



Systemic Racism against Unaccompanied Child Immigrants in *Tori et Lokita* (2022)

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Abstract

Tori et Lokita (2022), a Belgian-French film by Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne, portrays the struggles of two child immigrants from Benin and Cameroon attempting to survive in Belgium. This study examines how the film represents systemic racism and racial discrimination embedded within institutional structures. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the research analyzes narrative, cinematographic, character, setting, and dialogue elements. Narrative analysis is conducted using A.J. Greimas' actantial model and functional structure, while Critical Race Theory by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic is used to identify forms of systemic racism. The findings reveal that systemic racism is represented through the main characters' experiences, particularly in the ineffective implementation of asylum policies for unaccompanied minors, institutional distrust toward immigrants, and the exploitation of individuals based on race and legal status. This study highlights film not only as a representational medium but also as a critical lens that exposes systemic racism and structural inequalities through the lived experiences of unaccompanied minors.

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Introduction

Belgium is a country divided into three main language communities: French, Dutch, and German, which has influenced the development of its cinema. Since the late 1920s, Belgian cinema has been split into Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia and Brussels (Mosley, 2001), although co-productions between these regions have increased in the twenty-first century (Van Beek & Willems, 2022). French-language Belgian films have gained international recognition through global platforms such as the Cannes Film Festival, which plays a key role in increasing their visibility (Hjort & Petrie, 2007).

Among the most renowned filmmakers are Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne, whose works are known for their social realist portrayal of marginalized individuals. *Tori et Lokita* (2022),

which competed at the 75th Cannes Film Festival, continues this approach by depicting the lives of two unaccompanied migrant children from Benin and Cameroon who struggle to survive in Belgium. Their involvement in exploitative and illegal labor, as well as the difficulty in obtaining legal status, reflects the structural barriers faced by undocumented minors.

The film highlights the vulnerability of migrant children, particularly those of African descent, who are exposed to racism, discrimination, and legal exclusion. Limited access to resources often pushes them into high-risk conditions, illustrating how systemic racism operates within institutional and social structures (Ocáriz & Beemejo, 2008; Digidiki & Bhabha, 2017).

Previous studies have examined systemic racism in cultural texts using Critical Race Theory, such as analyses of *American Son* (2019) (Hijriah et al., 2024), *Where Hands Touch* (2018) (Fazriya, 2021), and *The Atlas of Reds and Blues* (Marrrium & Janjua, 2025), which reveal how racial injustice is embedded in legal systems, institutional practices, and social norms. However, research specifically analyzing *Tori et Lokita* (2022), particularly in relation to migrant children and systemic racism, remains limited.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how *Tori et Lokita* (2022) represents racism and systemic racial discrimination through the lived experiences of its main characters, focusing on narrative and cinematographic elements

MÉTHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the representation of racism and systemic racial discrimination in *Tori et Lokita* (2022), directed by Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne. The data consist of scenes and sequences that show the experiences of the main characters, especially those related to discrimination and institutional barriers. Data were collected through close observation of cinematic elements such as dialogue, character actions, and setting.

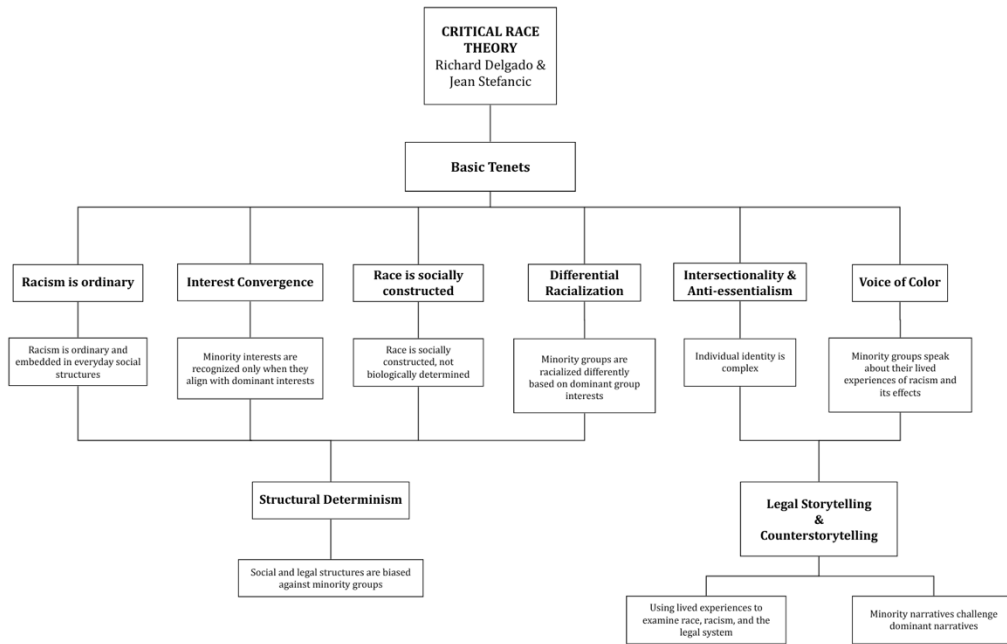
To analyze the narrative structure and character roles, this study applies A.J. Greimas' actantial model and functional structure. Greimas (1991) proposes that characters can be understood through a system of actantial functions that reveal their roles and relationships within the narrative. This framework is used to identify how the characters' positions and interactions contribute to the representation of systemic issues in the film. In addition, the film analysis framework developed by Petrie and Boggs (2008) in *The Art of Watching Films* is employed to examine key cinematic elements, including characterization and setting.

