

ASPECTS OF CULTURE SHOCK IN GERSON POYK'S *MATIAS AKANKARI*

Leon Agusta

Jurusan Studi Sastra Inggris
Fakultas Sastra dan Budaya
Universitas Papua
leo8gus@gmail.com

Abstrak

Kejut budaya merupakan fenomena umum yang hampir selalu dihadapi oleh manusia, terutama dalam penyesuaian diri terhadap lingkungan dan budaya baru. Fenomena ini bersifat alamiah karena pada dasarnya setiap manusia adalah makhluk sosial yang membutuhkan orang lain dalam hidupnya. Kebutuhan akan orang lain menjadi penting karena perannya melengkapi kebutuhan-kebutuhan dasar pribadi manusia yang bersifat fisik dan mental. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan aspek-aspek kejut budaya berdasarkan Taft yang dialami oleh *Matias Akankari*, tokoh utama dalam cerita pendek berjudul sama yang ditulis oleh Gerson Poyk. Pendekatan yang dipakai adalah strukturalisme genetik yang merupakan gabungan antara pendekatan intrinsik dan pendekatan ekstrinsik di mana penggambaran naratif dan dialog dalam cerita dianalisa berdasarkan konsep teori kejut budaya untuk membuktikan fenomena tersebut. Latar tempat cerita yaitu di ibukota menjadi elemen yang mendasar untuk melihat bagaimana *Matias Akankari* mengalami kejut di mana budaya yang ia hadapi sama sekali berbeda dengan budaya di tempat asalnya yaitu pedalaman Irian (Papua).

Kata kunci: *kejut budaya, tokoh, Matias Akankari, strukturalisme genetik*

Abstract

Culture shock is a common phenomenon always faced by human beings, especially in their adjustment to a new environment and culture. This is a natural phenomenon since every human being is a social individual who needs other individuals in his/her life. The need of other people becomes very important for its significant role to complete physical and mental needs of human being. This paper aims to describe aspects of culture shock based on Taft experienced by *Matias Akankari*, the main character of the short story entitled similarly written by Gerson Poyk. The approach used is genetic structuralism that combines intrinsic and extrinsic approaches in which the narrative descriptions and dialogues of the story are analyzed based on the concept of culture shock to prove the phenomenon. The capital city, as the setting of the place become one basic element to overview how *Matias Akankari* experiences culture shock in which the culture of the place he encounters is extremely different from his origin, a remote area in Irian (Papua).

Keywords: *culture shock, character, Matias Akankari, genetic structuralism*

Introduction

Culture shock is a natural phenomenon of anxiety in human life experience. This state of being anxious is commonly faced by people who do not have sufficient prior knowledge on a new environment they are going to encounter. Confronted with an extremely different environment as well as people gives a certain challenge as well as opportunity. The challenge is to be able to adapt well and the opportunity is to enrich our knowledge on new culture as well as sharpen the skill of communication with people. These knowledge and skill are two of most important ability of human being since every individual needs other individuals to survive. In literature, as a portrayal of human experiences, emotions, and feelings, culture shock is commonly found. Take an example of the character “I” in Paulo Coelho’s *The Zahir*. He is really surprised while travelling to Madrid, Spain, a new place to go from Paris, the city he had lived in for years to meet his wife (Coelho 2005: 23-24). In this paper the object of culture shock is Matias Akankari, a man from a remote area of Papua, who is brought to the capital city by a parachutist. He experiences many new things in a strange place for him in which he finds that most of them are hard to be understood. The paper will discuss about culture shock and how it is depicted in the characterization of Matias, the main character of *Matias Akankari*, the short story written by Gerson Poyk.

Culture shock

Facing a new environment and new people sometimes can be very difficult when someone does not have or lack of prior knowledge and information about them. Toffler (in Lazerson 1984) defined culture shock as “a sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes with feelings of anxiety that may affect people exposed to an alien culture without adequate preparation”. The confusion and uncertainty experienced by people in the context of getting into an atmosphere in which everything new causes anxiety, as if someone is lost. This condition is worsened by insufficient reference, whether the people is forced or do not prepare anything for any reason.

