



## Representing Multiculturalism in *Encanto* Movie

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### Abstract

Multiculturalism is the focus of discussion in the study of *Encanto*'s film which is linked to Colombian culture and society in the United States. Using Hall's theory of representation, this study aims to explore the extent to which multiculturalism is found in *Encanto*'s films, especially in Colombian society. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method and applied data from pictures, dialogues and narration in the movie. There are two main things that are highlighted, namely first, multiculturalism by underlining the expressive value in Colombian culture. The second issue is showing respect and willingness on diversity. The results of the study found that Colombian people show multiculturalism in their own culture related to the past history and various cultural backgrounds that accompany the existence of Colombian society today. The film *Encanto* is a representation of multiculturalism today.

**Keywords:** *culture, Colombian, diversity, multiculturalism, value*

### Introduction

Multiculturalism in diverse societies is usually correlated with intolerance and shapes social dynamics and policies (Sariyatun & Marpelina, 2023). The issue arose in the mid-twentieth century in response to growing awareness of cultural diversity and the need to promote social justice and equality in diverse societies. Scholars and activists in fields such as sociology, anthropology, political science, and education can be traced back to the origins of multiculturalism theory. Lan (2011, p. 280) quoted that multiculturalism would be more appropriately associated as heterogeneity than plurality. Meanwhile Blum (2001, 2014) underlined that multiculturalism is the knowledge, respect, and evaluation of one's own culture combined with an interest in the cultures of other ethnic groups.

Multiculturalism matters because it is the study to understand and accept other cultures. The real challenge lies in recognizing and embracing diversity, which includes different cultures and community belonging (Moawad & Shoura,

2017). Seeing the urgency of the emergence of multiculturalism, people need to be educated on the importance of multicultural values. Multiculturalism is a theory that emerged in the 20th century at a time of increasing awareness of cultural diversity and the need for the purpose of spreading social justice and equality in diverse societies in one place. The concept of multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of several cultures within a civilization. It is a social and political philosophy that values and acknowledges diversity of culture. The phrase is frequently used to refer to a society where members of many ethnic, racial, and religious groups are able to coexist peacefully and tolerate one another's differences (Moawad & Shoura, 2017). In discussing multiculturalism, Blum (2001) stated that there are components of multiculturalism, acknowledging and embracing one cultural identity, studying and evaluating one's cultural heritage.

Thus, Blum (2001) also underlined that multiculturalism does not imply that members of one culture lack the moral standing to criticize the practices of another culture. The key aspect of understanding and recognizing other cultures is to acknowledge how these cultures express value to their own members. Showing respect and exhibiting a willingness to understand and learn about ethnic or cultural backgrounds other than one's own. This understanding is not intended to be tolerated or justified; rather, it necessitates a critical response from outside parties to participate in providing support, reasons, recognition, appreciation, assessment, strengthening, and empathy in life unity as an integral part of a nation and also recognizes and appreciates cultural diversity, perceiving the presence of various cultural groups within a society as a valuable and worthy attribute to be upheld and preserved. Blum (2001) claims that cultural diversity might be more concretely realized as a manifestation of something excellent that is received and preserved to convey that worth. To express cultural values, it can be by allowing ethnic and cultural affinity groups/nations to learn about the culture of their ancestors, the ethnic group, nation, or civilization. And also, can be researching and learning the ethnic group's historical experience, way of life, successes and defeats, art, literature, and contributions to the nation.

Therefore, multiculturalism can be observed in various forms of communication, including film. As a literary work in the form of a series of motion pictures and usually contains stories that are similar to everyday life which are written by a writer, Film is a medium for conveying various messages to the general public through the media of stories, and can also be interpreted as a medium of artistic expression for artists and filmmakers to express their ideas and story ideas (Adi, 2011; Fithratullah, 2020; Kasih, 2020). It is from this media that many things can be discussed and ultimately provide certain knowledge and understanding to the audience but the contents in the film can be captured differently by the audience. The message in each film's storyline contains signs that will be interpreted differently (Wardaningsih & Kasih, 2022). Therefore, the purpose of this journal is to provide an in-depth understanding of multiculturalism with the subject of a film entitled *Encanto*.

