



**PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
OF KENYA CURTIS AS THE MAIN CHARACTER IN
ASALI SOLOMON'S NOVEL *DISGRUNTLED***

A THESIS

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for S-1 Degree Majoring Literature in the English Department,
Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University**

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PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer honestly states that this thesis is written by himself without taking any works from other researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3 and diploma degree of any university. The writer also ascertains that he does not take any material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned.

Semarang, 10th April, 2023

Anindya Tirta Wicaksono

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

“Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen.”

- **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

“With our thoughts, we make the world.”

- **Buddha**

This thesis is dedicated to

My dearest family

And everyone who have supported me up to this point.

APPROVAL

**PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF KENYA CURTIS AS THE MAIN
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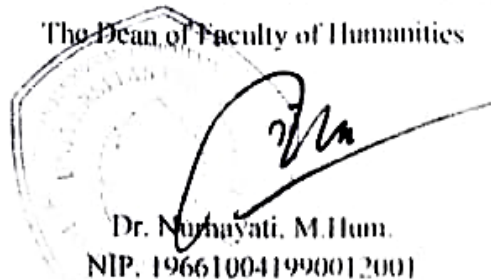
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I am aware that this thesis is still far from being perfect. Hence, any constructive criticism and suggestions are encouraged to make this thesis better. Finally, I hope that this thesis will be helpful for the readers who wish to learn anything related to the topic discussed in this research thesis.

Semarang, 10th April 2023

Anindya Tirta Wicaksono

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the psychosocial development of Kenya Curtis as the main character in Asali Solomon's novel *Disgruntled*. The purposes of this study are to analyze Kenya's personality before experiencing psychosocial development, the determinants of Kenya's psychosocial development, the stages of Kenya's psychosocial development, and the effects of Kenya's psychosocial development. The writer employs library research as the method of data collection, while the psychological approach is used as the research approach, specifically by using Erik H. Erikson's stages of psychosocial development theory. The results indicate that before undergoing psychosocial development, Kenya is a competitive and caring girl. However, her bullying and traumatic family breakup become the determinants of her psychosocial development as she undergoes two stages, namely the school age and adolescence stages. As a result, Kenya's psychosocial development tends to induce negative outcomes, including her sense of inferiority and prolonged identity crisis.

Keywords: *Disgruntled*, psychosocial development, stages of psychosocial development, effects of psychosocial development

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

As living creatures, humans are inseparable from development. It must not be understood as a process where one simply grows bigger physically, but also a process where one grows and changes in mental and cognitive aspects. This is why an individual tends to behave and think in a particular way when he/she is in a particular phase of life as well. For example, a child might feel careless about himself and the people around him/her, but after he/she turns into an adult, he/she begins to realize that he/she has some responsibilities to take, such as taking care of his/her family and becoming a member of society. This change in behaviors and thoughts has become an intriguing phenomenon that many academicians try to explain, including those from the field of psychology (Hoeksema, 2015:70).

Psychology designates one of its subfields to discuss the issue of development, namely developmental psychology. Various theories are proposed to cover the subject, with Erik H. Erikson's stages of psychosocial development theory being one of the earliest. Through the theory, Erikson believes that one's psychological development is largely influenced by social and cultural experience. This notion is what he refers to as psychosocial development (Miller, 2016:145).

The concept of psychosocial development is also applicable in literature, especially to a particular genre called *bildungsroman* or coming-of-age stories. The plot of a *bildungsroman* relies on the young main character undertaking various

journeys and experiences before eventually passing into maturity, often accompanied by the discovery of identity and self-actualization (Abrams and Harpham, 2008:229). It is also noted that the main character's interactions with the other characters provide significant contributions to his/her growth (Christy, 2016:1236).

This pattern of narrative is also reflected in Asali Solomon's novel *Disgruntled*. This novel tells about the coming-of-age story of Kenya Curtis, as she embarks on a journey to move on from her traumatic past. The novel does not simply deal with Kenya's personal and relationship conflicts, but it also deals with the pressure of being a conservative African-American girl in the 1980s United States.

