

IDENTITY CRISIS OF THE CHARACTERS SEEN IN ASWANY'S *CHICAGO*

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Abstract

In this research, the researchers explore about the identity crisis of the characters in the novel *Chicago* by Alaa Al Aswany. The aim of this research is to explain the identity of the characters that is in crisis as seen in Aswany's *Chicago*. To accomplish this research, the researchers apply sociological approach. Then, to support the research, the researchers need the concept of identity by Stuart Hall such as enlightenment subject and sociological subject to show the shifting process in five characters' identity. Moreover, descriptive qualitative method is implemented in this research since the result of the analysis will be described by using the words not in numeral data. The data are taken from the narration and dialogue in *Chicago* novel. As the result of the research, the researchers present the identity crisis of the characters as seen in Aswany's *Chicago* novel. The identity crisis of five characters happens when there is a shifting process from the old identity to the new identity and it can be seen through the two concepts of identity. In the novel, the identity crisis of the characters can be seen when the characters think back about their identity that is supported by the uncertain feeling and it is also influenced by the society surrounds them or where they live.

Key words: Identity Crisis, Social Relation, Social Policy, and Social Practice.

INTRODUCTION

Identity plays a central role in people's life, because it can show who you are and what type of person you really are (Mertania & Amelia, 2020). Who you are is not only about person's name but also can be related person's occupation, nationality, role, or even religion, for example "an Indonesian", "a professor", "a mother", "a taxpayer", or "a Muslim". In some situations, when person is asked about his or her identity, he or she might give his or her identity card for showing his or her identity. It simply means that an identity as a predicate that refers or may refer to a person that is shown about identity of a person. Whatever people want to do, wherever people go and whenever people exist, people are always asked about their identity. If people want to open a new bank account, people are always asked to fill the application form that is listed about people's name, people's phone number, people's address, people's nationality and etc, and people have to fill it. If people want to go abroad, people have to have passport and there are people's identity in it. From those statements, it can be shown about how important of identity in

people's life. Identity is also about how people can recognize other people that people exist in the world. Because when people do not know about their identity, so other people are hard to recognize who you are.

Person's identity is influenced by the cultural (M Yuseano Kardiansyah & Salam, 2020), (Oktaviani & Mandasari, 2020), (Ayu, 2020) and social contexts that surround them. It makes cultural and social contexts play their role (Mandasari, 2017b), (Sari, 2020), (Mandasari, 2017a), (Muhammad Yuseano Kardiansyah & Qodriani, 2018) in forming the person's identity which together can configure someone. Not only cultural and social contexts but also value and tradition system form person's identity. It can be shown when people try to share some characteristics (Rido & Sari, 2018), (Yulianti & Sulistiyawati, 2020), (Amelia & Dintasi, 2019), (Gulö, 2014), (M Yuseano Kardiansyah, n.d.), (Amelia, 2021), in appearance, behavioral traits (Kuswanto et al., 2020), (Novita et al., 2020), (Novita & Husna, 2020), beliefs (Muliyah & Aminatun, 2020), (Berlinda, 2015), (Mandasari, 2016), (Mandasari, n.d.), attitudes (Puspaningtyas & Ulfa, 2021), (Muliyah et al., 2020), (Sinaga & Pustika, 2021), (Puspita & Pranoto, 2021), (Sari, n.d.), life style (Aminatun et al., 2021), (Wahyudin & Rido, 2020), and so on. For an example, "an Egyptian", he or she might implement all manner of beliefs, customs, attitudes, life style, etc., that are becoming their characteristic of the category as "an Egyptian".

Identity as if it is water. Water can be changed along with where the water is placed or water will be changed when we mix it with anything; sugar, salt, syrup, or even tea, include of identity itself. Identity can be changed along with where the individual stay, because the surrounding of the place can be influenced the mindset or lifestyle of the individual. Nowadays, people live and stay in the world, that have known about technology so human can move from one place to another place easily. But, it triggers issue about identity because people do not live and stay in their homeland. Those who migrate abroad are to find meaning in their life or reach what they want, they still fail to discover their true identity. Identity becomes an unstable and shifting process and the worst thing is the old identity can be changed to the new identity.