The analysis of racism and systemic discrimination is based on Critical Race Theory (CRT), developed by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. This theory is used to understand how racism operates within social and institutional systems. Delgado and Stefancic identify six main tenets of CRT: racism as ordinary, interest convergence, race as a social construction, differential racialization, intersectionality and anti-essentialism, and the voice of color.

In this study, five tenets are used based on their relevance to the data. The concepts of racism as ordinary, interest convergence, and race as a social construction are applied to analyze structural forms of racism. Meanwhile, intersectionality and anti-essentialism, along with the voice of color, are used to examine how marginalized experiences are represented through the characters. The selection of these tenets is based on the main patterns found in the film, while less relevant aspects such as differential racialization are not included.

Through the integration of narrative analysis and Critical Race Theory, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how systemic racism is constructed and represented through both the film's narrative structure and its cinematic elements.

Image 1. Critical Race Theory Concept Map



Results and Discussion

Results

Narrative structure is an important part of literary works for understanding a plot. This study uses the concept of film analysis from Boggs and Petrie in their book *The Art of Watching Films* (2007) to analyze the narrative and cinematographic aspects of films. The film *Tori et Lokita* (2022) has a duration of 88 minutes and is divided into 21 sequences with a linear plot without flashbacks. The following is a table of the sequence durations from the film *Tori et Lokita* (2022).

Table 1. Sequence Duration

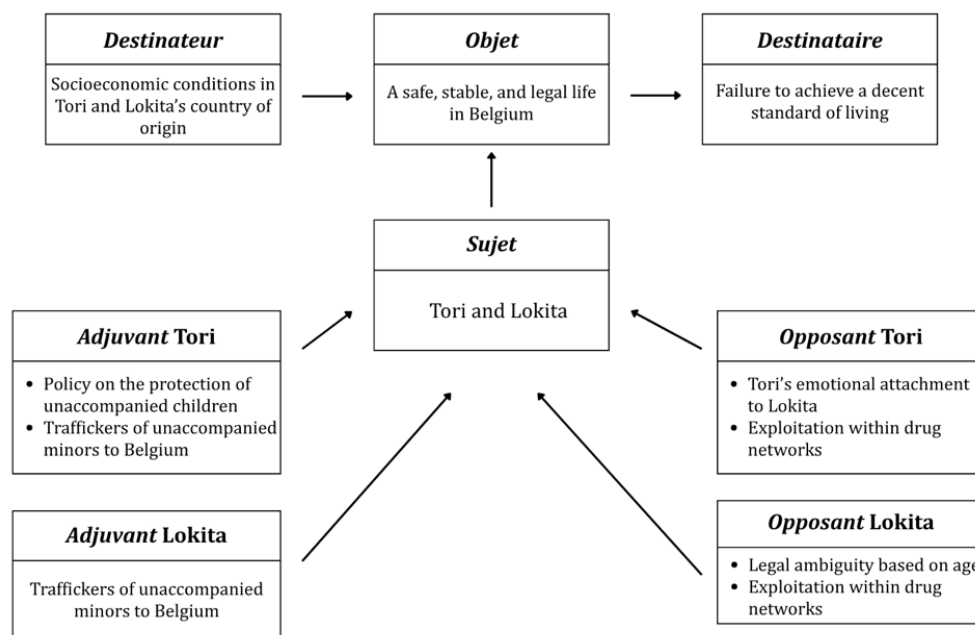
N.S.	Duration	S.N.	Duration	S.N.	Duration
1	4"25'	9	5"38'	17	4"1'
2	1"59'	10	5"25'	18	1"
3	11"5'	11	5"10'	19	6"12'
4	2"27'	12	7"42'	20	2"55'
5	3"37'	13	2"12'	21	4"57'
6	1"30'	14	2"16'		
7	1"56'	15	2"19'		
8	7"56'	16	3"38'		

Based on table, the longest sequence is in sequence 3, which highlights the routine work of Tori and Lokita as drug couriers at night. This sequence depicts the harsh reality they face as child immigrants trapped in a dangerous and risky criminal world. Another long sequence is the 8th sequence, when Lokita is taken by Luckas to Betim’s cannabis plantation after discontinuing the asylum process. Finally, the longest sequence is seen in the 12th sequence, which shows the scene when Tori secretly approaches Lokita and plans to sell Betim’s cannabis.

Meanwhile, the shortest sequence is sequence 18, when Tori and Lokita are caught meeting at the cannabis plantation and stealing Betim’s cannabis. Despite its short duration, the scene in this sequence becomes a turning point for Tori and Lokita. Overall, the four sequences form a clear storyline. It begins with an initial depiction of the harsh reality of Tori and Lokita’s life in Belgium, Lokita’s increasing involvement in the drug network, followed by a small act of resistance in stealing Betim’s cannabis, and reaching a major act of resistance by escaping from a situation that threatens their lives.

Furthermore, to understand the narrative structure and the relationships between characters, the analysis will be conducted using the actant schema. Greimas’ actant schema breaks down an action or story into six actants, namely the sender (*destinateur*), object (*objet*), subject (*sujet*), helper (*adjuvant*), opponent (*opposant*), and recipient (*destinataire*). The following is the actant schema from the film *Tori et Lokita* (2022).