The writer chose *Disgruntled* as a research object by considering that the novel depicts the main character's inspiring perseverance in overcoming various obstacles in life, which ends successfully as she finally finds her key to happiness in the world. Therefore, in this research thesis, the writer intends to discuss the main character's personality before experiencing psychosocial development, along with the major determinants, the stages, and the effects of the psychosocial development itself.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions of this thesis are as follows:

1. How is Kenya Curtis's personality before experiencing psychosocial development portrayed in Asali Solomon's novel *Disgruntled*?

2. What are the determinants of Kenya's psychosocial development in Asali Solomon's novel *Disgruntled*?
3. How are the stages of Kenya's psychosocial development depicted in Asali Solomon novel *Disgruntled*?
4. What are the effects of Kenya's psychosocial development in Asali Solomon's novel *Disgruntled*?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the research questions, the objectives of this research thesis are as follows:

1. To analyze Kenya Curtis's personality before experiencing psychosocial development in Asali Solomon's novel *Disgruntled*.
2. To analyze the determinants of Kenya Curtis' psychosocial development in Asali Solomon's novel *Disgruntled*.
3. To analyze the stages of Kenya Curtis's psychosocial development in Asali Solomon's novel *Disgruntled*.
4. To analyze the effects of Kenya's psychosocial development in Asali Solomon's novel *Disgruntled*.

1.4 Previous Studies

For the previous studies, the writer only found three journal articles which discuss about Asali Solomon's *Disgruntled*. The difficulty in finding other studies regarding this object might be caused by the fact that the novel is relatively new, since it was released in 2015. The first study is "*Disgruntled* by Asali Solomon (review)" by Nancy Kang (2016). This article mainly hints at the African-American historical and cultural references of the novel, including the degree of racism in the

U.S. at that time and the African-American figures and activists named in the novel. Thus, this article emphasizes more on Kenya's father, Johnbrown Curtis, who is also a radical activist with a wide knowledge of African-American philosophy.

The second study is a review entitled "*Disgruntled* by Asali Solomon" by Donna Seaman (2014) is more focused on summarizing the plot and giving a verdict on the novel. The writer introduces Kenya and her family problems that ultimately ends in divorce, and teases the reader with a cliffhanger of what will happen next. She also rates the novel positively by mentioning it as a brave and intelligent work. Similarly, the third article entitled "Review of *Disgruntled*, by Asali Solomon" by Shaunna E. Hunter (2015) contains a synopsis of the plot that invites people to read the novel. This review starts by highlighting Kenya's different background compared to her friends, and hints at Kenya's search of identity as she grows up.

This thesis is not similar with these studies for several reasons. The first reason is that most of these articles are book reviews that do not deeply analyze the novel's intrinsic and extrinsic elements. In addition, none of these writings focuses on Kenya Curtis as the main character of *Disgruntled*. Lastly, this research thesis is based on a psychological approach, which is not employed in any of the articles above.

1.5 Scope of the Study

In this research thesis, the writer aims to analyze how society shapes the personality of an individual by applying the concept of psychosocial development on Kenya Curtis as the main character in Asali Solomon's *Disgruntled*. The analysis will include the novel's intrinsic and extrinsic elements. The intrinsic elements

analyzed consist of character and characterization, conflict, and plot. As for the extrinsic elements, the writer uses Erikson's stages of psychosocial development theory to analyze Kenya's personality before experiencing psychosocial development, the determinants of her psychosocial development, the stages of the psychosocial development, and the effects of the psychosocial development.

1.6 Writing Organization

This thesis is organized into four chapters as follows:

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter consists of six subchapters, including Background of the Study, Research Questions, Objectives of the Study, Previous Studies, Scope of the Study, and Writing Organization.

CHAPTER II THEORY AND METHOD

This chapter contains the theories used as analysis tools and the methods for conducting the related research. The first subchapter is Theoretical Framework, which consists of intrinsic elements and extrinsic elements. The second subchapter is Research Methods, which explains the method of data collection and the research approach.

CHAPTER III ANALYSIS

As the focal point of this research thesis, this chapter contains the analysis results regarding the research topic. This chapter

provides the analyses of intrinsic and extrinsic elements as its subchapters.

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION

The last chapter draws a conclusion by reflecting upon the research as a whole.