Encanto, the latest animated musical from Disney, has earned critical acclaim and commercial success since its release in late 2021. The film centers around the Madrigal family, who live in a magical house called Encanto nestled in the lush Colombian mountains. The family's matriarch, Abuela Alma, possesses the power to bestow unique gifts upon her family members, except for her granddaughter Mirabel, who struggles to find her place in the family's fantastical world. However, what sets Encanto apart from other Disney films is its celebration of Colombian culture.

The movie showcases various aspects of Colombian life, such as vibrant music, colorful attire, and flavorful cuisine. The incorporation of these cultural elements has resonated with Colombian audiences, who feel proud to see their traditions and heritage portrayed in a positive light on the big screen. With the variety of cultural elements in this film, Encanto can be studied for its multicultural aspects. Similar to several previous studies that have also examined multicultural elements in films.

Even with Encanto's widespread appeal and accurate depiction of Colombian culture, not much research has been done on this movie's representation of multiculturalism. The majority of conversations have focused on its themes of gender identity and magical realism. This study uses multiculturalism theory developed by Lawrence Blum to provide a thorough examination of Encanto's cultural representation in an effort to close this gap. In this study, there are several previous studies that have also examined multicultural elements in film.

Hartanti (2018) discusses the representation of multiculturalism from the diversity of life that is portrayed from the variety of life that is harmoniously shown in the movie *cek toko sebelah* and can motivate viewers to adjust to cultural diversity and also cultural diversity equation. Debora and Saragih (2021) in their study underline the need to be fully aware of the diversity in the society to develop the understanding of the value of multiculturalism in the movie *the fast and the furious: tokyo drift*. Ulya and Rezaian (2022) discusses the representation of the multicultural concept in the movie *raya and the last dragon* which about understanding and the understanding of the concept will obtain awareness, tolerance etc. Next, Purnomo et al. (2022) considers the representation of the process of multiculturalism portrayed by the director in the movie *cuties*. The last is from Rosella (2022) that discusses how national unity is built by the diversity and richness of multicultural groups, which contributes to the nation's strength in the movie *raya and the last dragon*.

Therefore, to continue the previous research, it is worthwhile to make research to explore the relationship between the cultural aspects of Encanto and its success as a narrative using multiculturalism as the approach of the research. This journal aims to find out the multiculturalism issue in the Encanto film through the existence of characters and the setting.

## **Method**

This research project utilized a qualitative research approach. This type of research is focused on providing a comprehensive and detailed description of a particular phenomenon. Qualitative research is a research method used by collecting data, which is qualitative in nature, and research results emphasize the meaning of generalizations (Fadilah & Kuswoyo, 2021:99). The qualitative descriptive methods are used to collect data in the form of text. Data in this study were analyzed from pictures of the movie and dialogue from Encanto movie. The analysis uses Hall's reflective representation approach to examine how multiculturalism is represented (Hall, 2001). As Hall stated (1997), emphasized that representing something involves utilizing language to convey meaning to others through language, sign, or images as a medium of representation. The steps to analyze using Hall's representation theories are as follows.

First, some scenes are chosen based on key visual elements (pictures). Some narrations, and dialogues from the scenes are also taken to identify recurring themes and significant representations. Finally, the theory was used to explore how cultural values are depicted and transformed across these films. The content of the data from the movie was analyzed according to the theory used, namely multiculturalism by Lawrence Blum. A comprehensive literature review was conducted by searching through relevant books and journals found in libraries and the internet.

## **Results and Discussion**

This study discusses a film with the title *Encanto* which describes a girl named Mirabel who comes from a Madrigal family. This film tells the story of a family that has magical powers that come from their ancestors. And the family in this film adapts Latin America as their culture, especially Colombia. This film is centered on three discussions about diversity seen from three main issues, namely expressing values to Colombia culture's members, showing respect and willingness on diversity, and diversity as the source of strength, which can be seen from the various scenes that appear in the film. The diversity in this study was taken from the Colombian culture seen in the film *Encanto*.