Image 2. Actantial Scheme of *Tori et Lokita* (2022)



In *Tori et Lokita* (2022), the two main characters, Tori and Lokita, play the role of subjects who share the same destination in order to achieve their goal. Both are children who came to Belgium unaccompanied from Benin and Cameroon due to unstable social and economic conditions in their home countries. Tori came to Belgium because he experienced exclusion, violence, persecution in his home country due to the stigma of being a “witch child” or a child who brings bad luck. Because of these circumstances, Belgium recognized Tori as a victim of persecution and granted her asylum.

Meanwhile, Lokita came to Belgium for economic reasons and became the breadwinner of her family in sequences 5 and 15. According to the Belgian asylum system, which refers to the 1951 Geneva Convention, refugees are defined as people who cannot or will not return to their home countries due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, and political opinion. Because economic reasons are not considered strong enough, Lokita has not yet obtained legal status, so she lied by claiming to be Tori's biological sister, who has a stronger case for protection. This shows that the Belgian asylum

system prioritizes claims based on violence or persecution, while economic reasons are difficult to accept as grounds for granting asylum.

As subjects, both struggle to achieve the same objective, namely a safe, stable, and legal life in Belgium. This desire is evident in the second sequence when Lokita tries to match her answers with Tori's in order to obtain an official residence permit in Belgium. Lokita also expresses her desire in the fifth sequence, as in the dialogue quote below.

LOKITA: "*Je te dis que dès que j'aurai mes papiers jusqu'à la formation d'aide ménagère.*"

LOKITA: "I'm telling you, as soon as I get my papers, I'll go into domestic helper training."

This scene reinforces Lokita's goal of obtaining legal employment as a domestic helper (*aide ménagère*), a profession that gives her the opportunity to live decently without engaging in illegal activities. In addition, the perception that Belgium is a superior and ideal country offering stability, security, and a much better life compared to their home countries, which are described as third world countries, makes them want to obtain a safe, stable, and legal life in Belgium.

The receiver or *destinataire* in this film is the failure to obtain a decent life. They fail to achieve their goal and obtain a decent life not because of a lack of protection for unaccompanied children, but because the policy that allows unaccompanied children to enter Europe actually causes them to fall into a life of crime in Belgium. Tori continues to be exploited by drug networks even though he has been granted asylum, while Lokita faces various difficulties and ultimately dies because she has not been granted asylum, as shown at the end of the movie.

Tori and Lokita were assisted by unaccompanied child traffickers, Firmin and Justine, who acted as their helpers by bringing them into Belgium. These two traffickers were black immigrants like Tori and Lokita. Tori and Lokita had to pay off their debts to the traffickers, which forced them to become drug couriers. In sequence 4, Lokita's money from working as a drug courier is forcibly taken by Firmin and Justine to pay off their debt, as seen in the dialogue quote below.

FIRMIN: "*Tu la laisses fouiller sinon je te cogne.*"

FIRMIN: "Let her search you, or I'll hit you."

In this scene, Firmin threatens Lokita with physical violence to pressure her into submitting to him. Violence and threats are used as a means of controlling Lokita so that she is unable to fight back. In addition, Firmin, Justine, Tori, and Lokita are a group of black people, which shows that oppression against Tori and Lokita can also occur within their own racial group as a means of survival.

There is a difference between Tori and Lokita in terms of *adjuvant*, namely the unaccompanied child protection policy that helps Tori but does not apply to Lokita. Twelve-year-old Tori is legally assisted by the unaccompanied child protection policy, which allows him to stay in Belgium and obtain asylum status. This policy plays an important role in helping Tori obtain asylum status and the necessary protection. Through the Dublin III Regulation, which adopts the principle of the best interests of the child from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the European Union provides a legal framework that allows unaccompanied children up to the age of 18 to enter and reside in its member states. This principle requires EU member states to prioritize the protection of unaccompanied children in all decisions, whether related to asylum, education, or basic services. In the movie, this policy appears to be effective for Tori, who has successfully obtained asylum, has a place to live, and is attending school in Belgium.

Meanwhile, the same policy cannot help 17-year-old Lokita due to legal ambiguity based on age, which is considered *opposant*. Based on data from the Protection of Minors EU website, Belgium sets the legal age of a child at 18 years old. However, at the same time, children aged 14 and above can be considered legally mature. This results in legal ambiguity whereby children under 18 are still entitled to protection, but children over 14 are also considered capable of taking responsibility for their own choices. In the movie, 12-year-old Tori is still considered a child and therefore obtains legal status more quickly. Meanwhile, 17-year-old Lokita can no longer be considered a child and is deemed mature enough, but she cannot yet be recognized as an adult.

According to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2017), children aged 15 to 18 often receive minimal protection, are treated as adults, or are left in a state of legal uncertainty until they turn 18. This situation has resulted in Lokita's asylum application not being accepted and her being caught in legal ambiguity, forcing her to enter the criminal world in order to survive in Belgium.

The same *opposant* for both of them is exploitation by drug networks. Betim exploits unaccompanied children such as Tori and Lokita to work as drug couriers for his own profit. Unaccompanied minors are exploited with the aim of increasing the volume of their activities and minimizing the risk of criminal prosecution (Peyroux, 2021). In addition, Lokita, who has not yet been granted asylum, is forced to work with Betim because she does not have access to legal employment in Belgium. She feels responsible as the breadwinner of the family and has to pay the smuggler for herself and Tori. Lokita's statement confirms her role as a premature adult who faces various adult problems in general, as in this dialogue quote.