REFERENCES

CHAPTER II

THEORY AND METHOD

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Intrinsic Elements

2.1.1.1 Character and Characterization

According to Baldick, characters are the persons in a narrative or dramatic work (2008:52). A further overview of characters will bring the distinction between main character and supporting character. A main character is defined as the character that possesses a goal, in which to achieve that goal, he/she must go through various events and conflicts of the plot (Rojany and Economy, 2005:112). On the other hand, a supporting character is the character whose interactions with the main character are necessary to move the plot forward (2005:120).

Characters possess certain qualities and traits that are bestowed upon them through the method of characterization. Characterization itself can be distinguished into two types: direct and indirect. Direct characterization includes the explicit commentary or description of a character's traits, while indirect characterization requires the reader to infer a character's attributes from his/her dialogues, actions, and appearance (Baldick, 2008:52).

2.1.1.2 Conflict

Holman defines conflict as the opposition between two forces in a narrative plot (1985:98). The function of a conflict is to provide tension that will trigger the plot to move forward (Pugh and Johnson, 2014:131). Conflict can be classified into

internal and external conflict. Internal conflict happens within the inner self of a character, for example, his/her race of thoughts, emotional struggle, etc. Meanwhile, external conflict is the opposition between a character against other characters, events, or other external forces (2014:131).

2.1.2 Extrinsic Elements

2.1.2.1 Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

Psychosocial development is a concept of personality development in which social interactions are considered influential to that development. According to Erikson, personality develops gradually along with the maturation of an individual, which brings forth a wider social range (1980:59). This gradual development is divided into eight stages based on specific ranges of age.

Ascribed to each stage is a particular “component of mental health” that becomes the favorable outcome of healthy development (Erikson, 1980:54). However, Erikson does not deny the possibility of unhealthy development, as influenced by the negative psychosocial experiences in it. Therefore, each stage is viewed as a crisis with two possible outcomes.

Based on age range, the stages of psychosocial development are classified into: infancy (0-2 years old), early childhood (2-3 years old), play age (3-5 years old), school age (6-11 years old), adolescence (12-19 years old), young adulthood (20-39 years old), adulthood (40-65 years old), and old age (65 years old – death) (Erikson, 1982:56-57). In this research thesis, however, the analysis will be focused only on the stages relevant to the discussion, those are (1) school age and (2) adolescence.

2.1.2.1.1 School Age

School age is the fourth phase of Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. One notable feature of this stage is the absence of sexual and aggressive drives. Children are more focused on mastering the technologies and competencies of society which can be accessed through schooling. In addition to learning, interaction with other children of his/her age is also of great importance (1980:93).

Positive development yields a favorable outcome in the form of the sense of industry, which is "the sense of being able to make things and make them well and even perfectly" (1980:91). On the other hand, adverse experiences might lead to a negative outcome of the development, that is, the sense of inferiority, where one is discouraged and lacking confidence in executing tasks.

Although the triggering conflicts may vary, Erikson has noted that a child's inferiority can be particularly caused by the unresolved conflict in the family scope as quoted: "He may still want his mummy more than knowledge; he may still rather be the baby at home than the big child in school; he still compares himself with his father, and the comparison arouses a sense of guilt as well as a sense of anatomical inferiority" (Erikson, 1980:91). Unsupportive community attitudes, such as racial discrimination, can also contribute to a child's inferiority (Crain, 2014:298).

2.1.2.1.2 Adolescence

Adolescence is a stage where teenagers face a crisis resulting from the radical change in physique and increasing social demands. From the physical perspective, the pubertal growth has changed their appearance drastically, along

with the resurgence of the sexual and aggressive drives on an intense level. At the same time, society demands them to make decisions for their future, such as which path of education or career they are going to take. With so many options to choose from, they are concerned if they make the wrong choice or if they would not meet others' expectations with that choice (Erikson, 1980:97). Together, these factors put pressure on them, and their childhood identity alone is not adequate to deal with this kind of pressure. Hence, the primary task of this stage is to accumulate their previous senses of identity into a more complete identity (Miller, 2016:142).

