

# THE REPRESENTATION OF FILIATION AND AFFILIATION TOWARDS HISPANIC-AMERICAN COMMUNITY ON NETFLIX SERIES “ON MY BLOCK” BY LAUREN IUNGERICH

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## ABSTRACT

On My Block (2018) series, directed by Lauren Iungerich and aired on Netflix in 2018, tells the story of four friends who live in a block in the city of Los Angeles, United States. Chaos often occurs due to the presence of many Hispanic gangsters. Cesar, one of four friends, faces a dilemma between following his family's wishes to become the successor to a gangster named Santos in his area or going to school for a better future with his friends. The dilemma faced by Cesar can be described as a negotiation between filiative and affiliative relations as elaborated by Edward Said (1978). Affiliation is a gift and cannot be changed which is passed down from generation to generation in the family, whereas affiliation is obtained through social interaction with other people. Cesar himself negotiated between filiates and affiliates which in the end, he preferred the filiate to become the head of the Santos gangsters in the block. This film shows a different story plot from other youth films set in slum areas in America which emphasize that success is only shown through education at school. This series instead presents the success achieved by Cesar through his choice as head of the Santos gangsters. However, another character, Monse, who is an African Hispanic woman, decides to go to higher education which is different from Cesar's choice. So, this series shows the construction of the Hispanic-American version of the American Dream which is shown through strong filial ties.

**Keywords:** Filiation and Affiliation, Hispanic-American, Series, Gangster

### I. BACKGROUND

Film has become a medium in the delivery of everyday communication. As a medium for disseminating information, films can also contain shows, events, and stories (Poedjianto, 2014). Film is a form of mass culture that effectively conveys messages to the public about the community itself, in this case the audience (Ida, 2014). In addition, McQuail (2013) states that film is the fastest and easiest medium in terms of conveying information through visual images and the use of audio in its presentation.

Poedjianto (2014) also explains that the scenes depicted in the film present events as if they were happening in front of the

audience. Because the film contains a message to be conveyed to the audience, the film can give meaning to the audience which will be polysemous in that every viewer with a different cultural background will have different thoughts (Ida, 2014). Then, Ida (2011) explained that visual culture is also an aspect of social life in society. In relation to social life, people with knowledge are constructed through audiovisual forms in accordance with specific goals and purposes (Poedjianto, 2014).

The visual aspect is also a characteristic of modernity which contains a certain meaning for the people who watch it and see it (Poedjianto, 2014). In relation to meaning, Hall (1997) explains that there is an

interaction between encoding and decoding. The first is coding done by the producer or crew behind the film production in the first meaning structure order, and the second is related to the meaning of the audience after the message in the show is finished in the second meaning structure.

Basically, the interactions that occur in films are mediated or mediated quasi interactions. This means that interaction operates through mass media intermediaries, such as television, newspapers and radio (Thompson, 2020). In addition to mediated interactions, films also actually have ideological power that will enable communication between shows and the public (Wibowo, 2006).

In this interaction, Wibowo (2006) also argues that the medium used in film is a story which can be an expressive medium in telling a social reality in a particular culture. That is, films always have a connection between the message contained and the existing society. Therefore, film has a significant position in forming the mindset of a society (Wibowo, 2006). In addition, Poedjianto (2014) explains that the visual forms depicted in films can have a significant influence on social change in society.

The process of communicating messages and meanings is the cause of social change that occurs through representations of reality and conditions in society that have different interpretations. Therefore, film

becomes a medium for conveying ideas, ideas, and concepts from a person or group which will eventually form different effects. Messages in films that deliver various effects packaged through the reality of society (Poedjianto, 2014).

Aspects that build a film include plot, plot, characters, characterizations, and others, and these aspects are also packaged in conveying the meaning and ideas of the producer to a wide audience. Usually, the messages contained are also taken from events that occur in society which are also related to aspects of the social life of the audience (Vivian, 2008). In addition, films can also generate stereotypes through their intrinsic elements because films only represent part of society. This part is described in a symbolic reality that cannot represent the reality of society holistically (Vivian, 2008).

Most American films now have the theme of minority groups that inhabit the country, one of which is the Hispanic-American community. Hispanics have been recognized as the Spanish-speaking ethnicity that is spread throughout the world, and Hispanic-Americans are known as the descendants of the Spanish-speaking community living in the United States (Acevedo, 2021). In addition, the number reaches 4.7 percent of the total population of the United States.

This ethnicity is the highest immigrant in the country as much as 31.1 million in

2000, and the largest wave of immigration came from Mexico in 2000 at 29 percent, and another 22 percent came from Latin American countries. Overall, this indicates that the Hispanic-American population is claimed to be the highest minority group in the US (History, 2019).