LOKITA: "*C'est à moi de gagner de l'argent pour la famille.*"

LOKITA: "It's up to me to earn money for the family."

Meanwhile, Tori, who has been granted asylum, remains trapped in the criminal world. Legally, Tori has the option to walk away and refuse to be involved. However, his emotional attachment and dependence on Lokita, who is the only family member he has in Belgium, keeps him involved in illegal activities to help Lokita work, as shown in the dialogue quote below.

TORI: "*Madame, qu'est-ce que je vais faire moi ici sans elle? Pourquoi vous lui donnez pas ses papiers?*"

TORI: "Madam, what am I supposed to do here without her? Why don't you give her her papers?"

This scene shows Tori's closeness and strong emotional bond with Lokita. In addition, unaccompanied children who have obtained legal status like Tori can still be exploited in their destination country if they have someone who is considered family to live with. Although the two have different statuses, they are still entangled in the criminal world, which shows that both legal and illegal statuses will still be exposed. The strong emotional bond between the two characters is formed from their shared background as immigrant children facing various difficulties in Belgium. Tori's concern for Lokita is shown in the scene where Lokita is forced to record an adult video, as in the dialogue quote below.

LOKITA: "*Je me sens sale.*"

TORI: "*Tu as force. C'est lui qui est sale.*"

LOKITA: "*Je voudrais que ma mère soit là.*"

TORI: "*Je suis là moi.*"

LOKITA: "*I feel dirty.*"

TORI: "You were forced. He's the one who's dirty."

LOKITA: "I wish my mother were here."

TORI: "I'm here."

Their closeness is also shown when Tori tries to approach Lokita at the cannabis plantation in sequence 12 and when Lokita feels anxious because she has not communicated with Tori in sequence 10. Therefore, Tori's emotional attachment to Lokita makes him willing to enter the drug network and work illegally. After analyzing using the actant schema, the next analysis is to determine the development of conflict in the movie by applying a functional structure to the plot of Tori et Lokita. The following is the functional structure of Tori et Lokita.

I	II			III
	Transformation			
Initial Situation	Qualifying Test	Main Test	Glorifying Test	Final Situation
Tori and Lokita's routine as drug couriers in Belgium	Lokita's failure to obtain asylum status	Lokita accepts Betim's offer to work in a cannabis plantation in exchange for fake documents	Tori and Lokita are caught stealing drugs from Betim's cannabis plantation	The failure of Tori and Lokita at the cannabis plantation and Lokita's death

The initial situation in *Tori et Lokita* is depicted through Tori and Lokita's routine as drug couriers under Betim's control in the third sequence. This stage shows Tori's life as an unaccompanied child who has been granted asylum, giving him access to protection, shelter, and education. Meanwhile, Lokita is still struggling to obtain asylum status, which is a requirement for obtaining legal employment and a stable life in Belgium. Tori and Lokita's involvement in illegal activities shows that black immigrant children like them are in a vulnerable position.

Image 4. Drug Transaction Between Tori and Lokita with a Customer



Figure 4 shows a scene in which Tori and Lokita are working as drug couriers and conducting a transaction with a customer in the third sequence. This shot highlights racial and age differences through a suspicious transaction between black children and a white adult male. In addition, the brightly colored lights at night give the impression that the children are in a place they should not be visiting. This reinforces the fact that immigrant children like Lokita are not only struggling to obtain legal status, but also struggling to survive amid exploitation by criminal networks. In addition to their legal status, their racial identity also makes Tori and Lokita more vulnerable to exploitation by adults who are aware of their weak position.

The qualifying test stage is marked by Lokita's failure to convince immigration officials of her asylum claim. In her first asylum interview, she claims to be Tori's biological sister to increase her chances of obtaining legal status, despite the risk of being exposed. The interview ends with growing suspicion toward her answers. In the second interview, she faces further difficulties and fails again, as she is unable to respond to several questions, leading the authorities to request a DNA test to verify her relationship with Tori. The authorities' suspicion during the asylum process reflects underlying prejudice against Lokita as a Black African immigrant child approaching adulthood, making it more difficult for individuals in her position to obtain asylum.

Image 5. Close-up of Lokita's Face During the First Asylum Interview



In the footage of Lokita during her first asylum interview, close-up techniques were used when she is in a stressful and intimidating situation. During the interview with immigration officials, the camera remains in close-up on Lokita, while the interviewer is not shown. This filming technique placed the audience in a position close to Lokita's feelings, allowing them to feel her anxiety, tension, and fear. The absence of the interviewer in the frame allows the audience to focus on Lokita's emotional reactions and makes it seem as if the audience themselves are asking Lokita questions. This technique reinforces the impression that Lokita is in a stressful situation and that she is being put on trial.

After overcoming various challenges in the beginning, the story enters the main test phase with Lokita being forced to accept Betim's offer to work at a cannabis plantation in exchange for fake documents and a place to live in sequence 7. At this stage, Lokita transitions from being a courier who only delivers drugs to a cannabis farm worker who is directly involved in the production process. Betim takes advantage of Lokita's desperate situation by offering her this job, while Lokita has no other safer or legal alternatives to survive in Belgium.

