

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF MULTICULTURALISM REPRESENTATION ON CHILD CHARACTERS IN THE FILM “CUTIES”

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Abstract

This study focused on the multiculturalism representation of child characters in the movie “Cuties” (2020), directed by Maimouna Doucoure. The research was interesting as it represented the child characters into multiculturalism issues which became the central problem in “Cuties”. The data was obtained in the form of movie scenes that presented the structure of multiculturalism issues. These issues were shown both visually and narratively. The study was a descriptive qualitative study using a semiotic analysis method that referred to the John Fiske model, which consisted of reality level, representation level, and ideology level. The symbols in the movie scenes represented the multiculturalism in “Cuties”.

This multiculturalism could convey the diversity and differences in French society. The result of study indicated that multiculturalism was shown by the process of accepting a new culture, which was represented through attitude, behavior, narration, and other aspects in the movie through the characterization of Amy as the child character. Besides, the existence of this multiculturalism process could construct the identity formation in anyone without exception to a child.

Keywords: Child, Movie “Cuties”, Multiculturalism, Semiotic

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the representation of multiculturalism in the child characters in the film "Cuties". This theme is interesting to study because the researcher looks at the issue of multiculturalism which is the central problem in the Cuties film and how the director constructs multiculturalism through a child character, namely Amy who is described as a figure who is confused about the construction of her identity. Understanding and understanding multiculturalism means trying and trying to understand, understand and appreciate any differences that occur between two or more from different cultures (Purwasito, 2003). The issue of multiculturalism is related to one's identity or the image of one socio-cultural culture in another. The film "Cuties" which originated in France, features children who are seen as victims of loss in their lives and relationships with adults. Departing from this phenomenon, researchers are interested in seeing the representation of multiculturalism in children's characters in film media.

Film media is considered as a form of mass communication. As a mass media, film is not only used as a mass media that reflects reality, but can also shape reality. Film is a work of cultural art, community organization, sound or silent mass media produced based on the principles of film photography. Film is one of the alternative art forms from visual forms that are in great demand by the public, because by looking at the events/story behind the story, from what can be shown by the film. Therefore, in the process of developing films, they no longer only display moving images, but also with certain benefits such as politics, capitalism, human rights, and lifestyle (Achmad, 2020).

According to (Hall, 1997) states that representation itself is part of cultural research, which focuses on how to construct and represent the world in society. Representation is the process of generating meaning through language. Therefore, notation connects concepts and language, which allows us to refer to objects, people or events in the real and fictional/imaginary worlds.

The reality shown in the film is the real reality. Film is a very real medium, although in fact there are many aspects that make it detached from reality. The series of signs in the film is a series of signs that have existed or were used by humans. This is because all kinds of films are products of human thought. Even abstract films are displays of a series of symbols known or used by their creators. Every film that is produced or produced must convey a message to its audience. If it is related to the study of communication research, the film

presented must have an effect that is in accordance with the expected information link, so that the core information cannot be conveyed correctly.

The film *Cuties* or *Mignonnes* is one of the films that carries the theme of multiculturalism. This French film was written and directed by Maimouna Doucoure. The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival on January 23, 2020, and streamed on Netflix streaming media on September 9, 2020, for a total duration of 96 minutes. The film *Cuties* caused controversy on Netflix and became popular within days because it was believed to feature sexuality, sexism, language, and substance, and was played by minors and was rated 18+. Netflix has asked viewers to pay more attention to and interpret the stories they are trying to tell in the *Cuties* film. The film, directed by Maimouna Doucoure, was not a problem when it was screened in France on August 19, 2020. In fact, *Cuties* won an award at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival. The online media page (www.tek.id, 2020), mentions the fact that the *Cuties* film is a story of the past. little famous director. Maimouna Doucoure said in a quote from *The New York Times*, "She grew up in two different cultures that gave me the strengths and values that I have today".

Starting with the clichéd phenomenon of French multiculturalism, it is widely used in French film production. Several French films address real immigration issues and are influenced by cultural and family issues. Most immigrants in France come from North Africa, North African culture is different from France and is thick with Islamic values. Besides bringing cultural elements, it also connects with low-income communities and people living in slum areas of France. Differences in perception of clothing also exacerbate this. According to Amy, her friend looks very free, without a veil or other objects covering her body (Safran, 2003).

