The Conflict Factors of Caribbean Female Writers’ Writing: Focusing on Jamaica Kincaid’s Annie John

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Abstract: The Caribbean people had to move all over the world, and the Caribbean women writers’ writing was prone to include the phenomenon of diaspora based on their real life stories. They tried to suggest the retrospect of their experience about how they were thrown into a strange world and how their life was stricken with instability, fear, wandering and conflict. Their writing does not seek the positive direction for the future. This study is conducted to examine conflict factors which are at the center of the Caribbean’s mind and hinder setting up stable and positive identity as a free human existence. For the method, this paper utilized the discourse of colonialism and de-colonialism to examine the purpose of its research. First, this study sticks to examine Caribbean female writers’ universal theme, the issue of conflict in the frame of the discourse of colonialism and de-colonialism. Second, it analyzes one representative Caribbean female writer, Jamaica Kincaid’s novel, Annie John, which implies the typical factor of conflict generally seeped in Caribbean female writers’ writing concerning mother and motherland, diaspora and postcolonialism, Western imperialism and patriarchal society. Its analysis is specifically proceeded by examining and analyzing Annie’s conflict, change and growth in Annie John with the view of Chin and Gilles. This study found that Caribbean female writers’ writing of today tries to embrace de-colonized culture, the feminism of the colored women, and multi-culturalism. Their writing does not only deal with their individual issue, rather, it also deals with the identity politics embracing each person’s cultural identity.

Keywords: Caribbean Female Writing, Conflict Factors, Cultural Identity, Colonialism, De-colonialism

1. Introduction

The main topic of this study is to grasp the general propensity of Caribbean female writers’ writing and their texts, and to examine the themes in their literature through the analysis of Jamaica Kincaid’s novel, Annie John. That is because it represents the discourse of Caribbean female writers’ universal conflict and struggle. For its analysis, this study intends to look into conflict factors which appear in most of Caribbean female writers’ text including Jamaica Kincaid. These conflict factors are presented in the form of conflict in the border of colonialism and post-colonialism[1]. These conflict factors cause protagonists to feel unfamiliar to the basic things in life like the relationship with their mother and their motherland. This study methodologically adapts the discourse of colonialism and –de-colonialism with the view of Timothy Chin on Caribbean female writers’ writing. Townsend Cheryl Gilles’ view supports its process[2]. The object of this study is to examine the conflict factors and the issue of cultural identity mostly dominated in Caribbean female writers’ writing.

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2. Literature Review

2.1 The Characteristic of the Caribbean Female Writers’ Writing

The Caribbean society settling down in New York, Miami, London, or Toronto ask Caribbeans themselves on who they are and why they are there. The Caribbean female writers question on their self-esteem, in that how they were thrown into a strange foreign land and how their history was sticken with violence and wander, not rather pursuing the positive direction of their future. Their writing reflects not only the understanding of the Caribbean’s historical trauma in the domination of the West colonization, but also the yearning and fantasy on the post-colonial policy and culture[3]. Due to the postcolonial situations, diverse literary recurrence against the old historical oppression is unceasingly embodied in their text. Therefore, the Caribbean writing can not be defined with the dichotomous structure between the colonist and the colonized or the writing for the resistance.

The Caribbean female writers’ writing is defined as a "contact literature" which touches literature and culture[4]. The trait of the writing of contact literature is to use European language outside of Europe. "Contact literature" is defined as a diaspora literature by the writer's will, but most of the cases are the results from the West colonization for the third world. Townsend Cheryl Gilles reused the word, "transculturation" to explain African Cuban culture, and it is also a good example explaining the Caribbean localism with multi-cultural characteristics and its literature[5] The contact zone meant by him is the explicitly exposed in-between space.

Among the Caribbean female writers, Jamaica Kincaid showing the critical writing style was born and raised in a small island called Antigua. Her writing pursues to escape from the typical frame of minor literature, and it commonly pursues the resistance narrative or confront epic against the colonialism and neo-colonialism. It is prone to show respectively different Caribbean women subjectivities.