Image 6. Lokita is Slapped by Luckas



The shot in Figure 6 focuses on Lokita, who is the victim of violence by Luckas in the cannabis plantation house. In this scene, Luckas slaps Lokita, showing how violence is used to force Lokita to obey Betim and his two subordinates, Luckas and Margot. Lokita's experience illustrates how black immigrant children seem to have to live under the control of more powerful white people.

This stage corresponds to the glorifying test, when Tori and Lokita staged a small act of defiance by stealing some of Betim's cannabis to sell secretly in sequence 15 and 16. This act represents their last attempt to resist Betim because they are increasingly burdened by their circumstances. Lokita is not paid for her work at the cannabis plantation, she is pressured by Firmin and Justine to pay her debt for distribution costs, and at the same time Lokita also need to send money to her family in Cameroon, as shown in the dialogue quote from the scene where Tori calls Lokita below.

TORI: "J'envoie 200 euros à ta maman ou je donne 50 à Firmin? Ok, j'envoie l'argent demain

matin.”

TORI: “Should I send 200 euros to your mother or give 50 to Firmin? Okay, I’ll send the money tomorrow morning.”

The scene is shown after Tori successfully sells Betim's cannabis to his old customers. This shows how desperate they are to get money. However, when Tori comes to the cannabis plantation for the second time to sell more cannabis, they are caught by Betim and then run away.

Image 7. Lokita Asks a Female Driver for Help



Figure 7 shows Lokita with a panicked expression and bruises interacting with a white female driver. In sequence 19, Lokita asks for help from a car driven by a white woman, but the car drives away immediately after Lokita calls out to Tori. This situation indicates that the woman's prejudice against black immigrant children meant that they did not receive help when fleeing.

The final situation shows that all of Tori and Lokita's efforts and resistance were unsuccessful, even ending tragically. In the end, Lokita is captured and killed by Luckas on Betim's orders in sequence 20. Her death signifies her inability to change her fate. This situation shows that even though they tried to find a way out of their problems by taking risks, the results were disastrous. Their struggle to survive actually shows that black immigrant children like Tori and Lokita are in a helpless position and trapped in a system that oppresses them based on their racial identity.

Image 8. Luckas Chokes Lokita



The scene in figure 8 shows Lokita being strangled by Luckas in the middle of the forest. Visually, there is a contrast in race, age, and gender, namely a white adult male who has control over Lokita, a black teenage girl who has no power to fight back. The forest setting also shows that they are far from the city and in a deserted area, so no one can witness or stop the violence.

After examining the functional structure of the story, which shows the development of the conflict until the final situation, the next discussion will analyze the characters and characterization. Boggs and Petrie (2008) classify characters into two types, namely dynamic characters and static characters. Dynamic characters are characters who develop and undergo several changes in personality, attitude, or outlook on life in the story. Meanwhile, static characters are characters who

remain the same throughout the story and do not undergo any significant changes. This classification serves as a guide to understanding the role of each character in the narrative structure, as shown in the following table.

Table 2. *Classification of Dynamic Character and Static Character*

<i>No</i>	<i>Character Name</i>	<i>Appearance in Sequence</i>	<i>Number of Appearances</i>	<i>Description</i>
1	<i>Tori</i>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19	16	- Kamerun, black, male, 12 years old - Dynamic character
2	<i>Lokita</i>	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20	17	- Benin, black, female, 17 years old - Dynamic character
3	<i>Betim</i>	3, 7, 13, 17	4	- White, adult male - Static character
4	<i>Justine</i>	4, 11	2	- Black, adult female - Static character
5	<i>Firmin</i>	4, 11	2	- Black, adult male - Static character
6	<i>Luckas</i>	8, 18, 19	3	- White, adult male - Static character
7	<i>Margot</i>	10	1	- White, adult female - Static character

The characters listed in Table 2 are grouped into dynamic characters and static characters in *Tori et Lokita*. Based on the number of appearances in the sequences, Tori appears in 16 sequences and Lokita appears in 17 sequences, making them the main characters who drive the movie's storyline. Tori is a boy who struggles to survive alongside Lokita in Belgium. Tori, who was initially passive, slowly begins to change and becomes more active and decisive as the story progresses. This change begins when he takes the risk of hiding in Betim's car to find Lokita and help her in sequence 12. Tori also plans to steal Betim's drugs to help Lokita get money and carry out the drug transaction himself in sequences 15 and 16.

Image 9. Transformation of Tori's Character



Figure 9 shows a significant change in Tori's character. Previously, he always conducted Betim's drug transactions with Lokita, but after Lokita started working at the cannabis plantation, he did it alone. He also sold stolen cannabis to Betim's customers in order to get money for Lokita. This shows a shift in roles and responsibilities that were initially carried out by Lokita and then transferred to Tori after Lokita did not earn any money while working at the cannabis plantation.

Another character who undergoes a change is Lokita. Lokita is a teenage girl struggling to survive in Belgium. She initially tries hard to obtain asylum status so that she will no longer be involved in criminal networks, but in the end she gives up and continues to depend on Betim as her only means of survival in Belgium without official documents, as shown in the dialogue quote below.

LOKITA: *"Je te dis que dès que j'aurai mes papiers jusqu'à la formation d'aide ménagère."*

LOKITA: "I'm telling you, as soon as I get my papers, I'll go into domestic helper training."