Furnham and Bochner (in Lange 1987) proposed that “The literature reveals that the travelers generally suffer more physical and psychological distress than their hosts. The culture distance concept explains this distress in terms of the degree of dissimilarity between the traveler’s culture and that of the host, resulting in the traveler’s lacking skill in social conventions of the host culture.” The suffering of travelers is understandable since every

human being needs time to adapt to a new environment. The physical distress may come in the form of exhaustion or unreasonable headache. Meanwhile, the psychological distress is relatively more complicated, from confusion to a will to escape. The cultural difference creates the inability of a traveler to blend to the new environment in a certain short period of time. The fact that every new comer needs adequate prior knowledge as well as a certain period of time to settle in a new culture is undeniable.

The central discourse on the phenomenon of culture shock is the trouble exists in someone's personality by encountering strange environment. The trouble might arise in any kind of difficulties that perhaps new comers never expect. Meintel (1973) argued that "... discussions of culture shock tend to focus on the newcomer's problem with a foreign language, strange customs and uncomfortable living conditions, that is on problems which often constitute the less significant or enduring aspects of his experience as a stranger." The new environment offers many challenges to a newcomer. Different language, culture, and atmosphere are some common challenge experience by people who encounter a new environment, especially for those who has no adequate knowledge about it. Furthermore, Oberg, known as the first scholar to propose the concept, (in Yue 2012) argued that "culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing of all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse." The first sign of culture shock is the feeling of nervous of something bad is going to happen. Most of times, being confronted with strange people and their unfamiliar behavior drive a sojourner to uncomfortable feeling and awkward movements. In short, culture shock is a common psychological phenomenon experienced by someone who encounters a new environment without prior references.

Given the purpose of this research, six aspects of culture shock proposed by Taft (in Yue 2012) are utilized to generate the culture shock phenomenon in *Matias Akankari*, a short story by Gerson Poyk. The six aspects are as follows:

1. Strain due to the effort required to make necessary psychological adaptations;
2. A sense of loss and feeling of deprivation in regard to friends, status, profession and possession;
3. Being rejected by and / or rejecting members of the new culture;
4. Confusion in role, role expectations, values, feelings and self identity;

5. Surprise, anxiety, even disgust and indignation after becoming aware of cultural differences; and
6. Feelings of impotence due to not being able to cope with the new environment.

Each of the aspects will be discussed comprehensively based on the dialogues and narration to present how this phenomenon reflected through the text.

The Approach

Basically, genetic structuralism is a hybrid of internal aspects of a literary work with its external, especially social aspects. The approach inherits the aspects of internal elements analysis from structuralism but then combine it with extrinsic elements analysis that allows the study of literary works in its relation to human and other social aspects that built them. Goldman (in Rosyidi et.al 2010: 201) mentions that genetic structuralism treat a literary work not only as a static structure which born by itself but also as the mental structure of its writer that emerge as a result of interaction between its subject and certain social situation. In short, genetic structuralism is an approach that tends to study a literary work based on both internal and external aspects as a unity. Related to the focus of the analysis, culture shock as an external/ social structure has already discussed, therefore the following discussion will be about the internal approach utilized i.e. *text oriented approach*. This approach limits the analysis on formal or structural features of a literary work, which means that intrinsic elements are the framework of the study (Klarer 2004: 78-79). This approach is utilized to describe the character and characterization of Matias are in line with the description of how he experiences the phenomenon of culture shock he experiences based on six aspects of culture shock mentioned by Taft (in Yue 2012).

Discussion

Matias Akankari is a short story written by Gerson Poyk. Reading the short story will bring readers to a new though very short perspective about Papuans as one layers of the multicultural dimension of Indonesia. This fiction specifically depicts a short shocking experience by Matias Akankari, a man from Irian (Papua) who was brought to the capital city by a parachutist, strongly assumed as a member of a military troop. His experience in the capital city shows how a newcomer face challenges in a totally different culture. Most of times he is not able to deal with the new situations but his simple way of thinking and

impulsive actions save him from negative effect even dangers of the new environment. Poyk describes Matias as a stranger in new places he is never been before. Through the plot, Matias' character was developed based on the sequences of the experience he gets for a few days in the capital city. He must walk alone through many places since his only friend, the parachutist, left him on purpose. Along the experience he sees many people with their behaviors which are extremely different from his hometown.