As human, identity crisis is really crucial thing in order to make sure who really you are and where you belong to and it can lead to commitments for life and to shows the existence within the society. Some people have their own commitment to fulfill what they want but sometimes they face a crisis in guiding their commitment. It also happened when they want

to guide their own identity but in the middle unconsciously they face identity crisis because they try to get what they want but suddenly they feel uncertain about themselves and it will happen the shifting process of the identity.

This case merely happened in people's life that the researchers will scrutinize further about the characters in *Chicago* novel written by Alaa Al-Aswany. *Chicago* is Alaa Al-Aswany's second novel after *The Yacoubian Building* published on 2007. *Chicago* novel tells about some students of Egyptian who migrate to Chicago, United States of America in continuing their study at the University of Illinois Medical School. Not only about the students but also about some faculty members who work as academician and scientist who decided to be an American because of some troubles that they faced while they lived in Egypt. In this research, the researchers wants to reveal more about characters' identity crisis that happened in the *Chicago* novel by Alaa Al-Aswany. Instead Alaa Al-Aswany describes the situation, emotion, and feelings in detail expression of its narration and dialogue inside. Since the identity crisis encounters on each story and happens while the characters interact to others, so it can be said that Aswany's work contains of sociological element within five characters itself. To assist this discussion, the researchers uses sociological approach.

In a brief, the issue in the story of this novel might be reflected to our real life even though *Chicago* novel is an imaginative form. Related to our real life, human's identity could be influenced by the cultural and social context that surround them. But, it would be in crisis when people are newcomers or even immigrant in the country which is the culture and social context is really different from their original culture. However, identity crisis is a crucial thing in human's life in order to get integrated to their new country, a new culture, and to be part of the new society, and to keep their roots and their heritage at the same time, but it is not easy to achieve especially for immigration and newcomers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Identity by Stuart Hall

Identity is an individual's conception about himself or herself where he or she belongs to and it can be seen from his or her action that makes him or her different from others. Stuart Hall asserted that identities are questions in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we come from', so much as what we might become. It illustrates the idea of identity being always connected to culture and always being in moving.

Enlightenment Subject

Enlightenment subject regards that an individual has united with enlightenment which is included as a philosophical movement that is related the idea that mind and rationality as the source of human's development. This subject is inspired by Descartes' thought about *je pense donc je suis* which means "I think, therefore I am". An individual has thought to think about whether he or she to change his or her identity or not. This view is not only as philosophy view but also as wider social process in shaping identity to look at the individual as centre and autonomous individual.

Sociological Subject

The movement from enlightenment subject towards sociological subject is the shifting from someone as unified heading to someone socially constructed. As sociological subject, individual can not be apart from interaction and socialization which the identity is formed through acculturation process that makes him or her able to socialized with others or even other groups. This view asserts that identity is not something that can stand alone but it is a social product through acculturation. So it means that sociological subject is about human as social beings that individual and social aspect is mixed and interacted each other. Therefore individual's identity is influenced by social environment.

Post-Modern Subject

In post-modern subject, individual's identity is seen as a complex thing. Individual has one identity previously but he or she experiences the identity shifting after through socialization process. The conception of post-modern is the intellectual movement from "enlightenment subject" to "sociological subject" that portray the individual shifting that change him/herself to socialized subject. This produces the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity.

Concept of Identity Crisis

The next notion of this part is about the concept of identity crisis. The researchers needs to attach this point because the issue of this research is about individual's identity crisis. Thus, the concept of identity crisis is crucial to be brought here. Identity crisis is a really crucial thing in individual's life in order to make sure who really you are and where you belong to and it can lead to commitments for life and to shows the existence within the society. The old identity that has already constructed for so long is threatened in decline or even change to the new identity as the result of fast-changing condition in the individual's

life. The condition that can lead to the identity crisis can come from many aspects, such as family, society, or even the feeling of the individual itself.

