

CULTURE AND FAMILY'S CLASH IN JAMAICA KINCAID'S GIRL

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Abstrak

Jamaica Kincaid's short fiction "Girl" revolves around the stream of consciousness interaction between two women, a mother and a daughter. It was an unconventional text that portrays a mother's list of rules that her daughter must obey in order to be accepted in society. The aim of this research was to find culture and family's clash in Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl". The method used in this research was the qualitative method with a narrative approach. In this short fiction, culture has an impact on the clash of mother and the child; moreover the mother-child relationship at stake. Mother's concept that is influenced by culture breaks her relationship with her child because she always tries to make her child appreciated by the society by teaching her culture implicitly. Whereas, child's concept is far away from culture because she attracts to play and get happiness; it is contrasted with her mother. Every mother has their own experiences in mothering their children which will distinguish it with each other based on their children's needs. It is important for mother to recognize the special characteristics of their children and accept them as they are. Mother should push aside their personal expectations, focus on what their children wish to accomplish and realize that their children are not their continuation but they have a life of their own. It's best then for them to let their kids set their own targets according to what the children want and need. It is not healthy for mother to live vicariously through her daughter or try to make her daughter be like them. They should not to dictate their daughters' goals, but it is better to guide them and support them in learning to set goals themselves.

Keywords: Culture, Family

1. Introduction

Every human have their own thinking to live their life; their thinking is usually influenced by their knowledge and age. The deeper their knowledge about life, the deeper their thinking about how to live their life; based on this difference, there will be some clashes with each others. The clash on how to live the life appears in family's life, such as the clash between mother and her child. In fact, mother will do everything for her child even though she uses different ways to show her love; she uses to make her child becomes a good child. The term "good" will be related to

the culture in which they live; it is known deeply by mother as the old generation who has been live in it for a long time. Whereas, child who is young will not understand well about culture because child's orientation is just for getting happiness; in this situation, mother and child's clash will be appeared. The existence of the clash between mother and child forces mother to get a hard life; she has a dilemma whether to teach her child about the culture to prepare her in the society or let her child to do as she wants to minimize the clash; therefore it is not an easy thing to become mother because it needs some sacrifices that are hard to do by women. Manne (2005:5)



argued that being plunged into parenthood can be a central transforming event in someone's life, for men as well as women. Moreover, it can make woman becomes someone else because she will not only care for herself as she usually does when she is single, but she will also care for her child's life.

Talking about cultural impact on mother and child's clash, it will lead us to the good short story of Jamaica Kincaid which discusses mother and child as the main topic of the story. This research was analyzed the short fiction entitled *Girl* by Jamaica Kincaid to know the impact of culture on mother and her child's clash, and also the impact of the clash on the mother-child relationship. It is needed to know those aspects in order to strengthen the mother-child relationship in the real life. As argued by Sigmund Freud in (Bornstein, 2002:4) that relationship between mother and child was the strongest of all relationships, enduring for a lifetime, and the root of one's future intimate relationships. The mother-child relationship should be build in order to control her child and take her trusts; because mother runs big roles in developing her child's life. This research describe the different concept of culture in mother's and the child's mind that will lead to the clash between them and the impact of the clash toward mother-child relationship.

There are four parenting styles which will affect the personalities of children; the four parenting styles (Hughes and Noppe, 1985:407) are:

- a. Love. There is parental acceptance, approval of the child, tolerance for the child's dependency, and an atmosphere of warmth and affection.
- b. Hostility. The parents' attitude is one of coldness and rejection, disapproval, and questioning of the child's worth.

- c. Autonomy. Very few rules of requirements are placed on the child by the parents; there is little concern for neatness, modesty, and obedience.
- d. Control. There are many parental restrictions; the child is expected to conform, to obey, and, most of all, to be respectful to superiors. Freedom of expression is discouraged,

Mothers can combine each of them or some of them depend on their decisions, for example, the combination of love and autonomy, love and control, hostility and control, and hostility and autonomy. These different combinations automatically will give different effects on children. In a home with love and autonomy, the children are allowed to express opinions freely and to share in family decision; therefore children grow up in love and tolerant environment that will help them to develop their positive self-concepts and positive attitudes toward other people (Hughes and Noppe, 1985:406).