Studies on multiculturalism communication were initially used by national institutions such as the United States, France, and England (Purwasito, 2003). Multiculturalism itself is a policy that emphasizes the characteristics of different cultures, especially how they relate to each other to receive their national status. Multiculturalism is often used to describe a society with many different cultural groups, which are usually the result of immigration (Liliweri, 2005).

Throughout the film, Amy faces two cultural issues that make Amy confused about her own identity because she suddenly faces multiculturalism. Amy represents a child who is easily carried away by globalization like children in Indonesian films/sinetrons, and in this era of globalization, this is not only an opportunity, but also a challenge that must be watched out for, especially for children (Syarifah, 2016).

The film *Cuties* has a strong meaning for the representation of today's children who are familiar with the world of social media today, including the environment that affects them, which can be seen from cultural, social, and personal forms. Things like that make children premature (grow up prematurely). What is shown in this film, also happens in Indonesia. Doucoure tries to convey information by reflecting on how capable children are in using the unrestricted internet, as well as the situation of parents who do not know this. Parents must also be more "aware" or understand their children, because parents are the first school for their children.

In fact, children grow up in a social and cultural environment that is dominated by the people around them, so that it will indirectly shape the child's character. Children are rarely allowed to determine their own path, including managing their own happiness, because this determination is based on adult choices. It is believed that children still cannot determine their own path independently, so they still need guidance and direction or adult guidance. The guidance and teaching of children is usually always followed in accordance with the customs and habits of the community, the phenomena of all of which occur in the *Cuties* film.

In this study, we look at a previous research study written by Sari (2018) which as her research discusses how the identity of a person (woman) can be seen through a vlog, the vlog belongs to Gita Savitri (Gitasav). This study uses a semiotic method that refers to the Roland Barthes model. This research will produce a form of identity for Gitasav who is an Indonesian vlogger living in Germany. Based on this research, the author got the idea of a similar research that discusses how a girl whose identity can be constructed by cultural diversity (multiculturalism) resulting from moving countries and experiencing culture shock.

The purpose of this research is as a lesson for the public or the audience about how to interpret and understand a film. This study will explain how the representation of multiculturalism in children's characters in the film "*Cuties*". The creation of this research departed from the news about the film "*Cuties*" which stated that the film caused controversy (pros and cons) because it played an eleven year old child with adult behavior and the film has not been studied much. Child characters in the world of cinema cannot be separated from the construction of adults.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, the qualitative method used by the author is rooted in a natural setting as a necessity. Humans use qualitative methods as research tools, rely on analysis and direct research

objectives on a theoretical basis, and are descriptive by limiting the focus of research. about having criteria used to test its validity. The data is a temporary research design, and the results of the study were approved by the authors and the research object (Moleong, 2017).

The current research conducted by the author uses qualitative research, qualitative research is a descriptive research procedure in written or spoken language from people who can observe their behavior (Moleong, 2017). Qualitative research adapted to the object in this study is a sign that represents multiculturalism in the child characters in the film *Cuties*. Its function is to reveal the meaning of signs and symbols, even symbols in films. This study uses John Fiske's semiotic analysis method to represent multiculturalism in children's characters in the *Cuties* film.

The subject used in this research is the film "*Cuties*" by Maimouna Doucoure with a total duration of one hour and thirty-six minutes (96 minutes) which is documented in the form of scenes.

The object as well as the corpora in this study are scenes and dialogues that show the representation of multiculturalism in the child characters in the *Cuties* film through the child character Amy. The whole scene in this film is 72 scenes, while the number of scenes to be studied is 14 scenes. This study aims to determine the representation of multiculturalism in children in the film *Cuties*

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

1) Reality Level

At the level of reality, events that are encoded as reality such as gestures, facial expressions, appearance, behavior, speech, environment, make-up, and sound will be analyzed as follows:

a. Gesture

Gesture is a gesture that represents a character in a film



Figure 1. The highlight of Amy's character in terms of gesture

Amy's character as a child character (main) in terms of gesture is shown by the medium shot in scene 2. Over time, Amy arrives in France which is constructed by her friends, Amy has a gesture that looks like a rebellious and forcing child. Amy took her little brother's clothes with the intention that the clothes would become a crop top if worn by Amy. His actions like that make Amy an angry child because her wish must be fulfilled.

b. Facial expressions

Facial expressions are a combination of various movements or facial expressions, such as eyes, eyebrows, mouth, forehead, and so on that represent the behavior or feelings of a character in a film.