METHOD

In doing research, it is necessary to execute the planning of research. So, the research can be conducted systematically. The researchers in this research uses qualitative descriptive research. Qualitative descriptive research is the least encumbered studies, compared to other qualitative approaches. This research activities include collecting data, analyzing the data, interpreting the data, and ends with conclusion that refers to analyzing the data. The research uses qualitative descriptive research since the researchers not only collects the relevant data, but also analyzes the data and then draws conclusion based on the data analysis.

In addition, the researchers also uses library research to collect the data. The researchers uses library research to collect the data and information toward the analysis. Therefore, the researchers finds supporting data in completing research such as books from library or data from the internet such as journals or articles. Data are commonly viewed as information that stands in a form of facts and data mainly used to strengthen and as the referral to the decision-making in the analysis section, while data source is the origin of the data or the place where the data gathered. In this research, the data are taken from the dialogues and narrations which have correlation with the case of the identity crisis in characters that exist in *Chicago* novel. Data source is one of the most important and vital aspect of any research studies which is analyzed and interpreted to get information. Data source that is used by the researchers is *Chicago* novel by Alaa Al-Aswany published in 2007 by Harper Perennial.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Relation

Social relation is a blanket term for interactions between two or more people, groups (Yulianti & Sulistyawati, 2021), (Pustika, 2021), (Handayani & Aminatun, 2020), or organizations. Individual social relationships are composed of an immense number of social, physical, and verbal communications that create a climate for the exchange of feelings and ideas.

Identity Crisis of Shaymaa Muhammadi

Shaymaa Muhammadi is an Egyptian woman who is a talented medic from a humble background. She is over thirty, still unmarried and she decides to go to Chicago, America in order to continue her study at the University of Illinois Medical School. Shaymaa who is coming from Egypt have already given the principle warning by her mother about the honor of women.

“Your body is your honor, Shaymaa, and your father’s honor. Your body is the whole family’s dignity. If you are lax with it we will spend the rest of our lives humiliated, in shame. Your body is a trust that God Almighty has placed in your hands to preserve, sound and pure, until you hand it over to the man who marries you in accordance with God’s commandments and the Prophet’s way.” (Aswany, 2007:168)

The quotation above implies about the honor of Egyptian women that is woman may not be touched by man who is not her husband or not her *mahram*¹. If man wants to touch woman, man has to married first with that woman. That quotation is also portrayed as the identity of Shaymaa as Egyptian woman that is described through her behavior. It is what Shaymaa always keep in her mind, in her relationship with other man, she never let man touch her even her professor until she is over thirty. . It can be seen from the quotation:

And why should she go far for examples? How about she herself? Hadn’t she lived chastely? Hadn’t she reached her thirties untouched by a man? All her life she had acted properly and had not permitted anyone at school to go beyond the bounds of collegiality; even her professors she had treated with much reserve. (Aswany, 2007:169)

She keeps in her mind about the principle warning from her mother, but after she arrives in Chicago, America, she meets with a man named Tariq Haseeb who is her friend at the same university and she falls in love with him. Tariq Haseeb has already helped her when she is almost arrested by the American policeman and she said to Tariq that she can not bear it because Americans shy away from her and she feels lonely. Because of it, Tariq and she always go together wherever they want to go. But when Tariq visits her in her apartment, Tariq tries to hold her hand and hug her. Shaymaa does not want it and she is angry to Tariq. After Tariq goes out from her apartment, in the middle of night, she recalls what Tariq had gone to her and does not disapprove of it and was not angry with him for it. Once again her mother’s principle warning comes back to her mind, but for the first time in her life, she finds herself rethinking it. This is the beginning of Shaymaa’s identity crisis.

Social Policy

Social policy is a term which is applied to various areas of policy, usually within a governmental or political setting. It can refer to guidelines, principles, legislation and activities that affect the living conditions conducive to human welfare, such as person's quality of life. In the form of social policy, the researchers wants to analyze the identity crisis from one character in *Chicago* novel by Alaa Al Aswany that is Ra'fat Thabit.

