

## THE PORTRAYAL OF MULTICULTURALISM IN FILM *THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS: TOKYO DRIFT*

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Article History	Abstract
Submitted date: 2021-11-27 Accepted date: 2021-12-04 Published date: 2021-12-28	This research aims to analyze the portrayal of multiculturalism acted by Sean Boswell as the main character depicted in <i>The Fast and The Furious: Tokyo Drift</i> . It will focus on analyzing the main character's attitude and behaviors in this film regarding multiculturalism regardless of his struggle being treated as <i>the other</i> . The findings will be analyzed using a qualitative descriptive methodology and three sub-values of multiculturalism proposed by Lawrence Blum for the theory. The results of this research show that despite the struggle Sean had to encounter, he remains to be portraying the three sub-values of multiculturalism; affirming other's culture, has a willingness or desire to understand their culture, and is pleased and delighted to be part of that culture.
<b>Keywords:</b> film; multiculturalism; Blum	
	Abstrak
<b>Kata Kunci:</b> film; multikulturalisme; Blum	Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penggambaran multikulturalisme diperankan oleh Sean Boswell yang tergambar dalam film <i>The Fast and Furious; Tokyo Drift</i> . Penelitian ini akan berfokus kepada analisis sikap dan perilaku pemeran utama dalam film ini terhadap multikulturalisme terlepas dari perjuangannya yang diperlakukan seperti <i>yang lain</i> . Hasil temuan akan dianalisis dengan menggunakan metodologi deskriptif kualitatif dan tiga teori sub-nilai multikulturalisme yang dikemukakan oleh Lawrence Blum. Hasil yang ditemukan pada penelitian ini menunjukkan sekalipun adanya perjuangan yang harus Sean jumpai, dia tetap menggambarkan tiga sub-nilai multikulturalisme; mendukung budaya kelompok lainnya, adanya kesediaan atau keinginan untuk mengerti budaya pihak lain dan dengan senang dan sukacita menjadi bagian dari kultur tersebut.

### Introduction

Literature holds an important role for the development of many different fields of study. All types of literature have been utilized as the account for the different matters and reasons. One of the types used recently is film. The film is stated by Montgomery, Durant, Fabb, Furniss, & Mills that is one of two dominant forms of fictional narratives at the beginning of the twenty-first century aside from novel and short story (2007, p. 295). However, film and literature in fact have distinctive characteristics in their nature. The film narrates its story through images joined with sounds, whereas short stories or novels are presented by words and with their style of writing. With these distinctive characteristics, Caixia (2013, p.87) claims that "the story presented by the film is much easier to be understood than that told by the novel, especially when certain cultural factors are involved."

The film, besides being a medium for entertainment, does raise different issues with different deliveries. The issues such as culture, human rights, political issues, even religious issues are a few examples depicted through visual images in the film. By delivering such issues, the film is chosen, for some respective reasonings, as the source of both visual and verbal literacy. The film, thus, is chosen as the source for this study.

*The Fast and The Furious: Tokyo Drift* is a 2006 film directed by Justin Lin and part of *The Fast and The Furious* film franchise. This film, *Tokyo Drift*, is a drift racing, thriller film that is set in Tokyo, Japan. The story itself is about a young teenager, Sean Boswell, who moves to Tokyo and lives with his father due to his avoidance of imprisonment in his then state, USA. Whilst in the midst of questioning himself as a person, he then gets involved with the world of racing from which he learns that he is, somewhat, now living as *the other* in Tokyo. Of all kinds of struggles he has in this movie, discrimination, and racism, he however has shown his acceptance towards a new living culture he lives in. Despite the fact of discrimination and racism are shown in this film, there are a few exemplars that could be taken as characteristics of *multiculturalism*.

Multiculturalism is defined by Blum not only valuing the others' cultures, but also willing to treasure different cultures as part of cultural diversity (1992, p. 8). Taylor, likewise, states that multiculturalism, in a generic term, is policies in which combined with three goals; recognizing diversity, fostering integration and producing/maintaining equality (2012, p. 415). Multiculturalism, in short, is not merely a policy and/or a demand for recognition of one's culture, race, and religion, but also a way of responding to the cultural diversity itself.