Figure 2. Amy's face expression



In scene 35, it is shown how Amy's facial expression is sad when she remembers her family when dancing on stage with a close up type. Amy showed a sad and regretful face when she appeared on stage that should have been Amy showing a happy facial expression with a smile when performing.



Figure 3. Amy's appearance after her move to France

b. Appearance

In the aspect of appearance, we will discuss the appearance that appears on a character in a film, such as accessories, clothes, and so on that are worn by players with a specific purpose. Amy's appearance changed, starting to wear skimpy and tight clothes with the type of long shot. In this case, Amy adheres to the pattern of social life of French children mentioned in the online media page TheAsianParent which states that one of them is a child who is free to act. Amy is constructed by French culture, which has an explicit and open style of appearance, and is not suitable for children of Amy's age because it can be said that Amy is precocious. This change in Amy's appearance is a multiculturalism activity that leads Amy to follow a new culture and modern society.

c. Behavior

This behavioral aspect is related to the interaction between characters in a film with the aim of being interpreted symbolically. Amy's behavior has changed from being a good child who obeys God, then stealing to support relationships to becoming a rebellious child who sticks a ballpoint pen into her friend's hand. Amy stabbed her friend's hand with a ballpoint pen directly and spontaneously. Amy did this because her friends called her a "slut" because of Amy's sexy and minimal clothes (not appropriate for children her age). Amy felt disapproved of these words, Amy immediately stabbed her male friend's hand with a ballpoint pen. In this behavioral aspect, the form of representation of multiculturalism can be shown through behavior that makes Amy increasingly aggressive, due to the lack of assistance from parents in cultural adaptation.

b. Saying

In the aspect of speech, we can see various meanings that appear in a film, such as the dialogue spoken by the characters.



In scene 12, Amy and her mother are arguing, because Amy misbehaved and was caught wearing scanty clothes

Amy's mother: You attacked your classmate and behaved like a prostitute!

Amy's mother felt ashamed of her son's behavior and her mother expressed her anger because of her condition being married by her father who remarried. Amy experiences a tense situation with her mother because of Amy's acculturation process. His mother was very angry because she found her son who was naughty at school and dressed up.

c. Environment

In the environmental aspect, we will discuss the environment that builds or forms a meaning and character for a character in a film.



Figure 6. Friendship Environment after moving to France

In scene 32, Amy is seen who is happy after shopping with her friends and is taking out her shopping results while walking home, then Amy's younger brother is picking up clothes that are thrown in the air. It can be understood by Amy taking out her shopping, so the audience knows what she and her friends have bought.

d. Make up

Aspects of make up can not be separated from a system of marking and symbolization to interpret the message to be conveyed.



Figure 6. Amy with striking make up like adult.

The make-up or make-up worn by Amy in scene 34 shows a striking make- up. Amy's makeup is a form of makeup that is usually worn by adults, children shouldn't wear makeup, if it's simple enough, it's not excessive, and shows Amy's inner turmoil.

e. Voice

The sound aspect is one of the symbols that has a special meaning in semiotic analysis.



Figure 8. Amy's Voice Pronunciation to her father

Amy and her father were seen fighting because her father found Amy was using her cell phone which Amy had been looking for and thought was missing. Amy spoke to her father in a loud voice, because Amy wanted to keep the cell phone that actually belonged to her father from being taken back.

1) Representation Level

At the representation level, the encoded reality must be displayed in technical codes, such as camera, lighting, editing, narration, conflict, setting, music, action, and characters. These elements will be transmitted into a representational code that can be actualized into these elements, following the representation level analysis:

a. Camera

Camera has an important role in a film for taking shots or angles with a role that will bring up the characterization of a character in the film



Figure 9. Amy in short close up

b. Lighting

Lighting or lighting has a meaning in shaping a character in a film, such as providing a supporting visualization effect.



Figure 10. Amy with dark lighting

Amy is shown with dark lighting with the time setting at night before Amy goes to sleep. The scene was carried out in the recitation room at Amy's apartment location with the accompaniment of typical traditional music to add a mysterious impression. A darkly lit background in a Cuties movie would suggest something serious. The scene is to give awareness to Amy for her actions that have followed French culture quickly and to the extreme. Amy stands to the accompaniment of songs and distinctive speeches and splashes water on Amy's body, so that it fits well if the lighting is made dark to give a mysterious impression.

c. Editing

The editing aspect is part of the unification of a scene in the film and the time used by an actor/actress/character to appear in a scene in the film.



