

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Background of the Study

Captain America is an icon of comic history in the United States. According to Srikandi (2019, p.2) Captain America is a story “about a young man who always gets rejected for entry into the U.S Army after the great depression.” Set during World War II, according to Johnston (2011) this movie portrays a terrorist organization called HYDRA, which is from Nazi Germany that starts to conquest the world.

One of the people controlling HYDRA is Johann Schmidt, who found Tesseract, which he believed could help him control the world. A tesseract is a stone in the shape of a cube. This tesseract is an artifact that has the power to take over the universe because it possesses some unlimited energy. After experimenting on the tesseract, Schmidt harnessed the tesseract to create killing weapons that help Schmidt to rule the world. With the power of the tesseract, Schmidt feel sstrong enough to lead everyone, including to fight against Adolf Hitler.

In 1943, Schmidt brought the Tesseract into HYDRA’s top-secret weapon facility in the Austrian Alps. When the facility was in operation, Allied Prisoners of the War were forced to create a large-scale Tesseract-based energy weapons, which included the super-bomber and setting of nuclear-scale Tesseract energy. When the Allied super-soldier, known as Captain America infiltrated the facility to free the four hundred P.O.W.s (Prisoners of War), a significant confrontation began. This was

why, Schmidt took the Tesseract and set the strategy to self-destruct. Set in 1945, Schmidt was prepared to launch his Tesseract, that would shake the entire planet. With its flying nuclear, Schmidt intended to destroy populated cities across the United States. However, his last base was attacked by Captain America as the representative of the United States Army. When Schmidt managed to take the Tesseract, Captain America was fortunate to go on board Schmidt's airplane and shot Schmidt. Schmidt's death managed to break the Tesseract machine and turn off the power for the nuclear bomb, too.

Captain America: The First Avenger movie started by telling about a young man named Steve Rogers that lived in Brooklyn. He grew up suffering from numerous health problems, and when he found out that America joined World War II, Steve tried to enlist himself to join the war. Unfortunately, he was rejected from serving in the United States army because of his health problems. With his persistence to show how self-reliant he was with his individualism skills, Steve managed to be chosen as the Captain America the army was searching for. Transformed as Captain America, Steve managed to lead America and became the hero that saved the United States from the group of terrorists that wanted to destroy the country (Johnston, 2011).

Steve's experiences in becoming a leader while also suffering from numerous health problems and attack from the bullies on the street is engaging for the writer to analyze. It seems that *Captain America: The First Avenger* movie, through the character of Steve, is displaying the theme of individualism spirit of the United States

of America's citizens. According to Realo (2002, p. 2), "individualism is a 'political and social philosophy that places high value on the freedom of the individually and generally stressed the self-directed, self-contained, and comparatively unrestrained individual or ego.'" It means to say that there may be a negative yet positive quality when dealing with individuals fighting a freedom to change society, like is the case with Steve. The freedom that Steve is fighting for is an order to changing his social society. Realo (2002) stated that "the individualist theory of human nature holds that the interest of the normal adult is best served by allowing him maximum freedom and responsibility for choosing his objectives and the means for obtaining them."

This theory of Individualism is supported by an American psychologist, Hofstede as stated by Realo, (2002, p.3) who informs that "individualism pertains to a society in which the ties between individuals are loose, and everyone is expected to look only after themselves and their immediate family." Similarly, according to Gustavsson (2008, p.6), "Individualism is the character that an individual is equated to alienation, i.e., having no larger goals in life than one's self-fulfillment". Thus, the writer believes that this individualism spirit of being free to obtain a self-fulfillment can be seen in the movie's main character, i.e., Steve Rogers.

Some researchers already analyzed Steve's character by using a different theory other than American Individualism. Frederick H. Navarro from Walden University used a social cognitive approach. He said that Steve Rogers as a personality portrait reflects the dynamics of his upbringing, the interaction of his physical characteristics with the social environment, and his response to the social dynamics of his time.