The other part in the film that is found interesting is that, while in some films there is a depiction of the issue multiculturalism from the viewpoint of minority groups, for instance, African-American groups of people in the narrative of white people film, or Muslims who struggle living in Europe, in *Tokyo Drift*, it features from the point of view of white American. In this sense, the white, American, and man, who has been known to us with all its intricacies in mind, inherits the socially constructed ideology of white supremacy. In other words, this film is seen through the eye of the white skin of an American boy. As to that, this study tries to answer questions related to issues that Sean, a white American boy, who is in the film becoming *the minority* living in Tokyo, was through any kinds of verbal discrimination and racism. This research, therefore, intends to show these kinds of struggles white American, Sean, has encountered and describes how multiculturalism is portrayed through his acting in this film as a value of learning.

## **Methodology**

There is a previous study that uses the same film as the source for their papers. In 2014 an article entitled, *The Translation of Taboo Words into Indonesian in The Fast & Furious Tokyo Drift and Fast Five Movies*, is written by Ni Made Windri Shanti discussing the taboo words uttered in these two movies and analyzing them by using the translation theory of Mildred Larson and theories of taboo words proposed by Timothy Jay. The findings of this paper show that taboo words found in the movies could be translated denotatively and lexically (2014, p. 5).

There have been found several articles as well discussing the issue of multiculturalism with similar mediums (Maheendran, 2017; Hartanti, 2018). Both of these articles explore multiculturalism with different approaches and methodologies. Maheendran (2017) analyzes the portrayal of multiculturalism in the film *Ola Bola* and the success behind the movie that uses content analysis methodology accompanied with the theory of Structuralist Film Theory on writing the analysis. Whilst Hartanti (2018) focuses her research on finding a representation of accommodative multicultural life by utilizing Semiotics theory from Roland Barthes in the Indonesian movie, *Cek Toko Sebelah*.

This study tries to show another possible view point to be analyzed. Through the leading character and his background in this film, it is a struggle as well for an American boy to live in Japan, but yet he depicts such values of multiculturalism despite any kinds of verbal discrimination and racism he faces. Given these three different articles as additional sources for

reading, the writer of this research tries to analyze the film, *Tokyo Drift*, by using the theory proposed by Blum, stated beforehand, and uses a qualitative descriptive for the methodology. There are three steps taken on investigating this research. First, the writer watches the film for couple times and inscribes scenes primarily showing the issues of discrimination, racism Sean faces, and the portrayal of multiculturalism done by Sean himself. Second, the writer analyzes thoroughly the scenes based on the category made by utilizing the theory of sub-values of multiculturalism proposed by Blum. The last is presenting the analysis along with pictures and scripts of the scenes in this paper.

### The Struggle of Sean Boswell

Sean Boswell, an 18 years old young man and also the main lead of this film, faces discrimination and racism like other groups of minorities depicted in the motion-picture industry. Sean finds himself as the minority who is now involved in the affairs of being verbally discriminated against by Japanese characters in this film. These events occur when he joins his new friend, African-American, named Twinkie in the drifting arena for the first time. For a while, Sean and Twinkie have their time in the arena enjoying what most drifters do until Sean talks to a fellow school girl who happens to be a drifter as well. The following is pictures of the scene taken and the script.



Figure SEQ Figure \\* ARABIC 1

[Source: <https://195.2.81.61/movie/the-fast-and-the-furious-tokyo-drift-2006/>]

*D.K* : [Speaking Japanese]

*Sean* : I'm sorry, I don't speak Japanese

*D.K* : Understand that? *Gaijin*? (Performed 00:24:28-00:24:42)

Figure 1 is the first example of discrimination Sean faced. This occurs during his conversation with his schoolfellow, the girl, named Neela. Neela's boyfriend, a Japanese man known as D.K, interrupts their conversations. D.K shows his resistance towards Sean by calling him *gaijin*. *Gaijin* is a Japanese word with its literal definition as "the foreigner; outsider", but this word is commonly used by Japanese people to describe the non-Asian ethnicities, especially white and African-American people that is found somewhat as an offensive choice of word.