Figure 11. Some scenes with close up editing

This Cuties film editing technique uses a lot of close up shots, because the director wants to convey a message not only through dialogue and narration, but the visualization in this film is very much displayed. So that the audience will get the implied meaning in it. Implicitly

Amy who is dominant in taking close up shots shows that Amy is the main character who dominates.

d. Narrative

Narrative has a relationship with the words spoken by the actor/actress/character. Narrative is also a form of character building.



Picture 12. Amy after discussing with her mother

In that scene, Amy hugs her mother because she has accepted Amy's situation and appearance, and her mother defends Amy from her aunt's anger. The scene contains the following narration:

Auntie : the son of an honorable person will not wear this Amy's mother : let my daughter

Aunt : no

Aunt : go and wear your dress for your dad's wedding Amy's mother : don't disturb my daughter, aunty!

In this scene, it gives its own message of how a mother accepts her child in any situation and condition and indirectly describes the situation of liberal Islam in France. The mother who hugged Amy gave an understandable sign that her mother had finally accepted Amy with all her changes. The narrative in the scene becomes the climax as a form of building a character that is owned by Amy.

e. Conflict

Conflict that occurs in a film is a part that participates in building a character. Conflict is one of the things that is the core (central) in a story. Conflict is able to make the storyline reach its climax (end). Conflict can occur externally (with another person) or internally (with one's self).



Picture 13. Amy fights with her mother

It can be seen in the scene that Amy and her mother face each other with loud and high volume words. The conflict occurred because Amy's actions, which were secretly unknown to her mother, were finally discovered. His mother was very angry with Amy who dressed like an adult until her behavior was very extreme in absorbing French culture. Mariam, who knew this, was immediately angry and shouted at Amy, because such behavior was considered self-deprecating.

f. Settings

Setting is a factor that can bring a character in a film to life. Setting in the form of atmosphere, place, and so on can give a special meaning to a character in the film.



Picture 14. Amy and her friends under the railway bridge as a place to practice

The scene was chosen for the place setting because it shows the prominence of the setting where Amy can express herself freely, so she can blend in with French culture with her friends. To form the character, Amy is set in such a way. The scene was taken with a long shot technique to show the quiet street space which can be explained as one of the settings for the Cuties film

g. Music

The musical aspect is one aspect that John Fiske has included in his discussion of film. The function of music in the film can have an effect on the audience in a meaning about the film, both in terms of story, atmosphere, dramatization, and the character of the characters in a film.



Picture 15. Amy with slow music background

Slow music can show a calm atmosphere like in the scene above, and peaceful. The music played during the scene above is by Ablaye Cissoko & Volker Goetze – Amanke Dioni, music publisher: Sindee Levin Music OBO Ablaye Cissoko. The background gives meaning and message to the scene even without dialogue and gives Amy an emotional and psychological effect after going through the early days of arrival, changes in French culture, and Amy returns to her senses the same as in the beginning.

h. Action

The action aspect is a form of character depiction based on what the character will do in a film, in accordance with the character formation.



Picture 16. Amy's action when she dances on the open stage

Amy seemed to succeed in performing with her friends on stage. Amy managed to appear because she saw Yasmine who did not come because of her previous actions. Her friends also invited Amy to rejoin to fill the vacant position and on the other hand they would soon appear, so Amy also managed to appear and show her dancing actions that she had learned so far.

i. Character

Character is the essence of a characterization. Characters have an important effect on the course of a story in a film. With this character aspect, a film can represent social reality in the films made.



Figure 17. Amy's character as the main character

After going through many things and various problems, Amy was able to find her identity again. Amy's character shown is very strong and can represent the reality of Muslim girls who immigrated to France. The journey of finding Amy's identity since moving to France is very winding and long. Amy finally chooses to return to her original culture and play with friends her age.

2) Ideology Level

At the ideological level, all elements are organized so that they are categorized into ideological codes, such as patriarchy and class, the following is an analysis of the ideological level:

a. Patriarchy

Aspects of patriarchal ideology generally explain the concept of strata or social status, such as the position of men in various aspects being above women.