In films, they are also often depicted as illegal immigrants, drug dealers, low-paid workers, poor families, and members of gangsters (Popelková, 2014). With regard to gangsters, usually young men are often recruited as members because this is related to the projection of the concept of manhood and masculinity in their identity in society (Rodgers & Baird, 2015). By joining the gang membership, they can show their masculine identity and develop self-esteem from social exclusion.

A series with the theme of American society and youth is called ABC's After School Specials by Guy Fraumeni (1972-1995). The series examines youth representation in American society and issues such as adult alcoholism, homosexuality, teenage pregnancy, racism, drug abuse, domestic violence, sexually transmitted diseases, youth suicide, and child abuse (Elman, 2010).

Furthermore, a film that has a specific theme about Hispanic-American society and youth is entitled "A Better Life" (2011) directed by Chris Weitz which depicts themes, including gangsters, poverty, and hopes for success. Popelková (2014) states

that the image of Hispanic-American groups includes views of illegal immigrants who are poorly educated, speak loudly, are Catholic, have large families, speak Spanish, are incompetent, have many names, dance, celebrate events together, and engage in violence.

The series *On My Block* (2018) by Lauren Iungerich was chosen for analysis because it has several advantages. Firstly, this TV Series is popular among young people and has achieved several achievements in several award contests. The series has won a nomination at the Nickelodeon Teen Choice Awards in the select breakout TV show category in 2018 (Lawrence, 2021). Second, this film has an interesting plot that tells about the issues of minority communities in the United States, namely Hispanic-Americans and African-Americans in Los Angeles and raises the main teenage characters.

Soekanto (1985) states that something that controls the actions and actions of an individual can be said to be a social fact. The social facts in the series suggest that Hispanic-American society is very close to gangster culture. The blocks or areas where many Hispanic Americans live are called Barrios.

What is more, Barrios has several characteristics including fewer job opportunities, limitations in political inclusion, low levels of education, and poverty (Duran & Campos, 2020). In

addition, because cities are segregated, this triggers people to rely on their families and friends to find solutions and provide the services they need.

The social conditions in the area have resulted in youth organizing a group called a gang or gangster (Duran & Campos, 2020). Furthermore, Cesar's character who is the successor of the gangster Santos has a dilemma between following his family's wishes to become the successor of gangsters in his area or going to school for a better future with his friends.

The dilemma faced by Cesar can be described as a negotiation between filiative and affiliative relations as elaborated by Edward Said (1978). Affiliation is a gift and cannot be changed which is passed down from generation to generation in the family, whereas affiliation is obtained through social interaction with other people. Cesar himself negotiated between affiliates and affiliates which in the end, he preferred the affiliate to become the head of the Santos gangsters in the block. This is also related to the ideology of the American Dream.

A person is said to be successful in his life in the United States if he meets the criteria of that ideology. Lopez et al (2018) suggested that the American Dream itself has criteria, such as graduating from university, owning a home, taking care of a family, and providing a better life for the next generation. The Hispanic-American community itself considers family-related

priorities to be the single most important thing. This means that orientation towards family is their own version of the most important American Dream (Lopez et al , 2018). The focus of this research is to examine how the filiation and affiliation of Hispanic-American society is represented in the Netflix series *On My Block* by Lauren Iungerich.

## **II. RESEARCH METHOD**

*On My Block* is a TV series that premiered on Netflix on March 16, 2018 which tells the story of friendship consisting of Monse Finnie, Ruby Martinez Jr, Jamal Turner, and Cesar Diaz (Fienberg, 2018). They are best friends, live on the same block, and attend the same school. They just entered high school, and their friendship is very close. They live on a block called Freeridge, Los Angeles. There are many gang members and violence in the block (Fienberg, 2018).

They struggle in their friendship to save Cesar Diaz from his filial relationship with gangster membership because his father and older brother, Oscar Diaz or Spooky, are high ranking members of a gang called Santos. Apart from the Santos gangsters, he has a very violent conflict with another gang, namely the Prophet.

This gangster is an old enemy of Santos who is also in Freeridge, Los Angeles (Fienberg, 2018). These teens want to take Cesar out of gang membership by getting his hands on Rollerworld money which is old, robbed money buried beneath the Freeridge

area. The money has become a myth in the area, and only Jamal Turner believes the story. Living in Freeridge is complex for these teenagers as they need to live out their youthful optimism and ambition, their fears and their need to escape their surroundings in search of a better community. In fact, gunshots, asking for money illegally, beatings, conflicts, fighting, and crime have become daily fears faced by the four friends on this block (Fienberg, 2018).