Most of the Caribbean female writers have shown the characteristics of writing based on the history of the Caribbean. Their interest in Caribbean history is embodied in the image of their mother and motherland, and they pursue their origin in relations to them. In Caribbean women’s writing, the reproduction of mothers is one of the interesting topics that have already been explored for a long time. The existence of mother is depicted as a phenomenon that reveals the power to colonize, the origin of the pre-colonial state, and the complex and incomprehensible situation of the Caribbean itself.

Today, the Caribbean female writers’ writing recreates sharp counter-narrative on the colonization and neo-colonization. Especially the recurrence narrative which connects the mixed-race with the Caribbean female body is the clear characteristic of the Caribbean writers. White men and Caribbean men have possessed and dominated the Caribbean women's body oppressively and violently under the colonialism and patriarchy. Caribbean female writers tend to show a critical writing style. Their writing pursues to escape from the typical frame of minor literature. Caribbean female writing is not limited to the past history of the region, rather sublimes human being’s universal pain into art. In terms of this propensity of Caribbean female writers’ writing, Jena Evans Braziel explains as follows.

The three characteristics of minor literature are the de-territorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation. We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature[6].

She proves that Caribbean female’s writing pursue the universal values in life. Among the Caribbean female writers, Jamaica Kincaid showing the critical writing style was born and raised in a small island Antigua. Her writing pursues to escape from the typical frame of minor literature, and it commonly
includes the resistance narrative or confront epic against the colonialism and neo-colonialism. It reveals respectively different Caribbean women subjectivities having different skin color, culture, history and memory. The reproduction narrative they used to use in their text has a distinct feature, which directly connects the mixture of races to the body of a Caribbean woman[6].

Most of the Caribbean female writers have shown the characteristics of writing based on history of the Caribbean. Their interest in Caribbean history is embodied in the image of their mother and motherland, and they pursue its origin and aboriginality in the relationship with them. In Caribbean female’s writing, the reproduction of mothers, in particular, is one of the interesting topics that have already explored for a long time. The existence of mother is depicted as a phenomenon that reveals the power to colonize, the origin of the pre-colonial state, and the complex and incomprehensible situation of the Caribbean itself.

This study focused on the Caribbean female writers’ writing starting in the category of colonialism and post-colonialism and pursuing the cultural identity of Caribbean women. It embodied the frame of conflict factors through the examination of Annie’s conflict with mother, motherland and oppressing social scheme in Annie John. The factor of conflict in Caribbean female writers’ writing is the key element to prepare for the ground to be the independent and free existence out of the past[7]. With the discourse of colonialism and de-colonialism, this study proceeded to examine Annie’s change and growth as a real Caribbean woman.

2.2 The Examination of Conflict Factors in Jamaica Kincaid’s Annie John

2.2.1 Annie’s Realization

In this chapter, this study will show Annie’s true realization in reality under the colonized and patriarchal-centered society in Anne John. It will analyze the process of confusion and conflict in the postcolonial state seen in Annie John through the metaphor of the identity of confusion. It focuses on Annie’s realization of the cultural identity as she experiences the harsh reality.

In the novel, Annie becomes interested in death as she witnesses numerous funerals. In particular, looking at the body of the girl having a crooked back makes Annie understand death as a stopped state like a paralyzed state without movement like a picture. In other words, the death witnessed by young Annie represents a problematic reality that exists under a peaceful surface, dealing with the lives of poor colonists, on the other hand, showing the entity of colonial society that drives its members to a state of paralysis like death[8].

Much of Annie’s conflict and confusion in adolescence stems from “anger, hatred, and anxiety about being treated as a colony object”, not being called by their names. Education in Annie’s hometown, Antigua is such an education that makes anything British seem holy and good, and it causes Annie to have the conflict on what she has experienced as a black child. Like the story of Columbus’ discovery of the West Indies, “Jane Eyre”, and “Paradise Lost”, colonial black children learn literature in the language of ‘white criminals’ who had used slaving blacks, and they were educated as a paradoxical process to strengthen the power[9].

Because the criminal’s language contains only the good things about the crime. The criminals’s language can only explain and express the act from the criminal’s point of view. It does not contain the terribleness of the act, the injustice of the act, the shame and anger inflicting on them[10].