BETIM: *"Tu veux des faux papiers, je te trouve direct une solution maintenant tu discutes. Ça va pas la tête ? Tu veux les papiers ou ne t'en veux pas ?"*

LOKITA: *"Si, je veux."*

BETIM: "You want fake papers? I can find you a solution right away, and now you're hesitating? Are you out of your mind? Do you want the papers or not?"

LOKITA: "Yes, I do."

This change shows a shift in Lokita's attitude and life choices from trying to be independent and find legal solutions to accepting the harsh reality that forces her to rely on a criminal network by accepting Betim's offer to make fake documents. The transformation of the two main characters in the movie can be understood as a response to the pressure of the situation that forces them. Tori, who was initially passive but then became active, shows that he has developed into a more courageous person by taking risks for Lokita because there is no one else who can help her but himself. Meanwhile, Lokita, who initially sought a legal way out, ultimately accepts reality and relies on Betim in order to survive in Belgium. The two main characters can be said to be dynamic characters because they are affected by their interactions with other characters who are static characters in the movie.

Besides dynamic characters, there are characters that are classified as static characters, namely characters that do not change and remain the same from the beginning to the end of the story. Betim is a character who represents the criminal world and takes advantage of Tori and Lokita. He consistently only thinks about his own interests and does not care about the children, as shown in the dialogue quote below.

BETIM: "100 euros."

LOKITA: "Non."

BETIM: "*Tu veux tes papiers ? Tu ne veux pas ?*"

LOKITA: "Si."

BETIM: "*Enlève ton t-shirt. Non non non. Recommence. Lente. Regardez moi tous les temps.*"

BETIM: "100 euros."

LOKITA: "No."

BETIM: "Do you want your papers or not?"

LOKITA: "Yes."

BETIM: "Take off your T-shirt. No, no, no. Start again. Slowly. Look at me the whole time."

This scene depicts the moment when Lokita is threatened to record an indecent video for Betim's benefit. Fake documents are used as a means of threat to control and manipulate Lokita. Lokita's change in attitude from initially refusing to later following Betim's order shows that she was forced to give in in order to obtain the documents. Besides Betim, there are Betim's subordinates, Luckas and Margot. From beginning to end, they remain the same, not helping Lokita in particular and remaining obedient to Betim's orders. Luckas even follows Betim's orders to chase and kill Lokita in sequence 20. Other characters such as Firmin and Justine are the couriers who take Tori and Lokita to Belgium. In sequences 4 and 11, their treatment remained the same, namely searching for and pressuring Lokita to pay off her travel expenses. These characters can be said to be static characters because they did not experience significant development and continued to oppress Tori and Lokita until the end of the story.

Other than character analysis, there's also setting analysis, which includes the place and time settings in the movie. The setting in a movie also plays an important role in the overall story. According to Boggs & Petrie (2008), setting is an important element in a story because it significantly supports the development of a movie's theme. The interrelated relationship between the setting and other narrative elements makes the setting an essential component that influences both the progression and meaning of the story being conveyed. Some of the places that often appear are streets, cannabis plantations, and Betim's restaurant. Meanwhile, the dominant time setting in the movie is nighttime. The setting and time in the movie are interrelated with the lives of Tori and Lokita as illegal workers in the drug network.

Betim's restaurant is a place frequently visited by Tori and Lokita at night. This restaurant operates as an ordinary dining place while also serving as a front for illegal activities that exploit Tori and Lokita as drug couriers. This place is considered a symbol of Betim's deception and camouflage to hide his criminal activities. Another location is Betim's cannabis plantation, which serves as the location for his illegal business. This place illustrates how drug networks in Belgium can operate covertly while employing undocumented immigrant children who are unrecognized by the legal system. In addition, the streets often appear in the film and serve as settings that depict the illegal and dangerous lives led by Tori and Lokita. On the streets, they work as drug couriers who move around at night and are stopped by the police, making it an unsafe public space for them.

Image 10. Police Inspection of Tori and Lokita



Figure 10 shows Tori and Lokita surrounded by two Belgian police officers on the street in the third sequence. Visually, it is clear that Tori and Lokita are black children, while the two police officers are white. This contrast highlights both the physical difference in race and the imbalance of power. The position of Tori and Lokita, standing close to the wall, reinforces the impression that they are in a cornered position, as if they are being cornered. The tight framing, along with the position of the two police officers on their right and left, made them look trapped and unable to move.

According to Boggs & Petrie (2008), sound also plays an important role in movies because the real impression felt by the audience depends on three main elements in the soundtrack, namely sound effects, dialogue, and musical score. In the movie, the song *Alla fiera dell'est* by Angelo Branduardi appears in several scenes when they sing together or as a cell phone ringtone in sequences 3 and 13. This Italian song serves as a reminder to one another. It depicts an endless cycle. The story begins with a father who buys a mouse at the market, then a cat comes and eats the mouse, then a dog attacks the cat, and so on until finally the angel of death and God appear. Each verse adds a new character who is stronger than the previous one, as in the example of the lyrics below.

Alla Fiera dell'Est, per due soldi un topolino mio padre comprò.

E venne il gatto che si mangiò il topo che al mercato mio padre comprò.

(At the East Fair, for two pennies my father bought a little mouse.

Then came the cat that ate the mouse that my father bought at the marketplace.)