The scene continues where Sean has not only been verbally discriminated against by D.K, but also by his school friend, Neela. As in the following picture and script

*Neela* : Takashi [talking to D.K]

*Sean* : We were just talking.

*Neela* : This isn't your scene.

*Sean* : The word you called me, *gaijin* or something or other, what does that mean exactly?

D.K : *Mean, turn around, keep walking.* (Performed: 00:24:42-00:25:00)

Besides having been called *gaijin*, Sean is also told to leave the arena by Neela. As is shown in figure 2, Neela shows rejection towards Sean who comes to the arena by the invitation of Twinkie. Instead of leaving the scene, Sean keeps arguing why he is *gaijin* and refuses to leave. In other words, Sean has been verbally discriminated against and treated as the outsider. Apart from these verbal discriminations, it is shown as well through the look both Neela and D.K give to Sean during that dialogue. Although the look Neela serves is more to prevent the precaution it could get, D.K on the other hand serves a contemptuous look along with a derisive smirk to him. Until this point, Sean refuses to desert that situation due to what he believes in the racing community. Furthermore, as to what Sean believes that the world of racing is for everyone and its inclusivity, yet in the actuality world of racing in Japan, it has been exclusive for some people like him.

### The Portrayal of Multiculturalism

According to Song (2020), “the term “multicultural” is often used as a descriptive term to characterize the fact of diversity in a society, but in what follows, the focus is on multiculturalism as a normative ideal..”. This could mean as well, as the normative term, multiculturalism rejects the idea of *melting pot* and seeks for equality itself.

Blum (1992) likewise proposes three sub-values of multiculturalism which are; affirming one’s own cultural identity, respecting and desiring to understand cultures other than one’s own, and valuing and taking delight in cultural diversity itself. By understanding these three sub-values, there have been a few examples represented by Sean.

The first of three sub-values stated by Blum (1992) is the affirmation of another's cultural identity by learning theirs’ cultural heritage (p.8). Figure 3 shows Sean attending his first day of school a bit late. Sean, who had not yet understood Japanese in this scene, has to deal with his teacher first due to the language barrier he had. During his aim of understanding the teacher’s saying, the teacher, on her bowing salutation, finds out that Sean has not yet worn the traditional slippers, *Uwabaki*. The following presented both the picture and its script.





Figure SEQ Figure \\* ARABIC 3

[Source: <https://195.2.81.61/movie/the-fast-and-the-furious-tokyo-drift-2006/>]



Figure SEQ Figure \\* ARABIC 4

[Source: <https://195.2.81.61/movie/the-fast-and-the-furious-tokyo-drift-2006/>]

- The Teacher* : (Speaking Japanese)  
*Sean* : Wrong Train [handing a paper]  
*The Teacher* : Huh?  
*Sean* : I'm new here,  
*The Teacher* : (Speaking Japanese) ..... Boswell.  
*Sean* : Boswell, yes, Ma'am.  
*The Teacher* : (Bowing) ... (Speaking Japanese) Uwabaki!  
*Sean* : Uwabaki? Uwabaki? Uwabaki (**Performed: 00:17:36-00:18:29**)

The traditional Uwabaki, Figure 4, is mandatory slippers in Japanese culture that should be worn only inside of houses, schools and other public buildings. Although Sean gives no response but nodding along in the scene where the teacher tries to explain Uwabaki in the Japanese language, it is shown in Figure 4 that Sean wears those slippers eventually. This can be an indicator that Sean aims to acknowledge Japanese heritage by knowingly wearing those slippers. It can be put simply that Sean has demonstrated his affirmation of learning Japanese culture.