As such, British education emphasizing only British things as beautiful and civilized, consequently reduces and erases the existence of colonial children who are the descendants of black slaves, who are inferior, barbaric, and need to be improved[11]. Another cultural invasion has resulted in a denial of their own origins with the attempt of being more British than the British. It presents white or British as
the only ideal type of human, and causes the colonial children to be in serious confusion of their identity. It makes them lose their own cultural identity as the Caribbean.

Unlike her mother, who almost uncritically accept the colonial history, Annie refuses to remain silent and speaks out about the contradictory gap between the education she receives and the life in her homeland. Annie, who found a picture of Columbus being taken to England by being chained, thinks it is not an unfair treatment of Columbus, because Columbus was the symbolic colonist who exploited the Caribbean and damaged their lives. Annie, who damaged Columbus’s picture with a mocking scribble saying, “Hmm, the great man cannot even get up and walk”[12], is punished by an English teacher. The teacher is the same one who punished Annie for singing bad songs, saying forbidden words and showing each other parts of their bodies. Kincaid connects Columbus with the death of slaves through the two acts of Annie being punished by the same authority[13]. It was playing forbidden pranks on the graves of her slave ancestors and unnamed ancestors who died while attempting to rebel. In the West Indies, tombs are both a place to honor the dead and a place to resist.

Kincaid’s attempt emphasizing the episode of the graves of countless slaves has the effect of linking the private resistance of an adolescent girl to the historical resistance of rebelling slaves[14]. However, the most fatal trace of colonialism to Annie is not in British school education or British literature, but in the relationship with her mother who lost the cultural identity as a Caribbean. The conflict between Annie and her mother has a universal appeal beyond race, class, and regional difference. The conflict between Annie and her mother shows the confusion of race, gender and culture of the Caribbean women[15]. The history of colonialism appears in the private space of home. There is love, at the same time, hatred. Since social power secretly works in the most intimate relationship between mother and daughter, it creates more conflicts in terms of the identity of the growing children[16]. Therefore, the factors preventing Annie’s growth and change can be summarized as follows.

![Factors Hindering Annie’s Growth and Change](image)

### 2.2.2 Annie’s Diverse Experience

Annie and her mother gardening in the front yard of the house are described as having a heaven-like life, but the spatial meaning of the yard in the house has a different meaning. Most of the spaces that appear frequently in Annie John are limited to houses, rooms, kitchens, and the courtyard of the house[17].

When my mother was busy preparing dinner and walking dry laundry on a pile of stones and laundry lines, I sat at a corner of the yard and looked at my mother. She never stood still. Sometimes my mother called my and asked me to bring her lomon thyme, Basil, and other different herbs. This is because my
mother was growing fragrant plants in a small pot at the corner of our small garden. Sometimes when I brought my mother some herbs, she bent down and kissed to my lips and neck. The place where I lived was really heaven.

In particular, the space called the house and the courtyard of the family is a place where the tension of domination and obedience between mother and daughter flows strangely.

As such, places inside house are generally dominated by mother, where the daughter is trained to obey her mother’s rule. This training results in educating daughters as passive and obedient women. It is noteworthy that Annie’s mother is injecting the ideology of Western patriarchal society into Annie. The conflict between Annie and her mother begins when Annie starts to socialize with her friends. Annie’s interest and love for her mother changes to Gwen, a friend of the same class. Gwen is a typical Caribbean woman having swollen hair, gray skin, flat nose, wide lips, and soaring cheekbones. She represents Kincaid’s own aesthetics on beauty. Kincaid rejects European-centered racist aesthetic standard marginalizing Caribbean culture and acknowledges the beauty of African-Caribbean culture as the most beautiful and desirable norm[18]. Annie’s love for Gwen is so hot and passionate that it feels like the red rust covers the whole skin and is about to burst with happiness. However, Annie’s love for Gwen cools down as the new school year approaches. That is because Annie realizes that Gwen is also a typical result of the colonialism, who obeys the norm of social system.