Children from love and control receive attention, approval, and acceptance from their parents, but they are also limited in their freedom; parents may be protective, possessive, or overindulgent. As a result, their children may have positive self-concepts and may feel loved, but they may also be submissive, dependent, and unable to do things for themselves. Whereas, the hostile and controlling home is the one in which there are many restrictions and a cold, rejecting atmosphere; therefore the child may feel resentful toward authority figures but may not have the freedom, even such children often turn their aggression against themselves (Hughes and Noppe, 1985:407).

2. Research Method

a) Research Design



The research design that is used for this research is qualitative method with narrative approach. In qualitative research, it is important to analyze the words to group them into larger meanings of understanding, such as codes, categories, or themes (Creswell, 2012:19). Therefore, to get clear understanding about culture and family's clash that are existed in the short fiction entitled girl, analyzing the words or the text is needed. Bogdan and Biklen (2006:2) claim that the data in qualitative researches are full of explanation, places, and conversation. As the statement before, this research tries to give explanation about culture and family's clash that are in the form of words within Girl. It also tries to draw a conclusion about the problem that is being learnt based on the theories that is related with the problem.

b) Data and Sources of Data

The data source can be taken from various ways in order to make the research easier to conduct. Primary data source is the main data; it will take from the short fiction of Jamaica Kincaid written in 1978. Whereas, the secondary source is the data that is supported the primary data source. It can be taken from articles, e-book or other sources that is related to the study.

c) Data Collection Technique

In order to conduct the research, there are many steps to collect the data. The steps are close reading, collecting data that has correlation to the study and the last making some notes.

Reading the fiction for the first time is to understand the story, and then re-read or do the close reading for many times to build a good understanding about the story. Close reading is done to know more and understand the whole story of the fiction. By

understanding the whole story, it will be easier to know how culture and family's clash are constructed in the short fiction; identifies mother and child's concept on culture, mother and child's clash and also the impact of mother and child's clash toward mother-child relationship in Jamaica Kincaid's Girl. For collecting data, many books and references that are correlated with the study are needed. The study needs certain theories such as culture and family's clash. It can be from internets or libraries to finish the research correctly and easily. To avoid the meaningless activity in conducting the research, making some notes that are related to the problems of the study is needed. By making some important notes, it is expected to conduct the research without any meaningless activity.

3. Discussion

a. Mother's Concept on Culture in Jamaica Kincaid's Girl

The study of mother has been a very sensitive and emotional one as well as an interesting one (Ering et al., 2014:8); it is known that talking about mothers will not be separated with motherhood and mothering; so it is needed to focus on motherhood and mothering to know the existence of them. They take publics' opinions to define and categorize based on their experiences; therefore, motherhood and mothering become famous topics to be discussed by many people around the world.

Motherhood refers to the context in which mothering takes place and is experienced (Miller, 2005:14). Davis (2012:1) argues that ideas about motherhood have accordingly changed over the centuries; this statement is a brief evidence that research on motherhood has been conducted in many times because

people are care about it. It is also stated that motherhood in the second half of the twentieth century is a particularly interesting subject due to the dramatic changes in conceptions of the role of women that occurred at this time (Davis, 2012:2). Whereas, mothering refers to the personal, individual experiences that women have in meeting the needs of and being responsible for their dependent children (Miller, 2005:14). It is assumed that mothering will be different in every mother's life because it concerns to the individual experiences.

In reality, most of women have a chance to give birth a baby but not all of them are ready to become mother; they use to become busy on their career or others, even some of them think that having a baby will break their life. Therefore, mothers in contemporary societies are being confronted with a choice whether to work or not to work (Ering et al., 2014:1). In this case, mothers should think carefully whether to care their babies or to do a career as the most important thing; because their decisions will change the whole of their own life and their children's. It is not an easy thing to become mother because it needs some sacrifices that are hard to do by women. As declared by Manne (2005:5) that being plunged into parenthood can be a central transforming event in someone's life, for men as well as women. Moreover, the transformation to motherhood requires women to accept and work through feelings of loss and grief; they experienced a loss of a sense of self, of how they used their time, of freedom and independence, and of their life as it used to be (Bornstein, 2002:7). It is

occurred because they will not only care for their selves as they usually do when they are single, but they will also care to their children's life.