Identity Crisis of Ra'fat Thabit

Ra'fat Thabit is an American who is a professor of medicine at the University of Illinois Medical School. Previously, he is an Egyptian but he decides to change his citizenship to be an American because he has a bad experience when he lives in Egypt, the Egyptians break the glass factories owned by his father. It makes him has a negative view of the Egyptians that he sees Egyptians have many negative qualities. It also makes him has ambition to be a complete genuine American, pure and without blemish. He emigrates from Egypt to Chicago in the early 1960s and to make his ambition real, he marries with an American nurse named Michelle so it will be easy for him to get his new nationality which is an American. He does anything in order to show that he is an American.

He then settled in Chicago thirty years ago and married a nurse, Michelle, obtained American citizenship, and became American in every aspect: he no longer spoke Arabic at all, thought in English, and spoke it with cleverly acquired American accent. He even shrugged his shoulders and gestured and made sounds while speaking exactly like Americans. On Sundays he'd go to baseball games about which he had become such an expert that his American friends often consulted him if they had disagreements about its rules. He would sit in the park, wearing his cap backward, following the game intensely and enthusiastically while sipping beer from the large glass that never left his hand. That was the image he loved of himself. (Aswany, 2007:28-29)

Referring to the quotation above, it implies about the identity of Ra'fat Thabit as an American which can be seen through his appearance, his behavior, his attitudes, and his lifestyle. He starts to change the whole of his life starting from his lifestyle, his appearance, his attitude, his belief even his thinking.

Social Practice

Social practice is not only a set of activities that structures the lives of communities and groups and that are shared by and relevant to many of their members, but also a way on

how social beings in engaging in the social sphere. It includes a wide variety of forms, expressions, and physical elements: rituals, dress or physical appearance, festive events, style of speech, clothing, and seasonal ceremonies.

Identity Crisis of Muhammad Salah

Muhammad Salah is an American professor of medicine at the University of Illinois Medical School. Previously, he is an Egyptian but he decides to change his citizenship to be an American because he wants to have a better life as a doctor in America. In order to get the American citizenship, Muhammad Salah marries with an American woman named Chris. After thirty years he lives in America, he has adapted fairly well to live in America.

He had Egyptian features and a smooth brown complexion, was totally bald, and wore glasses whose silver frames gave his face a rather formal look. His clothes were elegant and well fitting, indicating a refined taste: dark blue corduroy trousers, a light gray jacket, a white shirt with an open collar and black athletic shoes. (Aswany, 2007:37)

The quotation above is narrated by Nagi Abd al-Samad, an Egyptian student, who continues his study at the University of Illinois Medical School. It narrates about the way of Salah to practice that he is an American through his style of dress or physical appearance. He is engaging on how American people dress. But after he lives in America for thirty years, he feels that he is not happy with his life. He feels that his life is empty. He thinks that he has made many wrong decisions especially in immigrating to America.

CONCLUSION

The discussion about the identity crisis in *Chicago* novel is divided into three main discussions; social practice, social policy, and social relation. First discussion is about social relation the identity crisis happens to Shaymaa Muhammadi. In the relation to the other people, the three characters have already had the identity that their relationship with the other man or woman that is unmarried yet with them can not be more intimate which means there is no touching, kissing, going out or even letting others to enter to the apartment, but they experience their identity crisis when they relate to other man or woman that there is shifting process from the old identity to the new identity. The shifting process happens when three of them start to do that is really contradicting with their identity previously as the cause of their thought and the influencing from the society surround them. Second discussion is about social policy that the identity crisis happens to Ra'fat Thabit. The identity crisis of Ra'fat Thabit characters that happens in the form of social

policy that the policy of America states that all of Americans adult has the right to decide where they want to live so parents can not control where the children want to live when they are adult, but Ra'fat shows contrary. He get involved to her daughter's life, so it makes the identity of Ra'fat as an American is in the shifting process to the new identity which happens because of his daughter, Sarah, and it influences his thought that it is not proper to leave parents. The third is about social practice that the identity crisis happens to Muhammad Salah. The identity crisis of Muhammad Salah happens in the form of social practice (style of dress or physical appearance) that previously the old identity of Salah which is American's dressing style is in the shifting process to the new identity which is change to Egyptian's dressing style, and it happens because of his feeling.

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