As such, places inside house are generally dominated by mother, where daughter is trained to obey mother’s rule. These training results in educating daughters as passive and obedient women. It is noteworthy that Annie’s mother in injecting the ideology of Western patriarchal society into Annie. In Western middle class families, women are only devoted to educating their children in the house, but do not work outside the house. The valuation of women is not only revealed as a result of how well they have educated their children in the house. This is related to women’s education under the patriarchal system, and it can be seen that house is recognized as a space for production whether women give birth and raise children. In this point of view, Annie’s mother is also a victim of Western colonialism and racism[19].

The bond between Annie and her mother gradually begins to crack and break up. Annie wants a strong bond with her mother, but her mother moves away from her. The episode of going to buy clothes with her mother reveals Annie’s more serious feeling of separation. Annie chooses the same fabric as her mother’s clothes, and she is proud of herself being identified with her mother. However, her mother advises Annie not to copy her. Annie gains pain, but simultaneously pride recognizing that her mother is moving away from her. Particularly, Annie’s feelings toward her mother are well expressed in Annie’s autobiographical essay writing. Annie who went swimming with her mother to the beach, loses her mother from her sight while watching three big boats full of people. At that moment, Annie experiences that a huge space is opened, and she is fallen inot it. Since then, Annie continues to dream of losing her mother. This includes the state of Annie’s unconsciousness preparing for breaking up with her mother. The ship filled with people Annie saw has the connection with the violence of the Western history carrying slaves from Africa.

The rapid change of Annie and her mother’s relationship begins When Annie starts to socialize with her friends. Annie’s interest and love for her mother comes to change to Gwen, a friend of the same class. Gwen is the typical Caribbean woman having swollen hair, gray skin, flat nose, wide lips, and soaring cheekbones. It represents Kincaid’s own aesthetics on beauty. Kincaid rejects European centered racist aesthetic standard marginalizing Caribbean culture and acknowledges the beauty of African Caribbean culture as the most beautiful and desirable norm. Annie’s love for Gwen is so hot and passionate that it feels like the red crust covers the whole skin, and it is about to burst with happiness. However, Annie’s love for Gwen cools down as the new school year approaches. That is because Gwen is also a typical girl who obeys the norm of patriarchal society.
Annie starts to have a special interest in another girl having a red hair, who has a totally opposite image with Gwen. The red-haired girl refuses the fixed and old-fashioned social order and lives a free life. She is rebellious, and her way of life stimulates Annie’s sense of rebellion. Laura Barrio-Vilar says that this red-haired girl can be classified as “a lost ideal type of person”[20]. Burrows claims that the red-haired girl plays a role of catalyst for Annie to be severed from the past relationship with her mother[21]. Both of the critics claim that red-haired girl is the symbolic figure who breaks the border of colonialism and gender. The read-haired has the image of being the most attractive boy, more than any other boys. At the same time, she is the most competent and charming girl among all the girls appearing in Annie John.

The several activities Annie shares with the red-haired girl play a very important role in Annie’s growth to be de-colonized[22]. First, the scene Annie and the red-haired girl biting guava together can be translated into the act of sexual gesture and wedding ceremony. Annie’s action who eats guava can be compared to Eve, who gains knowledge after eating the good and evil fruit in Genesis of the Old Testament[23]. It is the action against the stereotyped social norm. Second, it is Annie and the red-haired girl’s climbing to the lighthouse, because the lighthouse during that period was a significant symbol for ships of colonial countries to be guided. Before meeting the red-haired girl, Annie climbed to the lighthouse under the protection of her mother, but now she takes the adventure of climbing to the top of the lighthouse without fear with the red-haired girl. This means that Caribbean women conquer the outpost and bridgehead for colonial domination[24]. Third, it is a game mainly played by boys, which is banned by mothers to girls. Marble can also be compared to the peak of a woman’s chest, which allows the child to gain knowledge of her body. Annie learns how to play marbles with the red-haired girl which was prohibited for women, then she refuses to stay in the traditional gender role of patriarchy through the red-haired girl. Likewise, the red-haired girl is the one who conveys the knowledge of the world, the body, and the essence of equality and freedom to Annie. As a result, Annie could set up a foundation to seek for her own idendity and cultural identity.