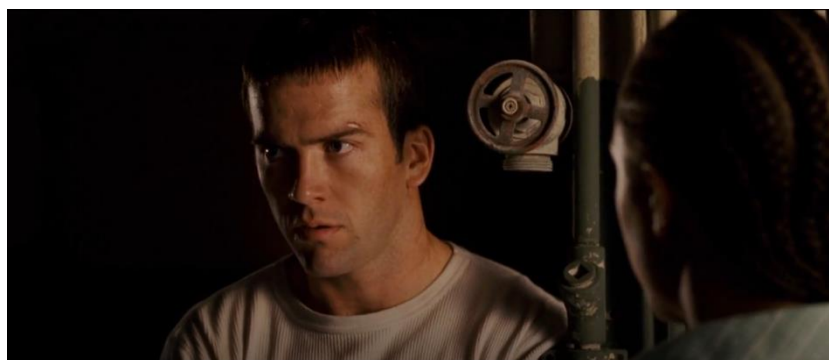
The second sub-values proposed by Blum (1992) is respecting and desiring to understand cultures other than one's own (p.8). This can be seen near the end of the film where the story gets more twisted. Sean now has to deal with the situation where he is being chased by D.K, who is part of the Yakuza or Japanese mafia. The reason behind the chasing was due to the theft caused by, at this point, Sean's friend, Han. During the car chasing, Sean has to witness Han getting killed while trying to protect him from D.K. Yet, Sean and three other friends of his manage to survive and hide for a while. Knowing that he has repeated the worst



mistake since the last one in the USA, he then starts to think to end the situation. In the following are pictures and script presented.

Twinkie : *You all right, man? We're leaving town. Look, I know some people*  
 Sean : *I can't do it, Twink/*  
 Twinkie : *Look, D.K wants your head. All right? And the trouble you just made for Kamata? You're done here, bro.*  
 Sean : *Maybe I should talk to Kamata.*  
 Twinkie : *What?!*  
 Sean : *D.K answers to him (Performed: 01:18:58-01:19:26)*

In figure 5, Twinkie, suggests that Sean must move to another city since the area he has been living in is territorial of D.K's uncle, Kamata. Kamata is known as the chief of the Yakuza. Since Sean and D.K have caused several problems in Kamata's territory, at this moment, Sean is no longer in a position to escape anymore. In this scene could be seen that Sean then thinks this ought to be ended. He thus plans to talk to Kamata himself. On his way to Kamata's club, he has prepared himself a few Japanese sentences to speak to Kamata for his purpose of coming. He then proceeds on explaining the motive of his visit. It is explained that his visit has two reasons which are first to give back Kamata's money which was stolen and to ask Kamata's permission to end the issue he has with D.K. As for that idea, Sean proposes to be having the last race at once to which Kamata agrees. This is presented in the following picture and script.



Sean : *(Speaking Japanese to the bodyguard) <I'd like to see Mr. Kamata, Please>*  
 D.K : *You came to the wrong place.*  
 Sean : *I didn't come here to see you.*

*Kamata* : <Takashi! Who's your friend?> (*Speaking Japanese*)  
*D.K* : <Nobody> (*Speaking Japanese*) <I can handle this>  
*Sean* : (*Speaking Japanese*) <I have something which belongs to you, Sir>  
**(Performed: 01:21:03-01:22:05)**

Through these two pictures along with the script provided, Sean once again has given another example. He is willing to learn to respect Japanese culture, in this sense is towards elderly, by trying to speak in their language and also a desire to understand how one's culture is done in certain ways apart from his own culture.

The third sub-values Blum (1992) proposes is valuing and taking delight in cultural diversity itself (p.8). This means that besides having learnt one's cultural heritage and having a desire to understand one's culture other than his and respect it, he is now fully aware of the satisfaction one's culture gives to him. In this case, Sean is gratified by the car racing in Japan. It has been known throughout the generations in Japan about *drifting*. Drifting has been part of Japanese culture since the 1980s. As to the title of this film, Sean gets himself to learn how to drift as a Japanese. The following picture is the first time Sean decides to learn drifting. It takes sometimes for him to eventually master it, but at the end of the film, Sean has proved himself to be known as a drifter as well. To simply put, Sean has been delighted to be part of this drifting culture in Japan.



## Conclusion

Sean's struggles at first could be taken as examples that discrimination and racism are not only involving the minority groups of people but also including the majority groups as well. This means this issue certainly occurs in different kinds of society despite the race and ethnicity of someone. Yet, through the performance of Sean in this film, it is understood that, regardless of his struggle, to understand the value of multiculturalism, someone has to be fully aware of the diversity in society first. In Sean's action, his body language and the attitude done in this film, Sean is representing the three sub-values of multiculturalism; affirming other's culture, having a willingness or desire to understand their culture, and being pleased and delighted to be part of that culture.

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