

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Research

In this current era, the development of technology is growing rapidly. One of the industry exposed an impact of technological development is film industry. Since the 1800s, films had been produced and continued to grow until now. Film is an audio-visual mass communication tool to present a story that contains a message. Film presents many stories and everybody can gain many experiences by watching film. As technology is growing, everybody can watch the film anywhere. Not only at the theater but also on the television, computer, even on cellphones. A story presented in the film has a message that gives a positive thing about meaning of life to everybody who watched.

Based on the word, film (cinema) comes from the word *cinematographie* which means cinema (motion), *tho* or *phytos* (light) and *graphie* or *grhap* (writing, image). It can be defined that film, also called movie is a moving visual art-form by using a camera tool to record to make up a story and simulate experiences that communicate ideas, stories, perceptions, feelings, and beauty. Most people watch movies for entertainment. The actual functions in the film include informative, educational, and persuasive functions. Therefore, the directors do not just make a story but behind the story there are moral messages that are sometimes not realized by most people. Sometimes, the messages in the film are not delivered directly that makes people feel confused. The hidden meaning can be found in the dialogue, character, object, sign, etc. A sign in a film can represent a meaning. People can start to analyze the meaning by seeing the sign that appeared in the film. Semiotic study is a solution to find hidden messages through the signs in films.

Semiotics derived from the Ancient Greek *sēmeion* that means sign. Semiology was first introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure. Ferdinand de Saussure said language is a sign-system. He focuses on the language system or *langue* and language use or *parole* (Yakin & Totu, 2014). *Langue* is an institution and a system while *parole* is an act of selection and actualization that is individual. One of the theorist of semiotics who largely uses Saussure's analysis is Roland Barthes.

Roland Barthes is one of the pioneer of semiotic. According to Roland Barthes (1968) Semiology is the part of linguistic. Language as a sign system which is not only the sounds or written texts, but all meaningful social practices and cultural phenomena that can compose various kinds of languages. Human uses the signs to communicate to other people, but not all the meaning of the signs are delivered literally. Sometimes, there is the hidden message behind the sign that human deliver.

A sign is something that defines something else beyond itself. This universe is filled of signs and anything can be sign. Signs are not just things that are posted in certain places. Signs can be taken the forms of human, object, cloth, culture, sound, gesture, picture, etc. Signs itself contain meaning for human and serve many functions that act as a guide human for taking action. Roland Barthes' concept is about connotation, denotation, and myth. Barthes said that the denotation that is told continuously will become the connotation. While myth is a system of communication that brings a message. To find out the myth, I use Ferdinand de Saussure theory of syntagmatic and paradigmatic which relates to the culture. Syntagmatic relations are relations between components in the same structure, while paradigmatic relations are relations between components in other structures. And I use Neubeck theory or racism in order to know what form of racism reflected or experienced by Martha Cabrera. This three theories will help me to do the analysis.

I choose the film *Knives Out*. This film is an American mystery film written and directed by Rian Johnson in 2019. *Knives Out* tells about the mystery of the death of novelist who named Harlan Thrombey (Christopher Plummer). He is the novelist who is very rich. Harlan Thrombey, who is found lifeless after celebrating his 85th birthday with his family and close friends. He allegedly commit suicide because he was found covered in blood on the neck with the knife in his hand. The family is interrogated by a detective Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig) to facilitate identification of the mystery murder. There is Linda (Jamie Lee Curtis), Thrombey's ambitious first daughter with a sophisticated business mind; her husband, Richard (Don Johnson), is proud, haughty, cheating, and xenophobic; and their hedonistic son Ransom (Chris Evans); there's also Walt (Michael Shannon), Harlan's second

son who runs a family-owned publishing company; Donna (Riki Lindhome), Walt's wife; Joni (Toni Colette), Harlan's materialistic daughter-in-law who has become a widow; and two of Harlan's other grandchildren, the woke Meg (Katherine Langford), and Jacob (Jaeden Martell), the troll boy on the internet who plays very little. And Martha Cabrera (Ana de Armas), Harlan's nurse who is considered to be his own friend. Martha is from Latin America who works for Harlan. She has a mother and a sister. The dialogue throughout the film emphasizes tension about her family's immigration status. Martha is very kind person among the member of the Thrombey family. Almost every member of the Thrombey family is guilty and terrible people, they just want Harlan's inheritance. When the will is read, it is written that Harlan revises his will to give 100% to Marta. The publishing company, the house, the estate, every dime of his \$60 million. Because of that, the Thrombey family alleged that Martha forces their father to give out his will to her. They trap Martha as if she killed Harlan Thrombey and they treat Martha badly because of her status. At the end of the film, the truth about Harlan's death was revealed. One of the family who killed Harlan Thrombey is Harlan's grandchild, Ransom. Martha deserves an inheritance as Harlan Thrombey's wishes, because she was so sincere in caring for Harlan as long as he lived.

*Knives out* is interesting to analyze, because it has hidden message that I am interested in analyzing by using semiotic theory to prove the meaning of the sign about racism experienced by Martha. According to Oxford Dictionary, racism is an unfair treatment of other races. People who believe that some races of theirs better than others. Racism is "an ideology of racial domination" (Wilson, 1999, 14) in which certain racial group is considered as superior and there is inferior treatment to other racial group. It can be seen from the film that there is inequality between Martha as an immigrant, and also American latin and the Thrombey family as a white family and wealthy. This issue happens in America which the immigrant and racism become the main issue. This film could make people aware that we are born equal. Both immigrants and natives, black and white are human beings who are entitled and must be treated equally. Not only white people can occupy the top position, but also other races deserve equality and privilege because everybody deserves their rights.