To achieve that end, adolescents have various ways of forming identity. They begin to form or join a social circle that befits their ideals, where they become very exclusive and intolerant to outsiders. Teenagers may fall in love too, but it is a love that seeks to reflect one's identity through the other's view, rather than to establish a lasting commitment (Erikson, 1963:262). Their tendency to avoid commitment also makes them temporarily retract from real-life obligations to explore the world and try new things, a concept known as psychosocial moratorium (Crain, 2014:289).

Despite the various ways of forming identity, the risk of failure still exists when psychosocial conflicts are present. Erikson is particularly concerned that "some adolescents have to refight many of the crises of earlier years" before eventually discovering a lasting identity (Erikson, 1963:261). When one is failed to resolve these crises, it will bring forth the negative outcome known as identity diffusion. It is a condition where an individual feels uncertain of their identity, wishes, and life goals (VandenBos, 2007:463).

2.2 Research Methods

2.2.1 Method of Data Collection

In this research thesis, the writer employs library research combined with close reading as the method of collecting data. George defines library research as a method of “identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinion on a research question” (2008:6).

The data are classified into primary data and secondary data. The primary data are original data collected for a specific purpose of the research (Salkind, 2010:1095). On the other hand, the secondary data are the data that are collected by other people for other purposes as well (2010:1330). In this research thesis, the primary data is the novel written by Asali Solomon entitled *Disgruntled*. Meanwhile, the secondary data are taken from books, scientific journal articles, and the internet.

2.2.2 Research Approach

Based on the background of the research that reveals phenomena of psychosocial development in Asali Solomon’s novel *Disgruntled*, the writer applies the psychological approach in literature as the main tool of analysis. Holman states that psychological approach in literature is an approach to examine the character’s motives and actions in a literary work (1985:357). Specifically, the writer will use the stages of psychosocial development theory proposed by Erik H. Erikson to analyze Kenya Curtis’s psychosocial development.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS

3.1 Intrinsic Elements

3.1.1 Character and Characterization

3.1.1.1 Kenya Curtis

3.1.1.1.1 Direct Characterization

3.1.1.1.1.1 An African-American Girl

Kenya Curtis is the main character in Asali Solomon's *Disgruntled*. At the beginning of the story, she is told to be a nine-year-old girl who comes from West Philadelphia. Her physical features resemble a typical African-American person, as directly described in the following quotation: "Her skin was not light, her brown eyes unremarkable, her hair standard-issue nappy" (Solomon, 2015:105). Based on the quotation, it can be seen that Kenya has dark skin, brown eyes, and naturally curly hair.

Other than physical appearance, Kenya's African-American descent can be determined by her beliefs and practices. Since she was born to a conservative family, Kenya beholds traditional African beliefs and practices. This includes the celebration of Kwanzaa as a replacement for Christmas. She is also prohibited from many things deemed as racist or creations of White culture, such as eating pork, speaking the Pledge of Allegiance, calling her father "daddy", and saying the word "nigger" (Solomon, 2015:3-4).

3.1.1.1.2 Indirect Characterization

3.1.1.1.2.1 A Low Self-esteemed Girl

Kenya's background as a minority race makes her feel ashamed of herself, which becomes a sign of her low self-esteem. This statement can be observed in the following quotation:

“Kenya didn't blame any of the boys for disregarding her. She had eyes just like anyone else, ... She was not tall or cutely miniature, and she had a completely average B-cup chest. Her skin was not light, her brown eyes unremarkable, her hair standard-issue nappy” (Solomon, 2015:105).

The quotation above captures Kenya's appearance as an adolescent. The description is painted in a negative manner to show how Kenya is not proud of her African-American physical features. Aside from the shameful of her physique, she also needlessly blames her average appearance as the reason why the boys are not attracted to her. This tendency to be overly critical of herself further signifies Kenya's low self-esteem.

3.1.1.1.2.2 A Depressed Girl

As if Kenya's negative view of self is not bad enough, she also has a depressed trait. It develops after she goes through a series of adverse experiences, including bullying and witnessing her parents fight on a daily basis. However, the worst episode of Kenya's depression occurs after the separation of her parents. Her depression is marked by her emotional numbness, as shown in the following quotation: “Kenya couldn't cry. She did not feel the acute sting of sadness so much as a heavy, damp feeling. For days after the funeral, she tried to snap herself out of the strange spell cast by Grandmama's death” (Solomon, 2015:77).