For mother, her child is the most important thing; it is declared by Cathy Sherry in Manne (2005:91):

"I suddenly discovered that I belonged to a large proportion of women who feel passionately about motherhood; for whom their children will always be the most important part of their lives; who find the prospect of leaving their babies and young children with a career they do not know physically and emotionally distressing".

From this passage, it is assumed that every mother will try to do their best for their child's life; although they use different way to show it. The main idea of that argument is also used in Girl short story by Jamaica Kincaid.

Mother's concept is influenced by the culture in which she lives; she puts culture on everything she does in everyday life; therefore she uses to teach her child about it implicitly. All children are born into, and grow up within, particular societies (Barrett and Buchanan-Barrow, 2005:1); based on that statement it is assumed that mother thinks that teaching culture starting from the young age is important to prepare the child to live in the particular society. A further important task facing the developing child is to learn about the various groups that characterize his or her own society, to establish a sense of personal identity in relationship to some of the available groups, and to internalize those

norms, values, representations, and practices that are relevant for the groups to which a sense of personal belonging is established (Barrett and Buchanan-Barrow, 2005). In other words, it is important to teach culture to the child to survive and adapt with their society; this important thing is one of mother's tasks. The mother in Girl short story teaches her child about what should be done by girls to survive in society. As known that culture has a main power in shaping people's knowledge and attitudes; therefore mother in Girl teaches her child about how to prepare the food, and how to do the domestic task for girl.

Since food is the main way that we learn about the culture in the text, it becomes a symbol for culture itself. By passing down this wisdom and knowledge that girl probably cannot learn in school or from books, mother is passing on her culture and making sure that it continues to survive.

this is how you set a table for tea; this is how you set a table for dinner; this is how you set a table for dinner with an important guest; this is how you set a table for lunch; this is how you set a table for breakfast;(Jamaica Kincaid: Girl).

The different way to set the food is influenced by culture; for example how to prepare the food for family will be different with how to prepare the food for an important guest. This culture will not be learnt by the child in the school; therefore mother thinks that it is needed to teach her about it to make her become a proper woman.

The child gets a lot of directions about how to do the domestic task for girl, such as housekeeping. From tiny details to major tasks, mother has the whole house under control. Mother's concept is to prepare the child before she has to live in the society lonely with her own family later. The word "People are watching you and your reputation is at stake" is implicitly talked by mother to her child in teaching how to do the domestic task. It means that mother tries to advice her that people seem to watch her in every move, and they treat her the way they think she deserve to be treated.

this is how you sweep a corner; this is how you sweep a whole house; this is how you sweep a yard;(Jamaica Kincaid: Girl)

Culture has arranged all of human's life to tie up them into one that will make a peace between them. Keeping the house clean will influence other people's mind to the child; so that mother tries to make her child survive in the society. In the same way, the child learns to arrange the house in different ways to give different impressions to different people.

b. Child's Concept on Culture in Jamaica Kincaid's Girl

Child's knowledge is limited to her or his need; the child usually focuses only on her fantasy without thinking deeply on her society or culture. It is contrasted on mother's concept who wants to make her appreciated by society; it can be assumed that there is no culture's concept in the child's mind. In the childhood, child will indicate her interest in playing around with her friends. It is naturally

appeared in child's minds; therefore she uses to spend much of her times to play. The child will feel disturbed when she does not have enough time to play although the mother forbids her and asks her to do not play around. It is shown in *Girl* that the child uses to ignore her mother's advices.

*but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all
and never in Sunday school; (Jamaica
Kincaid: Girl)*

Those words are used to answer her mother's prohibition; although it is never shown in front of her mother but it shows the indication of feeling bored and frustration on her mother's rules. The child needs to play and sing without any interruption because she just needs happiness based on her childhood's fantasy.

Child's need of happiness also makes her to refuse domestic task that is ordered to her because she never thinks about anything else except playing. The child in *Girl* also feels disturbed on her mother's instruction when her mother tries to command her to do some domestic tasks. She feels that it is not the time for her to do some domestic task because it is the boring thing to do.