## **1.2 Identification of the Problem**

According to the background of the research above, I identify the main problem is about racism experienced by Martha Cabrera as an immigrant and Latin American. Martha gets the racial treatment by the Thrombey family, the white and wealthy family, which want the inheritance that their father gave to Martha. The signs in film *Knives Out* such as the characters, clothes, mug, and etc contains a certain meaning. Based on the identification of the problem, I assume that the signs created have several implied messages about the issue of racism experienced by the immigrants that happens in America. Racism in America is not just experienced by Black People but immigrant or Latino also experienced that. According to the survey from Pew Hispanic Center in the journal of *The American Dream: Racism towards Latino in the U.S.* that makes trauma symptoms is about 32% of the Latino or immigrant reported that a family member or a close friend had experienced discrimination in settings, such as school and the workplace. It is not only adult who get racist but also their children.

## **1.3 Limitation of the Problem**

In this limitation of the research, I find many irregularities ranging in every section that I divided into four sections. I find the sign from dialogue, characters, and objects around which signs have messages in the film. Beside the death of Harlan Thrombey, I assume that there is an issue about racism experienced by Martha Cabrera as an immigrant from Latin America who works for Harlan. The major focus of the research is on analyzing the issue about racism experienced by Martha because of her race. The signs that appear in the film will be analyzed to answer the research questions. This research will analyze the signs using semiotic theory by Roland Barthes deals with denotation, connotation, and myth with suitable method and technique from theory. And I use Neubeuk's theory about the types of racism in order to analyze the form of racism.

## **1.4 Formulation of the Problem**

According to the background above, I formulate the problems as follow:

1. Why does Martha get racial treatment by the Thrombey family?
2. How is the racial treatment Martha experiences portrayed in *Knives Out* film?
3. What form of racism is reflected through the Thrombey family?

### **1.5 Objectives of the Research**

The objectives of this research is to answer research questions. In order to achieve this aim, I make several steps as follow:

1. To investigate the reasons why Martha get racial treatment by the Thrombeys.
2. To find out how Martha experiences the racial treatment by the Thrombey family.
3. To examine the form of racism which reflected through the Thrombey family.

### **1.6 Methods of the Research**

I use qualitative method in order to determine the data or problems in the film. According to Saryono (in Yusuf, 2020), qualitative research is research used to investigate, find, describe, and explain the quality or features of social influences that cannot be explained, measured or described through a quantitative approach. According to Bodgan and Taylor quoted by Bambang Setiyadi (in Yusuf, 2020), qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written words. Moleong quoted by Herdiansyah Haris (in Yusuf, 2020), research Qualitative is a scientific research, which aims to understand a phenomenon in a natural social context by promoting a deep communication interaction process between the researcher and the phenomenon under study. From the theories above, I state that qualitative research is the research that used to investigate, describe, explain, and produce findings such as in my research which analyzes signs and produces findings in the form of the meanings of these signs. And qualitative research is aims to understand a phenomenon in a natural social context.

I use Roland Barthes theory as a tool to analyze the data. The theory takes from the books and the journals from the internet. To do the research, I divide the plot into four sections, i.e. Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, and Resolution. I analyze Martha to investigate the reasons why she gets racial treatment. I use the data collecting by searching the signs through what she wears, what language does Martha use and what the conflict happens in the film. The main focus is to find out how Martha gets racial treatment from the other characters. I analyze the relationship between Martha and the Thrombey family and how the family treats Martha. I analyze the data or the sign using Roland Barthes concept about the denotation, connotation, and myth meaning to find out the various signs that



symbolize racism. In order to find out the myth, I use the theory of Ferdinand de Saussure about syntagms and paradigms. To examine the form of racism reflected in the film, I match with indicators of racism. I use Neubeck's theory in which he explains that there are two types of racism, i.e. Personal Racism and Institutional Racism. And I use the other supporting theory assistance related to the topic.

### **1.7 Benefit of the Research**

The research has some benefits for the reader. People who watch the movie and want to know about semiotic study, this research is helpful for them to know the hidden messages in the film *Knives Out* and to learn and gain knowledge about semiotic and racism. Those who read this research will know how racism is reflected in the film through signs and make people aware that racism is still happening until now and this issue often appears in the films.

### **1.8 Systematic Organization of the Research**

The term paper has paper organization. I organize the term paper into four chapters as follows:

Chapter I: Introduction

In this chapter, I explain about the background of the research, identification of the problems, limitation of the problems, formulation of the problems, objective of the research, methods of the research, and benefit of the research about the analysis of Racism Experienced by Martha Cabrera as an Immigrant and Latin American in film "Knives Out"

Chapter II: Framework of the Theories

This chapter is about the theories that I use. I use the theory of semiotic by Roland Barthes and Ferdinand de Saussure as a tool to analyze and I also use Neubeck's theory of the form of racism. I analyze this research by using denotative, connotative, and myth's concept to support this research. In order to examine the form, I use Neubeck's theory and other supporting theories.

Chapter III: Racism Experienced by Martha Cabrera as an Immigrant and Latin American in the film "Knives Out"

In this chapter, I examine and analyze the data by using the theory of Roland Barthes, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Neubeck. I will discover and analyze the signs to find out the meaning and the message in the film, entitled *Knives Out*.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

This chapter consists the conclusion of the complete study that analyzes by the writer.