Based on the quotation above, Kenya is unable to cry when her grandmother passes away. It shows that she has become emotionally numb, which signifies her depression. Although this symptom eventually gets less severe, it still largely affects Kenya's interaction with the people around her. She feels devoid of her new life with Sheila, and she retracts herself from social life at her new school.

3.1.1.1.2.3 A Cynical Girl

Following the negative experiences involving other people in her life, Kenya starts to develop a cynical attitude, where she finds it difficult to trust other people wholeheartedly. Kenya always has a negative and judging perspective towards other individuals and their motives in interacting with her, such as when she is introduced to her mother's new boyfriend, Teddy Jaffrey. This is shown in the quotation below:

““So, young lady,” Teddy Jaffrey was asking at dinner, “tell me about your boyfriend.” Kenya tried to read his expression. Was he making fun of her? Genuinely interested? Was this part of his Uncle Teddy act? She glanced at her mother, but incredibly, Sheila looked as if she was eagerly awaiting the answer” (Solomon, 2015:101).

Based on the quotation, Kenya feels hesitant to answer Teddy's question. Since the latter is a new person in Kenya's life, she becomes cautious towards him. Although the question is a simple one, she begins to speculate why Teddy asks such question and judges him with prejudices. This behavior clearly implies her cynical attitude. Kenya's cynical attitude also makes her unable to fully trust the people around her. This statement is supported by the fact that her friendship with Lolly Lewis, Phyllis Fagin, and Zaineb Husain is based on a pragmatic purpose and lacking in emotional attachment, as proven in the following quotation: “It was clear

to Kenya that what drew them together was not laughing, fun, or a shared passion, but seating charts, laziness, and the desire to move in a group” (Solomon, 2015:82).

3.1.2 Conflicts

3.1.2.1 The Conflict between Kenya and Herself

Kenya experiences an internal conflict when she develops a trauma resulting from her inharmonious family life. Kenya’s parents, Johnbrown and Sheila, often fight each other at home. These fights occur because Sheila has to provide for the family while Johnbrown, who is preoccupied with his activism, refuses to help with the housekeeping duties. As they, finally, decide to split up, their dispute ends in a horrible way, in which Kenya is involved. Kenya, who believes that she is asleep during her parents’ final fight, is actually sleepwalking and has accidentally shot her mother. This statement is observable in the following quotation:

“Sometimes Kenya thought that if the world before the walk she took with her father could be real, then the world on the other side could not be. Sheila had been shot. It was years before Kenya could say in her mind I shot my mother in the shoulder. Whether she’d been asleep or not, it made her want to die” (Solomon, 2015:75).

Witnessing such a violent event at a young age results in a trauma that is deeply carved in Kenya’s mind. Even though the event is accidental and the gunshot wound proves to be nonfatal, Kenya is constantly haunted by the guilt. The trauma is so intrusive that Kenya always tries to figure it out, yet she always fails to do so. The trauma is shown to be detrimental to Kenya’s mental state, and it inevitably triggers her depression.

3.1.2.2 The Conflict between Kenya and Her Schoolmates

One of the external conflicts of the story comes from Kenya’s childhood. It is the bullying committed by Kenya’s schoolmates at Henry Charles Lea School.

Led by L'Tisha Simmons, the kids harass her because of her conservative African beliefs and practices. This statement is represented in the following quotation:

“In the first grade at Henry Charles Lea School in West Philadelphia, when Kenya told kids that she celebrated Kwanzaa, no one knew what she was talking about. By the third grade, led by the tiny tyrant L'Tisha Simmons, the kids were calling her an African bootyscratcher” (Solomon, 2015:3).

As seen in the quotation above, Kenya's classmates do not understand when she tells them about Kwanzaa, one of the traditional African ceremonies that she celebrates. They also begin to label her as a “bootyscratcher”, which is a racial slur referring to a native person from Africa. Kenya eventually gets ostracized by her schoolmates, and she only has Charlena Scott as her only friend.