*but what if the baker won't let me feel
the bread?;(Jamaica Kincaid: Girl)*

She uses to answer her mother's instructions in her heart to show that she is unhappy and being interrupted on her mother's instructions; this feeling happens because of the misunderstanding of the child on culture that will be useful for her in the particular society. However, she never shows her emotion toward her mother; she just does

everything that her mother instructed to do without showing complaints to her.

c. Mother and Child's Clash in Jamaica Kincaid's Girl

The clash that is appeared between mother and child usually happens because of the different understanding about culture. They live in different generation that will lead to the different perspective about how to live their life. Mother who is the older one will have a broad knowledge and experience about how to live through society; whereas the child who is younger will interest in playing and getting the happiness based on her fantasy without thinking about culture. Mother's concept has been influenced by culture in which she live; she dedicates all of her activities to be appreciated by the society; therefore there will be a clash between her and the child whom never thinks about culture and society, sometimes child will feel that culture gives many prohibitions and forces her to do something bored.

Because of the differences of thought on culture between mother and child, the clash between them in *Girl* occurred. Mother feels that her child never pays any attention to all of her instructions; she actually feels disappointed. In every times she has, she always tries to advice her child to do the good thing to make her appreciated by the society because she thinks that social standing is a big deal in the child's environment.

*this is how to sew on a button; this is how
to make a button-hole for the button you
have just sewed on; this is how to hem a
dress when you see the hem coming
down and so to prevent yourself from*



looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming; this is how you iron your father's khaki shirt so that it doesn't have a crease; (Jamaica Kincaid: Girl)

The disappointment of the mother appears in the short story which is written above; although she thinks that her child is not attracted to all of her advices, she always tries to advice her again and again. It looks on the repetition on the word *"this is how to..."* which indicates that the mother never gives up on teaching her child about culture. In the mother's mind, the repetition and the instructions are the best thing that this might be a normal mother-daughter talk with informative content and heart-warming advice to make her child become the good one in the society.

Whereas, the child who always thinks about playing and getting happiness thinks that her mother is a fussy mother. Her mother always disturbs her with a lot of instructions that leads her to the bore situations; therefore although she keeps on doing her mother's instruction, she complains on it in the deep of her heart. The child never thinks about culture and how to be appreciated by her society because her thinking only for playing around with her friends and feeling free on domestic task as what her mother instructed her to do in everyday life.

but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school;... but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread; (Jamaica Kincaid: Girl)

As a conjunction, *but*, it connects the child's interjections to mother's words. So while mother is constantly passing out new

instructions, the child can only reply to what mother is saying. She does not have an independent voice. The repetitions that are used by her mother in instructing her bored her; therefore she treats her mother as the broken radio which talks all the day without stopping.

d. The Impact of Mother and Child's Clash toward Mother-Child Relationship in Jamaica Kincaid's Girl

Based on the clash that is happen between mother and the child in *Girl* short story of Jamaica Kincaid above, it can be seen that the relationship between them is in danger. It will lead to the broken relationship long the times; the mother will lead to the disappointment on her child's rebellion. She will also feel disrupted on her child's ignorance on all of her advices which will force her to repeat again and again to teach culture to her child. Her pretension to make her child gets a good reputation in her society by applying all of cultural roles in her activities. Whereas, the child will also keep on her mind that her mother is the disturbed person long the day who always talks about the same thing like a broken radio. This situation will exacerbate the relationship between mother and the child; it will also break child's trust on her mother to whom she can share everything. Mother will also get difficulties on teaching culture on her child because of the lack of the child's trust.

4. Conclusion

Culture has an impact on the clash of mother and the child in *Girl* short fiction; moreover the mother-child relationship at stake.

Mother's concept that is influenced by culture breaks her relationship with her child because she always tries to make her child appreciated by the society by teaching her culture implicitly. Whereas, child's concept is far away from culture because she attracts to play and get happiness; it is contrasted with her mother. Every mother has their own experiences in mothering their children which will distinguish it with each other based on their children's needs. It is important for mother to recognize the special characteristics of their children and accept them as they are.

Mother should push aside their personal expectations, focus on what their children wish to accomplish and realize that their children are not their continuation but they have a life of their own. It's best then for them to let their kids set their own targets according to what the children want and need. It is not healthy for mother to live vicariously through her daughter or try to make her daughter be like them. They should not to dictate their daughters' goals, but it is better to guide them and support them in learning to set goals themselves.

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