Picture 18. Amy is cooking in the kitchen

Amy cooks on the orders and orders of her aunt who, like a daughter, has to help and cook in the kitchen. Amy couldn't resist either and immediately did it from dawn until 10:00 am, which required Amy to go to dance auditions with her friends. This shows that there is a patriarchal ideology that women must do domestic work. The patriarchal ideology is still valid today in several countries and cultures. Where men as holders of power become a symbol for women to serve and serve.

b. Class

In a film, this class aspect gets its own portion, because the class aspect in the film is a form of representation of social class in a society that will be raised in the film later.



Picture 19. Amy gets bullied at school

Class shows the level of stratification of a person based on what he has, such as power, association, material, and so on. Amy was bullied at school because she was considered unequal to what happened in France, especially to her friends her age. Even though Amy is bullied, Amy still struggles to get into the cuties group of friends (gang) consisting of Angelica, Jess, Coumba, and Yasmine.

B. Discussion

The first finding found by the author is that the main character in the film *Cuties* experienced culture shock because he found cultural differences from his origin from Senegal to France. The main character in the film is an example of a representation of how immigrant children see cultural differences. The main character who experiences culture shock requires cultural adaptation to have a multicultural perspective.

Having a multicultural perspective is inseparable from the cultural aspects that influence it. One way to do this is by way of cultural adaptation, adaptation itself is a problem that needs to be solved when a person or group communicates with a different culture from their origin. So that a person will tend to have an awareness of the demands and expectations of the new environment to change behavior.

Gudykunts and Kim in (Utami, 2015) state that everyone's motivation to adapt is different. The individual's ability to communicate in accordance with the new cultural norms and values, depends on the process of adjustment (adaptation). From what has been explained in the adaptation process, the main character in the film adapts to the cross-cultural adaptation approach. The process that the main character goes through in adapting is assimilation which is the most perfect stage of adaptation which results in a situation where the newcomers minimize the use of old cultures to look like local residents (Utami, 2015).

Knowing the adaptation process of assimilation to the main character, the main character in the film adapts by observing the surrounding environment so that it can be seen and accepted by French children in general. This adjustment can be seen from how the main character dresses, talks, behaves, and so on. The changes shown are also very clear, when the main character is in the home environment and outside the home environment, for example, the style of dress that was originally used to become more fashionable and modern by wearing minimal and tight clothes, wearing make-up, and so on. other.

The next finding is that the main character in the Cuties film is treated with conservative cultural traditions that still apply in his family. Conservative culture is a support for traditional values because they have different values and goals. Conservative culture shown in the film, such as the main character who has been instilled in the principle that women should be in the domestic sector such as cooking, cleaning the house, and also shown in the main character's mother who must accept and obey the decisions of men, such as accepting the husband's decision. (the main character's father) to marry a second wife, as well as strict rules in terms of belief (religion) that he embraces.

Furthermore, the findings found by the author are the forms seen in the process of multiculturalism in the main character in verbal and non-verbal forms. The verbal form found in the main character is a shift in the dialogue and tone of voice of the parents who use loud voices. The words spoken by the main character become rude, impolite, and inappropriate at the age of 12 years. The choice of spoken language used also shifted.

Meanwhile, non-verbal forms found in the main character can be seen from body language, body movements, how to dress, to the silence that appears in each scene. The main character shows his aggressiveness after seeing his surroundings. The main character does not get proper direction from his parents or family because his family problems are also complex. Indirectly, the main character becomes precocious.

4. CONCLUSION

The representation of multiculturalism in the child characters in the Cuties film (2020) which is shown in every scene, is the result of the construction and representation of the director who describes the process of multiculturalism in the main character. The main character that appears in the Cuties film is the object of this research. The following conclusions can be conveyed in the main important points by the author, namely:

1. Multiculturalism in the characters, as Muslim immigrant girls, is represented through attitudes, behaviors, narratives, and other elements in the film.
2. The process of multiculturalism in the character is represented as an example of an immigrant child who wants to be accepted in his new environment.
3. In the process of accepting multiculturalism, the main character experiences a number of conflicting problems both in his family and the circle of friends (inner circle), such as problems in culture, social, religion, class, and patriarchy.
4. The process of multiculturalism in the Cuties film is shown by representing the main character, a child who grows up and can appreciate two cultures well.
5. In the process of multiculturalism, it can construct the formation of identity and identity in anyone without exception to children.
6. The production of children's films with critical stories is still rare, and often experiences adult construction.
7. The main character's family background still applies conservative cultural traditions.

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