3.1.2.3 The Conflict between Kenya and Sheila Curtis

Following the traumatic separation of her parents, Kenya lives with Sheila alone. As a single parent, Sheila often treats her daughter selfishly, without actually understanding what she wants or needs. For example, Sheila forces Kenya to celebrate her thirteenth birthday. Unfortunately, a snowstorm occurs and no one comes to the party. To make it worse, Sheila insists to pick up the birthday cake despite the bad weather. This leads Kenya to get upset with her mother, as seen in the quotation below:

“She stayed where she was for a while, stinking up the new purple couch, and entertained the thought of downing a bottle of aspirin. She imagined her mother in the front pew of an imaginary church, weeping about how she'd abandoned Kenya in a historically significant blizzard to hold on to a measly deposit for a cake, and even before that, forced her to have this party, and even before that, yanked her out of the city and into this surrealness” (Solomon, 2015:91).

The quotation suggests that Kenya is deeply frustrated with her mother. She even thinks of attempting suicide by swallowing a bottle of aspirin and getting

overdosed. By doing so, Kenya hopes that her mother will realize her selfish treatment towards her daughter. Fortunately, the thought only crosses Kenya's mind and she does not actually attempt suicide.

3.1.2.4 The Conflict between Kenya and Teddy Jaffrey

Kenya's frustration towards her mother somehow adds up after Sheila introduces her boyfriend-turned-husband, Teddy Jaffrey. Kenya dislikes Teddy not only for his awkward efforts in trying to socialize with her, but also for his suspicious motives. Kenya once finds him secretly sneaking into her room, as shown in the quotation below:

“He sat down on the foot of her bed. “You went to bed early. Must have been tired. Pretty fun party, huh?”

“Yes.”

“Let me help you into your PJs,” he said, reaching for the covers, but Kenya held them tightly” (Solomon, 2015:109).

The quotation shows how Teddy offers Kenya to help her change her clothes. Along with her cynical view towards him, this leads Kenya to suspect that Teddy tries to molest her. Ever since then, Kenya always tries to avoid him, either by going out with her friends or locking herself up in her room.

However, their years of silent treatment finally breaks when Teddy, who gets tired of Kenya's indifferent attitude towards him, confronts her as quoted below:

Kenya yelled back. “If you don't stop screaming at me, I'm going to call my mother.”

“Oh yeah, what are you going to tell her? She already knows you're a little sulky brat!”

“Teddy, if you don't stop, I'm going to—” “You're going to what? Get a gun and pretend to shoot me in your sleep?” (Solomon, 2015:183).

Based on the quotation above, Kenya and Teddy are involved in an argument where they threaten each other. The fight ultimately reaches its climax as Teddy mockingly reminds Kenya of her trauma. Angered by the fact that Teddy knows about her trauma, Kenya begins to get hysterical and throws a tantrum.

3.1.2.5 The Conflict between Kenya and Johnbrown Curtis

To escape from Teddy, Kenya, who has discovered her estranged father's whereabouts, plans to visit him. She discovers that Johnbrown has resided from his activism after being imprisoned, and he has lived a more modest life by establishing a ranch. He also has a polygamous family of two wives and three children. At some point, Kenya begins to feel comfortable with farm life and the family's welcoming treatment, until a sudden news incites the conflict between Johnbrown and her.

Kenya, who has been informed by Sheila that she has gone bankrupt, asks Johnbrown for financial help regarding her upcoming college. However, he refuses because it is not his money, but his new wife's. This leads Kenya to claim that Johnbrown is never able to give anything to her and Sheila. This statement is evident in the following quotation:

“Look, Kenya, I am sorry about the things that you had to go through because of me. But everything that happened got us here. I mean, look around. Don't I seem like a more stable person to you? All of this might not be your thing, but don't I seem like I have more to offer as your father?”
 “Except money! Or a simple fucking apology for what you did to my mother!” Kenya shrieked and covered her ears at the same time” (Solomon, 2015:231).

In the quotation above, Johnbrown does not feel the necessity to apologize because the past events make him a better man. However, Kenya still wants him to at least apologize for putting her and her mother in trouble. The fight quickly

escalates with Kenya verbally offending Johnbrown's family and punching him in the stomach, before eventually leaving the place.