### ***Expressing Values to Colombian Culture's Members.***

Picture 1. Time 0:46-2:48

This scene is the opening of the film which depicts the story of Abuela Alma, Mirabel grandmother, who tells about the origin of their magical power about how the power came to be told how the magical power can be passed down to the next generation of the Madrigal family. The story opens with the beginning of the story of Abuela Alma with Abuela Pedro with her three children and other residents who are required to move out of their residence which results in Abuela Pedro disappearing. Abuela Alma said that in the midst of the moment of loss, they were

given a miracle, namely the candle they brought became a fire that never went out, the candle then built the place where they live now.

*Abuela Alma: Long ago, when my three babies had just been born, your Abuelo Pedro and I were forced to flee our home.*

In the existing pictures and dialogues, Abuela told that there is a history of candles related to magical powers within the Madrigal family. Abuela Alma who tells the story of her struggle can reflect the idea of studying and evaluating one's cultural heritage. The words "Long ago" spoken by Abuela Alma are also a statement of the bond of the past and the present. The story of the past told to Mirabel emphasizes that the past will never disappear from the life of a Colombian child.

According to Blum (2001), acknowledging and embracing one's cultural identity, studying and evaluating cultural heritage is a form of appreciation for multiculturalism. This opinion underlines that magical powers passed down from generation to generation have a metaphora to be studied, nurtured and appreciated in the Madrigal family. The family recognizes the importance of their heritage, and they make sure to pass on that identity by telling it and making sure the cultural heritage continues to grow. The way Abuela tells the story can also show how Abuela tries to transfer Colombia's own cultural values to Mirabel.

The multiculturalism mentioned by Lawrence Blum (2001) also allows for a critical approach from other cultures while recognizing how the values of that culture are expressed by other members. In *Encanto*, the description of the difficulties experienced by the Madrigal family at the beginning of the scene where they experienced difficulties when the eviction occurred can reflect the history of displacement and development experienced by the Colombian people. Colombia is one of the countries most affected by internal displacement where conflict and violence have forced them to flee their homes. At the end of 2020, nearly 5 million people were still displaced despite the government and the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces signing a peace pledge in 2016. Candles and magical powers are always present in the film. Reflecting the resilience and value that people give to unity and strength, both of which are their cultural identities, Colombian society is also identical with candles because every year precisely on December 7 is the day of small candles which is also commonly called *noche de las velitas*. This event is usually held to commemorate the event of the conception of Jesus and the Virgin Mary.

Picture 2. Time 04:41-08:48

In this scene, Mirabel is standing in front of a family tree that shows the Madrigal family sequence of her grandmother, Abuela Alma. It shows the family tree from Abuela to her youngest grandchild, Antonio. In this scene, it is shown that Mirabel gets a question from three children from their village who ask about the miracle celebration event that Antonio will perform, who is the youngest member of the family. The three children also asked what magical powers Antonio had and they also asked about Mirabel's magical powers. Which finally responded with Mirabel singing the entire sequence of magical powers that the Madrigal family has.

*Boys: Hey! When's the magic gift happen?!*

*Mirabel: My cousin's ceremony is tonight.*

*Girl 1: What's his gift?!*

*Mirabel: We're going to find out.*

*Boy: What's your gift?!*

*Mirabel: Who's asking?*

*Kids: Us!*

*Mirabel: Well, "us," I can't just talk about myself... I'm only part of the amazing Madrigals.*

*Kids: Who's all the amazing Madrigals?*

In this scene, Mirabel gets questions from village children who want to know each of the strengths that her family members have. Mirabel replied with a song that told a little flashback of what they experienced, as well as describing the strengths that each of her family members possessed. That way, Mirabel succeeded in expressing the cultural values that their family adheres to to village children who are not even members of their family. Mirabel told the three children, "I'm only part of the amazing Madrigals". This emphasizes how history and lineage in the Madrigals family cannot be separated by magic.

The understanding and knowledge of the culture passed down by her grandmother, Abuela Alma, has succeeded in making the girl understand and appreciate the culture embraced by her family. This supports the first understanding that Blum (2001) has, which is that the key to understanding and recognizing culture is to know and have an understanding of the culture.