Matias experiences some phenomenon of culture shock during his short visit in the capital city. This proves how a main character plays the most important role in every story of literary works. Peck and Coyle (1984: 105) mentioned that "... the characters are part of a broader pattern: they are members of a society, and the author's distinctive view of how people relate to society will be reflected in the presentation of the character." Matias in terms of his physical and psychological more or less represents Papuan. Other characters are also playing their roles by representing certain kind of culture. The relation between people from different cultures is truly pictured throughout the story. Poyk set Matias to lead the plot which also makes him become the main object of culture shock in the short story. Furthermore, since this research centers the analysis to Matias as a character that generates the main issue of culture shock, his characterization must also be defined. Murfin and Ray (2003: 53) explained that "The term of characterization refers to the various means by which an author describes and develops the characters in a literary work." As we know, a fiction (a novel, a short story, and so on) usually has major and minor character that built the plot. Each character must be believable by readers the way every author has to create convincing characters. By describing and developing every character well, an author is already in a good path of telling a story that readers find easy to understand. The character of Matias is so alive that his curiosity leads him to many adventures the new environment even beyond his own expectation. The following discussion is the analysis of how the six aspect of culture shock based on Taft are projected through the character of Matias.

1. Strain due to the effort required to make necessary psychological adaptations

Matias experiences the first shock by realizing that the parachutist leaves him alone at a movie theatre. When the movie ends he looks around, but since he is not able to speak Indonesian language, he could not speak up a word to ask for help from anybody (*Matias Akankari*, para. 9-10). He fails to adapt the new situation around him and it causes his heart beats faster. Moreover, the noise outside the theatre is really annoying to him for he never

heard such a hectic atmosphere back to the jungle he lived before in Papua. The failure to adapt the new circumstances psychologically caused him walk everywhere, just like a person who is lost in a crowd.

2. A sense of loss and feeling of deprivation in regard to friends, status, profession and possession

Matias finds himself all alone in the crowd for his friend has left him alone. (para. 9-10). The only friend he expects to take care is gone already. He cannot find the parachutist, a man he trusted in a new environment. He stretches his body to the right and the left to see if there is anybody he knows, but there is no one (para. 19). This sense of loss makes Matias become more stressed after quite a while searching for his friend. He is shocked to find himself as a stranger in a crowd of a new place.

The next experience is after having an unintentional sexual intercourse with a woman, Matias reach up a church where he confesses his sin. At this point he remembers the church in his village where he joined a choir (para. 22). His previous status as one of church goers is crossed by his sin of doing adultery with an unknown woman. His confession shows the loss of status of being a person who is faithful to God.

3. Being rejected by and / or rejecting members of the new culture

The parachutist leaves Matias while they are watching a movie in a theatre (para. 7). This shows how he reacts to Matias's great appetite on food that he could not afford (para. 4). Matias spends so much food on every meal that soon make the parachutist re-think of having him stays with him any further. One member of the host culture rejects the newcomer for his unusual attitude that may endanger his financial security. Matias, who is used to live in a village of a remote area of that can be assume to have abundant food supply, eats so much due to his habit and portion that is too much for people in the capital city, therefore the parachutist rejects him.

The next shock is when the woman who seduces him to have sexual intercourse asks for payment on her service. Matias does not have any money. By knowing the fact, the woman drags him outside her place. (para. 13-19). At first Matias thinks that the woman would help him but after the intercourse he is surprised to find that the woman gets angry at him. Commercial sexual service as a common phenomenon of big cities requires payment and

Matias does not know about it. Therefore since there is no balance between demand and supply, a member of new environment, in this case the woman rejects Matias.

A job seeker who meets Matias in front of the church is also rejects him even though Matias gives his shoes for free by seeing the man walking by a pair of old shoes. After giving his shoes for free both of the men sleep under the Statue of West Irian Liberation at *Benteng Square*. But before dawn the job seeker leaves Matias. He does not want people see them walking together. He thinks that it would be quite sensational (para. 27). The shock is when Matias realize that even though he has helped the man with his shoes but he gets nothing in return. The job seeker chooses to save himself from people judgement, therefore he rejects Matias to be with him any longer.