In an online magazine interview with the Dardenne brothers on October 5, 2022, this song was initially chosen intuitively, but was later retained because it perfectly captured the situation of Tori and Lokita. The song is a Jewish exile song sung by Spanish Jews during religious trials conducted by the Catholic Church. Indirectly, the meaning of this song reflects the conditions and experiences of Tori and Lokita as marginalized children facing pressure in Belgium.

Through narrative and cinematographic analysis, it is evident that Tori and Lokita are portrayed as characters affected by the ambiguity of migration policy. These policies do not fully protect unaccompanied child immigrants, leaving them trapped in difficult situations, including Tori and Lokita's involvement in crime in order to survive in Belgium. Moreover, their interactions with characters from different racial groups reveal complex social dynamics and racial factors that also influence their experiences. The ambiguity of migration policies and racial discrimination underscore that the absence of an effective protection system leaves unaccompanied child

immigrants vulnerable to violence, discrimination, and exploitation in the criminal world. Subsequently, the forms of racial discrimination experienced by Tori and Lokita will be analyzed using Delgado and Stefancic's CRT theory.

Discussion

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) categorize six basic tenets of CRT for recognizing racism, namely racism is ordinary, interest convergence, race is socially constructed, differential racialization, intersectionality and anti-essentialism, as well as voice of color. Tori et Lokita (2022) highlights the life experiences of black immigrant children in Belgium from their perspective. As immigrant children from Benin and Cameroon, Tori and Lokita are part of a minority group within Belgian society.

In CRT theory, the tenet of voice of color means that people from racial minority groups have unique experiences and perspectives that differ from those of the dominant group because of their marginalized position. The concept of voice of color states that due to their different histories and experiences of oppression, writers and thinkers from Black, Asian, Indian, and Latinx groups can explain things about race and racism that may be difficult for white groups to understand (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

In Tori et Lokita, the voice of color is clearly evident in the way the film conveys the life experiences of Tori and Lokita, two black immigrant children living within the European social system. The film does not portray the characters' experiences from the perspective of state institutions, such as immigration officials or law enforcement, but consistently focuses on the personal experiences of Tori and Lokita. The film's narrative places them at the center of the story with their identities as black immigrant children involved in the criminal world as part of a minority group. Their narratives reveal the differences in experiences between black and white racial groups. Therefore, this film provides space for narratives that are usually unseen or unheard, especially those related to unaccompanied black immigrant children in Europe.

The unequal positions in the movie show a clear contrast between the dominant race and marginalized groups. Betim, the character who controls the drug network, is a white man who exploits the economic and legal vulnerability experienced by Tori and Lokita. He uses Lokita's illegal status to employ them in dangerous conditions. Even in their interactions with the police, Tori and Lokita are in a weak and suspicious position, including when they are questioned about their documents and curfew. This scene shows that both characters are under surveillance and considered suspicious.

The movie's narrative also shows that their racial identity, economic status, and legal position make Tori and Lokita vulnerable to exploitation without getting proper protection from the state. They become victims of violence and criminalization in Belgium, which is often seen as a developed and prosperous country. There are no white characters in the film who truly protect or help them. Therefore, this movie can be considered counterstorytelling, which is a narrative that aims to question the truth of accepted premises or myths, especially those held by the majority. This movie also functions as a form of legal storytelling that raises the voices and experiences of unaccompanied immigrant children who are marginalized in the legal system and migration policies. By showing the difficult realities of life experienced by Tori and Lokita, this movie challenges the assumption that the law and policies are fair and protect all children equally.

Other than voice of color, there's also the tenet of intersectionality, which means looking at how race, gender, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, as well as combinations of all these identities, play a role in different situations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Through Tori and Lokita, the movie shows how various social identities, such as age, race, gender, immigrant status, and class, overlap and influence their experiences. Lokita is a teenage girl from Cameroon. She is an unaccompanied child living without legal protection in poor economic conditions and without access to legal employment. The complexity of her identity affects how she is viewed by institutions when applying for asylum and how social structures view Lokita. Lokita's identity as a young black

woman, an unaccompanied immigrant, and an illegal immigrant in Belgium results in multiple layers of vulnerability that are viewed with bias by the authorities and exploited by Betim.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) reveal that although all oppressed people share similarities in terms of oppression, the forms of oppression they experience can be different. This concept is related to essentialism and anti-essentialism, namely that a group can have a unique essence but there are still differences among the members of that group. In the movie, anti-essentialism is seen in how Tori and Lokita, who are both unaccompanied minors, have different experiences due to differences in their legal status, age, gender, and social background. For example, Lokita, a black teenage girl and unaccompanied immigrant, faces a different form of oppression than Tori, such as when Lokita is harassed and forced to record indecent videos for Betim's profit. These two characters show that no single experience represents the entire group of unaccompanied children, but their experiences are influenced by their unique and complex identities.

In CRT, the tenet "racism is ordinary, not aberrational" is central to the framework developed by Delgado and Stefancic. They argue that racism is a common daily experience for most people of color and is embedded in the way society functions on a daily basis, for example in the education system, social services, etc. A characteristic of this racism is that it is habitual, meaning that it is difficult to recognize or overcome. *Tori et Lokita* does not directly criticize racism, but focuses on the structural difficulties experienced by the two main characters as unaccompanied black immigrant children in Belgium. These hardships stem from the asylum system and social attitudes that may disadvantage immigrants of color.