The painting of the family tree also illustrates how the Madrigal family upholds the history of the previous Madrigal family and the identity that unites them. The dialogue used by Mirabel above also shows that she really appreciates being part of the family, which is evidenced by her who remains proud and continues her family's cultural heritage by introducing the village children even though she herself does not have the magical power as her family. In the song, Mirabel also shows that each family member of the Madrigal family has its own role to continue their family's cultural heritage. The difference in magical power is also

what makes them have different values based on their abilities which makes the village children curious about the contribution of their magical powers. To understand and appreciate the contributions of their different families is a way for them to appreciate the religious diversity that is unique in them by maintaining the same identity. In multiculturalism, when the culture is maintained tightly can be the appreciation of the culture itself (Priwati et.al, 2021).

Picture 3 and 4. Time 17:01-17:20

In this scene, it shows the villagers gathering at the Madrigal family's house to witness the day Antonio gained his powers. The event is usually held by the Madrigal when their family members enter the age of 5 years, on average, the age of the Madrigal family gets its power which is passed down by the candle. In this scene, this article can also see that Abuela Alma is the speaker at the event as the head of the Madrigal family.

*Abuela Alma: Fifty years ago, in our darkest moment, this candle blessed us  
with a miracle.*

*And the greatest honor of our family has been to use our blessings to serve  
this beloved community.*

*Tonight, we come together once more as other steps into the light... to make  
us proud.*

In this scene, the opening speech of the celebration of Antonio's magical powers presented by Abuela alma shows how a person embraces the cultural heritage that has been held by an organization, where Abuela alma tells the story of their family who experienced difficulties and gained the magical power.

Abuela said, "Fifty years ago, in our darkest moment". Abuela repeated how history has an important role in the life of the Madrigal extended family. Abuela alma ensures each member understands the responsibility to uphold their heritage and cultural identity as the head of the family. In this incident, it can also be concluded that the gift ceremony held by Antonio can also function to transmit the values of their cultures to the new generation and not only about the continuation of the magical power of the Madrigal family. At the beginning of the speech, she said that the greatest honor of such magical powers is to use their talents to help and serve other inhabitants, which has become the value of the Madrigal family, judging from the children and grandchildren of Abuela to carry out this understanding.

The picture also shows that not only the Madrigal family but all the villagers gather to celebrate the same thing as the Madrigal family, the event can also be a place for family members to express their cultural values from one to the villagers. Seeing the villagers who came, celebrated and understood their differences with

the Madrigal family stated that they were aware of the differences and appreciated the differences by participating in the celebration. To recognize and learn cultures that are different from one another and appreciate them (Deborah, et. Al, 2021).

***Showing Respect and Willingness on Diversity***

Picture 5 and 6. Time 06:05-06:08 and 06:13-06:16

In this scene, Mirabel is introducing the magical powers that her family has, one of which is that she tells about the advantages of her mother, Julieta, who has magical powers. His mother could treat the entire village where her family lived by eating only the food made by her mother. In the following picture, it can be seen that Mirabel is trying to heal one of the villagers who is in pain and can be seen from her blackened eyes. The background of the picture shows different types of villagers from various professions and circumstances.

*Mirabel: The truth is she can heal you with a meal*  
*Her recipe are remedies for real*  
*If you're impressed, imagine how i feel*

In this scene, Mirabel is introducing her mother's power which has healing powers through the food she makes. In many cultures, food, including holding important roles such as a symbol of care, unity, and a symbol of healing as portrayed by the film about Julieta's abilities. Julieta' abilities is to heal others with her food and as the picture displayed, its food reference to traditional food from Colombia namely bunuelos, a simple fried food made from wheat-based yeast dough. Colombian people often eat bunuelos during holidays to bring luck in their beliefs. Julieta's abilities and other family members reflect traditional values that have been passed down from generation to generation, which symbolizes that the power of Madrigal is not only magical power but also symbolizes their cultural heritage. And through this ability, all Madrigal families can express their family identity and contribute to the community through acts of caring for the villagers.

In multiculturalism, emphasizing respect and appreciation for diversity to be a solution in life in religion (Race, 2015). In this scene, we can see a variety of backgrounds assisted by the Madrigal family. This shows the fact that through the power possessed by the Madrigal family, it can be used to support and help the population regardless of background. And through the action of this Madrigal family, it can become the root of the unity of the population as well as respect and appreciation in a multicultural environment.