This study uses a qualitative approach with the theory of filiation and affiliation from Edward Said (1978). Filiation is a patrilineal relationship within the family, and affiliation is an interpersonal relationship between one person and another (Said, 1978). This theory is used to reveal the relationship between the two and the negotiation of the character Cesar in the series *On My Block* (2018) who is a Hispanic-American. These two concepts will analyze the dilemma that Cesar faces between choosing to be the head of the Santos gangster in his family or going to school with his friends for a better life.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Filiation



**Figure 1. Cesar and Oscar are talking in the car**

In Figure 1, it is shown that Cesar ran

away from school, and chose to be with his older brother, Oscar. He is depicted getting into a red car driven by Oscar where they talk about the mission to avenge the Santos gangster against the Prophet gangster. Cesar chooses to be with Oscar, his brother and head of the Santos gangsters, because his life is threatened by the presence of Latrelle, a member of the Prophet gangster, who pointed a gun at his head the night before. The scene in Figure 1 shows how filial relations work between Cesar and Oscar. In fact, Howell (2012) states that the existence of gangsters in Hispanic-American society is their attempt to seek alliances to protect each other from attacks by enemies, other gangsters, or local authorities.

The Santos gang has a sworn enemy named the Prophet gang. Therefore, fellow members need to have awareness to protect other members from this tension. They also ally with other gangsters to create a supergang to keep the gangsters and their members stable (Howell, 2012). Because Hispanic-American society is family-oriented as reflected in the concept of *la familia*, they will prioritize family over relationships with other people who are not patrilineally bound (Noble & LaCasa, 1991).

In fact, Cesar never refused to go with Oscar or the other Santos members when asked to get in the car and leave even though he was with his friends on the way to school. Besides that, he prefers to meet his older brother behind the school to discuss the tension between Santos and Prophet rather

than go to school until it's time to go home. Then, Oscar also projected that Cesar would be his successor in the Santos gang as chairman. This scene shows the strong filiation relationship between Cesar and his family as members of the Santos gangster as Said (1978) states that patrilineal ties, heredity, and inheritance from one generation to the next are a form of filiation.

## **B. Affiliation**



**Figure 2. Cesar are walking to school with his friends**

Figure 2 depicts Cesar, Monse, Ruby and Jamal walking to school together. They always pick each other up before going to school. The affiliation relationship experienced by Cesar occurred when his friends wanted him to always go to school. So, they always convince themselves that they have to go to school. In fact, they really want to leave Freeridge for a better life because in that area there are lots of riots, commotion, and crimes that are often committed by gangsters, especially by Santos in that area.

They think that going on to higher education will make them successful in accordance with the ideology of the American Dream embedded in the minds of mainstream American society. Lopez et al

(2018) revealed that one of the criteria was graduating from university and having a good career. Therefore, this scene shows Cesar's affiliation with his friends who want him to continue going to school with them rather than being in the Santos gangster environment, Cesar's own family. Said (1978) explains that this affiliative relationship is established because of interactions with other people. In this case, Cesar's interaction with his friends is an affiliative relationship and they agree with the American Dream version of mainstream American society regarding education and a brilliant career (Lopez et al, 2018).

## **C. Negotiation between Filiation and Affiliation**



**Figure 3. Cesar is talking to his family**

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Figure 3 shows Cesar who has become the head of the Santos gangster who is in the dining room of Oscar's house. Cesar said that he would not leave Freeridge because this is where his family is, namely the Santos gang. Cesar himself has a big dilemma regarding following in his family's footsteps as the head of the Santos gang or going to school with his friends to get a better life according to their version of the American Dream.

In fact, he prefers to be the leader of a gang where he considers his close family. This indicates that he is negotiating between his filiative relationship with his affiliates. In the end, he sacrificed his affiliative relationships to vote with the Santos gang. This means that Cesar followed his family tradition of having their own version of the American Dream, namely prioritizing family above all else, or oriented towards their family (Lopez et al, 2018). The concept of la familia became Cesar's form of filiation in achieving the American Dream which was constructed in the Hispanic-American community in the United States.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In terms of representation of Hispanic-American entanglements and affiliations in the Netflix series *On My Block* (2018) by Lauren Iungerich, Cesar is depicted as having strong filial ties with his family who are members of the Santos gang. He negotiates filiation and affiliation by preferring filiative relations because in the Hispanic-American version of the American Dream concept, prioritizing family or family affairs is the most important thing displayed in the concept of la familia. Thus, this strong filial bond becomes a means of achieving their version of the American Dream.

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