/scenes, words, and sentences containing representations of black feminism.
- e. Taking notes based on their classifying

The researcher made notes based on classification and analysis regarding the representations of black feminism in the film “*Set It Off*.”

3. Data Analysing Technique

Data is analyzed in detail to address the research questions. After data is obtained from the data source, it needs to be analyzed through the following procedures:

- a. Reading and identifying the entire script and scenes to find representations of black feminism.

The first step in data collection for analysis is for the researcher to read, watch, and identify representations of black feminism in the film.

- b. Analysing the meanings and representations present in the script or scenes.

To analyze the meanings and representations, the researcher reads the script and comprehends each scene containing representations of black feminism in the film.

c. Making conclusion

The final step involves drawing conclusions to find answers to the research questions based on the analyzed data.

G. Presentation

This study is conducted to examine and identify the representation of black feminism in the film “*Set It Off*.” In Chapter 1, the researcher elaborates on the background, problem formulation, research objectives, review of related studies, and the research methodology. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical approach and theoretical framework. The theoretical approach includes the approaches and theories used to analyze the issues in the thesis. Subsequently, the theoretical framework comprises theories that serve as a cognitive framework for a more precise analysis of the issues. Chapter 3 presents the research findings and discusses them with accompanying data as supporting evidence. Moving on to Chapter 4, it contains two components: conclusions drawn from the research results and recommendations derived from the research and in alignment with the problem formulation.