Picture 7 & 8. Time 15:40-15:50

The scene featuring Cecilia and her father represent the residents who show not only tolerance but also support and appreciation. By coming to the madrigal family's house, they showed their support and understanding to the family as protectors and helpers of the village

This scene can be considered showing respect and willingness on diversity to others because as we can see not only Cecilia but other villagers appear to celebrate Antonio's magical powers days. It is symbolic of the villagers recognizing and showing respect through the madrigal family by showing gesture support for the family. This participation of the villagers can also show they didn't engage with the family only because of his power but they also engage with the culture of the family through the attending Antonio celebration which is an important event for the madrigal family.

In the next scene, Cecilia and her father pause their walk as they enter the house of madrigal to admire the candle of the madrigal family. It can be symbolic of the villagers' willingness on diversity, who are different from them because the madrigal family has power. Cecilia and her father also showed respect by stopping a while to observe the candle of Madrigal, which can be considered as a root of Madrigal family culture. All this opinion underlined, it does not mean that members of one culture do not have the moral standing to criticize the practices of another culture, where they decide to respect the culture of the madrigal family (Blum, 2001). This emphasizes that multiculturalism is showing respect and willingness on diversity.

Picture 9. Time 04:41-08:48

This scenario depicts Mirabel being questioned by three village youngsters over the miracle celebration event that Antonio, the youngest family member, will execute. The three children inquired about the magical abilities possessed by Antonio and also sought information regarding Mirabel's magical talents. Ultimately, Mirabel sang the complete sequence of magical abilities possessed by the Madrigal family.

*Boys: Hey! When's the magic gift happen?!*

*Mirabel: My cousin's ceremony is tonight.*

*Girl 1: What's his gift?!*

*Mirabel: We're gonna find out.*

*Boy: What's your gift?!*

*Mirabel: Who's asking?*

*Kids: Us!*

*Mirabel: Well, "us," I can't just talk about myself... I'm only part of the amazing Madrigals.*

*Kids: Who's all the amazing Madrigals?*

In this scene, three kids from the village, Alejandra, Cecilia and also Juancho happened to rush toward the madrigal house to ask Mirabel about the ceremony of Antonio, these three kids ask "Who's all the amazing Madrigals?" which can be seen as expressing excitement to understand more about the Madrigal family power which means it is the reflection of the idea of willingness on diversity with other cultures, and it's not only about tolerance but also willingness to learn it and appreciate it.

Multicultural perspectives will usually always have a connection with the culture that influences them. Communicating cultures with each other is a way of overcoming problems that will refer to adaptation (Purnomo et al., 2022). Seeing how excited these children are, questioning the power of the madrigal family, it's showing that the respect and appreciation for the madrigal family has passed down through generations, the willingness to understand the different traditions and culture of others. Mirabel responses also include the empathy of others where she not only focuses on herself but also her other family. It's reflected as how communities should support and show respect to others.

Colombia is known as the third largest coffee producer, especially Arabica coffee beans. In Colombia, children often drink coffee which is mostly milk and a little bit of coffee, it might be a comforting drink to them. And it's portrayed in the Encanto movie in which Juancho (the boy) usually brings his mug to drink his coffee. In another scene, he is also caught drinking his coffee. And it symbolizes Colombia culture which has a strong connection to coffee culture. Cecilia also represents rural life in Colombia by wearing traditional attire Meanwhile Alejandra represents Colombia culture through wearing colorful dress with braided hairstyle that also resembles rural Colombia clothing.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion of this study shows that the film *Encanto* represents multiculturalism that is closely related to Colombian society, especially in the United States. Multiculturalism in this film emphasizes the expression of Colombian cultural values as well as respect and acceptance of diversity. Colombian society in the Encanto is described as a society that values and embraces differences as part of their identity, linked to their past history and the various cultural backgrounds that shape their lives today. Values such as mutual respect, willingness to accept differences, and recognition of a rich historical heritage are key elements that are highlighted. The film *Encanto* serves as a symbol of contemporary multiculturalism, showing that diversity is not only a reality to be accepted, but also a force that enriches the lives of Colombians today.

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