Navarro states that Steve Rogers, the protagonist of *Captain America: The First Avenger* is portrayed as having

protective factors throughout his life allowing him to resist family alcoholism, aided by the early death of his father and the upbringing of his mother, fight negative mood, and still demonstrate prosocial motivations (2018, p.17)

In the Faculty of Language and Arts, there is already an undergraduate thesis written by Depi Mahlina that used Ralph Waldo Emerson's Self-Reliance theory in analysing the character development of Katniss Everdeen. In her thesis, Depi showed that Katniss trusts highly in herself as being the only one to protect her family. She found that Katniss's experience is being original in finding her ways to become a hero. Depi said that “ Katniss as the main character of *The Hunger Games* movie has proven herself with her actions and sayings, and is thus, accepted by others to become the hero of the game and be the true leader that Emerson has been seeking for” (2019, p.63). Yet, Depi did not use the film *Captain America* as her main data.

The writer is interested in combining the discussions used by Frederick H. Navarro and Depi Mahlina above for Steve Rogers, who is the main character of *Captain America: The First Avenger*.. In other words, this research wants to analyze Steve's character using the American Individualism theory that relies on Ralph Waldo Emerson's Self-Reliance. The writer believes that the Individualism theory from the American Studies' discipline is relevant because the director of the story is an American, and the movie takes place in North America.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, is the first American philosopher who writes “Self-Reliance” as the animating genius behind American Transcendentalism. Through his writing, he urged his readers to believe in themselves and choose to be transcendental individuals instead of simply following the conventional dictates of society. One of Emerson’s famous self-reliance philosophies is “To believe in your thought” and “to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,” which he considered was a genius thing to do (Emerson, 1841).

Emerson writes that to believe in our thought is a genius. It means that an individual must have to trust in him or herself to do what they want because whatever becomes the intentions of the self must already have had deep thinking and, as such, is a genius. From this philosophy, most Americans are judged as individualistic, not negatively, but in a positive way because the individuals show that they rely on their inner strength. By doing so, they are confident in what they will do. This study, therefore, aims to find out and see how Steve Rogers, as the main character of *Captain America*, exercise his self-reliance, which is influenced by the condition of his society, which requests to have his freedom. This is why the title for this thesis as “Individualism in Captain America”.

1.2 Field of the Study

This study is related to the field of literature, especially American Studies, which studies about the Ralph Waldo Emerson’s philosophy of self-reliance that became the basis for American individualism.

1.3 Scope of the Study

This thesis limits its analysis only on the character development of the weak Steve Rogers, who was then transformed into the strong willed and self-reliant Captain America.

1.4 Problem Formulation

One problem formulation for this thesis is: “How does Steve Rogers as Captain America show American individualism?”

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to find out how Steve Rogers as Captain America show his American individualism.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant to do because it applies the philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s self reliance to frame the American individualism that was studied in the American Studies class.

1.7 Definition of Terms

1.7.1 Individualism

Individualism is a “social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives; are primarily motivated by their preferences, needs, rights, and contracts they establish with others” (Hamamura,

2018, p.2). So, Individualism is the freedom of doing individual actions that support the idea of being free to do as one believes in.

1.7.2 Self Reliance

Self-reliance considers oneself a person endowed with potentialities, someone who relies on his mind to determine his life in a society where he lives. (Kouassi, 2015, p.8). Ralph Waldo Emerson (1841, p.14) philosophied that to be self reliant, one needs to seek his own self. It is “not selfishly, but humbly and truly. It is like your interest, and mine, and all men, however as long as we have dwelt in lies, it is to live in truth”. So, Self-reliance is every ones own personal talent that only needs to be exploited for their good and society.

1.7.3 Philosophy

Priest (2006, p. 5) informs that “Philosophy is a set of views or beliefs that life and the universe are often held uncritically” So, the meaning of Philosophy is usually a person is referring to an informal personal attitude to whatever topic.

1.7.4 Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism is “a philosophy movement that puts highly on mankind’s intuition and imagination as being better than any kind of logic or scientific reason” (Emerson, as cited by Mahlina, 2019 p.19).