2.2.3 Annie’s Self-identity

Lots of tricks of colonialism left behind by the British Empire’s education policy stimulate Annie’s resistance to the school system. Annie sings forbidden Calypso with her friends and plays a game of showing each other’s legs while climbing and descending a large tombstone where unnamed slave ancestors are buried. The act of showing various parts of each other’s body with friends while singing songs can be interpreted as an expression of the de-colonized female consciousness breaking away from the social framework thoroughly dominated by Western colonial policy.

The realistic conflict experienced at home and school now expands to Annie’s internal concerns and conflicts, and to the breakdown of mother-daughter relationship. Annie who turned fifteen is conscious of the pain that exists inside her, but she does not know exactly what the pain is. The reality of the pain is unknown, but it is compared to a small black ball surrounded by a spider’s coweb. Annie’s pain and concerns are expressed in thimble. Something like a thimble that has to withstand the weight of the world weighs down Annie’s heart. In particular, the process of two black things representing Annie and her mother meeting anew, colliding, and falling far away is repeatedly revealed. It implies a conflict between them, and it also suggests that the separation of mother and daughter is thoroughly begun.

For example, Annie runs into Mineu and her old friends on the street, and than her mother scolds Annie in French dialect, saying she should not be a slut. It shows Annie’s mother treats Creole language inferior to the language of the British Empire. Annie’s mother continuously scolds Annie for being not like lady. In the moment, Annie feels two black objects gather together and separate in the middle of the room. In this way, Annie and her mother are becomes to get separated from each other, get close again, and then move away again through the movement of two black things[25]. In other words, the two black
things symbolizing her mother and Annie’s inharmony play a role in highlighting the separation between Annie and her mother. Annie who inherited her mother’s trunk, decides to separate herself from her mother by asking father to make her own trunk in the text. The trunk that her mother used when she was young is a precious object that contains both her mother’s memory and Annie’s memory. But Annie chooses a complete separation form the trap of the past.

One day during the long rainy season, Annie is very sick without knowing what the specific disease is, and her parents take care of her. Annie’s mother uses African tradition, Obyer, and takes her to the hospital. In Kincaid’s works, rain and rainy seasons are mainly used as images of regeneration or purification, which exemplifies that Annie is preparing to form her own self-identity through the separation from her mother. Eventually, Annie’s grandmother, Ma Chess, who lives in Dominica, comes to Antigua to take care of her. She is the one who practices Aoborginal tradition, Obyer herself, and she can be evaluated as the totally de-colonized one in this novel[26]. Annie, who had no improvement despite her mother’s care, recovers her health after receiving her grandmother’s care. This suggests Annie’s change to be a real Caribbean woman having her own cultural identity. Ma Chess’s influence on Annie in relation to her self-identity is shown in this text.

Ma Chess settled on the floor next to the bed, ate there, and slept. I soon became dependent on the smell of my grandmother and the sound of her breathing coming and going inside and outside my body. At night, sometimes when I felt trapped in a black thing and could not get out of it, she approached me in bed and lay next to me until I found myself again. I used to sleep crouching sideways in the shape of a small comma, and she also crouched next to me, crouching into a larger comma suitable for me to enter and hug[27].

The way Ma Chess cares for Annie’s illness is very different from that of her mother. Ma Chess has a mysterious power, and she is delineated as a person having a transcendent and primitive power beyond the colonialism. When Ma Chess asks Annie’s father what he is doing, he says he is working on building a house. Ma Chess wonders why he has to live in the house. All he needs must be living together happily with family wherever they live. For Ma Chess, building a house is not considered important at all. If the meaning of home is nothing more than a space for reproduction within the Western-centered and patriarchal thinking framework, the pit, which Ma Chess calls a place of residence, reveals aboriginality and freedom close to nature. Likewise, in the viewpoint of de-colonialism, Ma Chess is the very one who practices the cultural identity as a Caribbean[28].