In the movie, several scenes show how Lokita faces these obstacles, such as uncertainty about her legal status, inability to get legal work, and vulnerability to exploitation, which shows systemic bias. During her asylum interview, Lokita faces a lengthy asylum process and immigration officials question her answers, showing that they are suspicious of Lokita's claims. Both Tori and Lokita become involved in crime, highlighting the asylum system's failure to protect immigrant children of color and indirectly endangering them. The movie highlights how the asylum system, which is supposed to protect children, actually pushes them into dangerous situations.

One of the five tenets is that race is socially constructed. In the movie, this tenet is clearly seen through how the race of the two characters affects the social and legal treatment they receive in Belgium. Tori and Lokita do not experience discrimination solely because of their skin color, but because of how society constructs black immigrant children as a foreign group. When Lokita asks a white female driver for help, she initially agrees, but immediately drives away when Lokita requests permission to bring Tori along. This refusal to help shows how social constructions of race influence society's attitudes toward black immigrant children. Society sees them not as children in need of help but as a foreign group to be avoided. This reinforces the marginalization and racial discrimination experienced by the two main characters.

The two characters were also stopped and questioned by the police while walking at night. This action shows that they were victims of racial profiling, which is a discriminatory practice by law enforcement officers who target individuals as suspects in crimes based on their race, ethnicity, religion, or origin. A report by Refugees Rights Europe (2018) reveals that immigrant children of color face racial discrimination from police officers in Belgium. One example is a 17-year-old girl who was arrested, handcuffed, and forced into a basement with extremely cold temperatures. The racial profiling, violence, and detention experienced by immigrant children of color are examples of the tenets that racism is ordinary and race is socially constructed. Certain racial groups are constructed as dangerous individuals and synonymous with criminality. This construction then justifies discriminatory practices that are considered normal or reasonable by the social and legal systems.

Interest convergence in CRT, as proposed by Derrick Bell, explains that the majority group will tolerate progress for racial justice if it is in line with the interests of the majority group. In the context of policies to protect unaccompanied children, policies that appear to benefit these children are actually only implemented if they also benefit the state. In Belgium, protection for unaccompanied children is provided through the granting of asylum and access to education and other social services. This policy benefits Belgium by providing it with a productive population and

the opportunity to educate them to become useful workers for the country. However, the policy does not deeply consider interracial interactions or the risks faced by children after they enter Belgium, including racial profiling and exploitation that continue even after children have obtained legal status and social services. This shows that the state is driven more by economic and political reasons than by genuine concern for the welfare of these immigrant children.

In the movie, Tori, who has been granted asylum and access to education and permanent housing, still experiences racism and exploitation. This confirms that legal status alone is not enough to protect immigrant children from danger and criminal networks. According to a report by UNICEF Belgium (2018), unaccompanied children in Belgium face an alarming situation, namely a lack of guidance and access to legal channels, forcing many to take great risks, such as entrusting their lives to smugglers and becoming victims of criminal networks, especially girls who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Meanwhile, Lokita, who remains in a state of legal limbo, becomes further entangled in the drug network after abandoning the asylum process. Considerations regarding the legal status of unaccompanied children are of secondary concern to the state, which usually focuses only on the basic needs of children to survive, leaving many of them in limbo (Bhabha, 2003). Digidiki and Bhabha (2018) state that neglecting the rights and other needs of unaccompanied children will have a negative impact on their welfare. Their uncertain legal status is often used as a strategy by the state to discourage children from applying for further asylum, keeping them in limbo until adulthood and deterring other children from coming to the country (Lelliott, 2022).

Structural determinism in CRT refers to the concept that deeply rooted ways of thinking or practices in society determine significant social outcomes, often unconsciously. The three basic principles of CRT, namely racism is ordinary, race is socially constructed, and interest convergence, show that racism against immigrant children of color is systemic and considered normal. Their identities are constructed as threats, not as victims, while legal protection is only provided if it benefits the state. The movie shows that social and legal structures do not change, so Tori and Lokita remain marginalized throughout the story, indicating that this injustice stems from a long-standing system that is difficult to change.

CONCLUSION

The narrative structure of the movie *Tori et Lokita* (2022) reveals the ambiguity and ineffectiveness of asylum policies regarding the protection of unaccompanied children in Belgium. The vagueness of these policies places Tori and Lokita in an uncertain situation, pushing them to choose a dangerous path by entering the criminal world in order to survive. Their relationships with other characters also reveal social disparities, particularly due to differences in race, age, and legal status. These conditions shape their character development from oppressed to rebellious.

This movie shows systemic racism through their experiences, which are told from the perspective of marginalized groups that are unique and can't be compared to the experiences of dominant groups. This shows that their experiences can be seen as the voice of color or the voice of minority groups. The stories of Tori and Lokita serve as counter-narratives and legal storytelling because their experiences challenge the myth that asylum policies related to the protection of unaccompanied children in Belgium are fair and effective without considering their race and age. In addition, this film also represents a number of basic tenets of CRT, such as racism is ordinary, race is socially constructed, interest convergence, intersectionality, anti-essentialism, and the concept of structural determinism.

The harsh realities they experience reveal systemic failures and systemic racism, whether in social interactions, policies, or their environment. Thus, the movie *Tori et Lokita* (2022) is not just a work of visual art, but also a medium for social criticism that voices the experiences of unaccompanied children and highlights the inequalities in the legal and social systems of their destination countries

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