4. Confusion in role, role expectations, values, feelings and self identity

The first encounter with the city life is when the parachutist and he go downtown. He's been in the city for only three days, so he is confused by seeing the city lights, buildings, other strange objects he has never seen before (para. 5). Matias is confused of being in the middle of such a noisy crowd. He does not know what to do but watching all those strange things presented before his eyes. The role of people who get used to work in the village and jungle are denied by the role of a tourist who enjoys new things as a pleasure, but Matias is confused with his new role.

Further confusion is after Matias did the sexual intercourse with a woman. He feels guilty and sinned. Therefore he goes to church and confess to God that he has sinned (para. 13-21). The value of faith he keeps is broken by a new experience in the new environment. He is also confused on his own feelings between the woman hospitality and then her rage on him afterwards. His identity as a naïve and strong people is also fade on the seduction of the woman who offers him a temporary pleasure.

5. Surprise, anxiety, even disgust and indignation after becoming aware of cultural differences

Matias is surprised to see everything in a big city. The lights, the buildings, and other interesting sights in the city attract his mind (para. 5). But he feels anxious when his only friend, the parachutist leaves him alone in a movie theatre. His heart beats faster and he feels

lonely among the crowd (para. 9-10). The feeling of disgust is when he confesses his sin to God at the church after having a sexual intercourse to a woman (para. 21). He is a bit aware of the different between his people's culture and the capital city's culture in which he is lost. Matias doesn't pay much attention to the difference for what he looks for is his friend to take him back to his village in Papua. The cultural difference makes Matias realize that it is far better to live in his village, in which he knows everybody and they are kind to him, rather than a big city with people who almost always reject and discriminate him.

6. Feelings of impotence due to not being able to cope with the new environment

Matias feels that he is unable to cope with the new environment is while walking here and there without exact destination after the parachutist left him. All of a sudden, Matias heard a sound of loud speaker. He recalls his memory about such sound in his village; the time when people always gather around to listen people speak in his language. He expects that this sound may lead him to something familiar for him, but unfortunately he does not recognize the person as well as he does not understand the language they use (para. 11). Practically, Matias believes that he will not be able to fit himself to the new environment for there are so many differences between himself and people in his village with people in the capital city. The feeling of impotence due to not being able to cope with the new environment is not actually clearly depicted throughout the story, but at this point, Matias decides to keep walking and searching for his friends despite his impotence to adapt to a new environment.

Conclusion

The six aspects of culture shock based on Taft are projected in *Matias Akankari* by Gerson Poyk. Each of the aspects is discussed based on the context of the story with a special note that Matias, the main character has a very limited time to learn about the host culture. Furthermore, the discussion of each aspect of culture shock found in the short story is proven to represent the idea of Taft about culture shock. Finally, as a common phenomenon of human experience, culture shock can be found not only in real life but also in literary works that may inspire readers to be better prepared before encountering a new environment and culture.

References

- Coelho, Paulo. (2006). *The Zahir*. New York. Harper-Collins Publishers.
- Klarer, Mario. (2004). *An Introduction to Literary Studies (Second Edition)*. London. Routledge.
- Lange, Crawford Linda. (1987). "Culture Shock: Psychological Reactions to Unfamiliar Environments by Adrian Furnham; Stephen Bochner "(A book review). *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 71 No.3 (Autumn, 1987): 337.
- Lazerson, Barbara Hunt. (1984). "Shock!". *American Speech*. Vol 59, No. 3 (Autumn, 1984): 286-288.
- Meintel, Deidre A. (1973). "Strangers, Homecomers and Ordinary Men". *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 1, Ethnographic Fieldwork: A Mirror for Self and Culture (Special Issue) (Jan., 1973): 47-58.
- Murfin, Ross and Supriya M. Ray. (2003). *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms; Second Edition*. New York. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Peck, John and Martin Coyle. (1984). *Literary Terms and Criticism*. London. MACMILLAN EDUCATION LTD.
- Poyk, Gerson. (1975). *Matias Akankari (Kumpulan Cerpen)*. Jakarta. Balai Pustaka.
- Rosyidi, M. Ikhwan, Trisna Gumilar, Heru Kurniawan, dan Zurmailis. (2010). *Analisis Teks Sastra*. Yogyakarta. Graha Ilmu.
- Yue, Yun and Quynh Le. (2012). "From 'Cultural Shock' to 'ABC Framework': Development of Intercultural Contact Theory". *International Journal of Innovative Interdisciplinary Research*, (Issue 2, 2012): 133-141.