Annie’s mother is in the position of a middleman, who does not reject Western Christianity, Western culture, and its educational methods and manners. This shows Antigua’s religion is a mixture of Obyer and Christianity. As such, Caribbean female writers’ writing is prone to include the conflicts like the friction of the protagonist with the social circumstance around them. However, Ma Chess does not follow various Western systems at all, and tries to maintain the African culture and lifestyle that her ancestors have kept. It is not her mother but her grandmother, who helps Annie recovered from her illness. This proves that Annie identifies her grandmother with herself to search for her own identity, not her mother. Unlike her daughter, Ma Chess is a person, who is not bound by formal things. She is nature-friendly and breaks the fixed frame of thought. She is the very important figure to understand the Caribbean female writers’ writing in the category of identity politics.

Annie recovers from her illness after the long rain, but the garden her mother was taking care of and the foundation of the house her father was preparing for are damaged by the rain. The long-standing rain here serves to heal Annie’s illness, and it brings her back to life. Water from Kincaid’s novels as well as rain plays a significant role as an image of regeneration. As Brooke Lenz argues, the image of water in Kincaid’s novels means regeneration, at the same time, severance with the colonialism[19]. It is also important that the garden that her mother tried to cultivate is damaged. It suggests a situation in which
Annie can escape from her mother’s shadow. Kincaid compares gardening to colonial rule. The abandonment of the garden due to the long rain means that her mother’s control over Annie can no longer exert its power, and that her mother’s power in gardening has been washed away with the rain. It can be translated that she is breaking away of the shadow of colonialism. Annie’s parents experience loss and defeat due to rain, while Annie and Ma Chess experience regeneration. Likewise, Annie was able to establish her own identity and pave the way to seek for the cultural identity as a true Caribbean woman.

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<th>Table 1</th>
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<td>Realization</td>
<td>Gwen, Red-haired girl</td>
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<td>Regeneration</td>
<td>Rain/ Raining Season/ Water</td>
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<td>Acceptance of cultural identity</td>
<td>MaChess/ African Tradition(Obyer)</td>
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3. Research Method/ Results

Just as there can be no present that has forgotten the past, it was noted that Annie in Annie John was changing and growing through the removal of conflict factors tied up with the past. This study proves that Annie’s independent identity from her mother was completed by escaping the chaos of her patriarchal Western social structure and postcolonial motherland. Ironically, however, it was her acceptance of the cultural identity as Caribbean that led Annie out of the state of fatal pain and confusion. As it is explained just above, this research provided an opportunity to correct the past of false errors and the need to preserve their root.

For this research, this study questioned the general characteristic of Caribbean female writers’ writing and the theme they usually include in their texts. This study quoted Lens’ theory to seek the answer of its unique trait and the examination in the second part of this paper. First, this study briefly reviewed the characteristic of Caribbean female writers’ writing and text to look into conflict factors generally seeped into their writing mainly with the view of Chin and Gilles. Next, it tried hard to prove the source that Jamaica Kincaid’s writing representing Caribbean female writers does not only deal with narrow and biased topic, rather it embraces the universal theme of conflict in human beings in the view of Justin Edwards. Third, it analyzed Annie John mostly adapting the discourse of colonialism and de-colonialism, and drew a conclusion that all the Caribbean women’s mental chaos and conflict were produced in the border of colonialism and post-colonialism. It locked them in the chaso of cultural identity. This study noted that Annie’s independent identity was completed with the severance of the shadow of the colonialism and the practice of de-colonialism.

4. Conclusion

This study looked into the conflict factors unceasingly recurred in their texts through the examination of Jamaica Kincaid’s novel, Annie John. Annie struggles with the trace of the past like postcolonialism and diaspora. She solves out the conflict factors with the realization of herself through diverse relationship and experience in life and the acceptance of cultural identity as true Caribbean. Caribbean female writing is not only limited to the past history of the region, but sublimates human being’s universal pain into art.

It found out that those conflict factors caused by the lack of self-identity have unceasingly oppressed
Caribbean women, and even made themselves be withdrawn in many ways of their life. This study methodologically focused on the discourse of colonialism and de-colonialism, and found that Annie symbolizing a typical Caribbean woman constantly collides with the trace of the past and has a hard time being out of the border of colonialism and post-colonialism. Likewise, this study drew a conclusion that Caribbean female writers’ writing including Annie John pursues the identity politics to embrace their own cultural identity in their text.

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