3.2 Extrinsic Elements

3.2.1 Kenya Curtis's Personality before Experiencing Psychosocial Development in Asali Solomon's *Disgruntled*

3.2.1.1 Kenya's Sense of Competitiveness

Before taking into account the major social experiences that influence Kenya Curtis's psychosocial development as portrayed in the novel, the writer will assess her earlier personality and psychosocial state. It is also important to note that Kenya is nine years old at the beginning of the story, hence it can be assumed that she currently undergoes the school age stage according to Erikson's theory. Given the fact that school age is the stage where a child focuses more on the activity of learning, the sense of competitiveness is an important indicator to measure a child's drive in learning.

In Kenya's case, she also shows the desire to compete. She excels in reading thanks to her friendship with Charlena, Kenya's only friend at Henry Charles Lea School. She often compares herself to Charlena and sees the latter as her rival as quoted: "She bragged about her reading but she was no Charlena" (Solomon, 2015:31). The fact that Charlena is a member of a reading group motivates Kenya to join that group as well. Her sense of competitiveness is also evident when Kenya feels proud after defeating Charlena in a spelling bee competition.

3.2.1.2 Kenya's Caring Behavior

Along with physical maturation, the stage of school age allows children to experience a wider social range. Unlike their previous interactions, which are limited to the scope of family, now they can also interact with their peers at school.

Kenya, however, is deprived of normal peer interaction since most of her classmates bully her, which becomes a telling factor in her psychosocial development and will be discussed later. With Charlena as the only person willing to befriend her, Kenya tries to cherish and care for her despite their less-relatable friendship. This caring behavior of Kenya is shown when she comforts Charlena, as she worries that her parents might get divorced. This statement is shown in the quotation below:

“Charlena started to cry and all Kenya could think to do was swat at her back. It was what her father would have done. She tried to picture her mother, but she would feel ridiculous crushing Charlena, who was nearly a head taller, into her skinny chest. “I bet it’s going to be okay,” Kenya said, wanting to ask more about Charlena’s parents and how they fought” (Solomon, 2015:7).

The quotation above depicts Kenya’s awkward effort to comfort Charlena. She is also curious about what happens to her friend’s parents and how they fight. It indicates her caring attitude.

3.2.2 The Determinants of Kenya Curtis’s Psychosocial Development in Asali

Solomon’s Disgruntled

3.2.2.1 Kenya’s Bullying by Her Schoolmates

Despite the positive aspects resulting from her interactions with Charlena, Kenya’s psychosocial development is still largely influenced by the negative events

she has experienced as a child. This includes the bullying committed by her classmates at Henry Charles Lea School.

In relation to Erikson's theory, Kenya's bullying can be regarded as a form of negative community attitude. The bullying is largely a form of cultural discrimination because Kenya is made to feel that her conservative culture is inferior compared to her schoolmates' modern culture. This is proven when Kenya feels ashamed of the fact that she celebrates Kwanzaa instead of Christmas like her friends. She wishes to lie about it to stay relevant with her schoolmates as quoted: "And anyway, she could have lied about Kwanzaa like she suspected Fatima McCullers did" (Solomon, 2015:3). As Kenya feels that she does not stand in the equal level with her friends, it discourages her wish to learn.

3.2.2.2 Kenya's Traumatic Family Breakup

Another adverse experience that is influential on Kenya's psychosocial development is her traumatic family breakup. As a result of her family's unharmonious situation, Kenya is unable to focus on school and learning. At the time when she is supposed to study and play with her peers, Kenya is still struggling with her family conflicts. This is proven by her effort in intervening her parents' arguments, as seen in the following quotation:

"It was because of Charlena's parents' imminent divorce that she ran downstairs yelling, "We need you! We need you!" and grabbed her father's leg. He ignored her, bulging his eyes in the direction of her mother, who said, "Upstairs, Kenya"" (Solomon, 2015:33).

The quotation indicates that Kenya's effort comes to no avail since her parents consider her a mere child who does not understand adults' business. As a result, the fight escalates to a new height as her parents are getting separated. The

event ends up with the shooting committed by Kenya while she is sleepwalking. It leads to the emergence of her trauma, which undoubtedly influences her psychosocial development later.

3.2.3 The Stages of Kenya Curtis's Psychosocial Development in Asali Solomon's *Disgruntled*

3.2.3.1 Kenya's Psychosocial Development at School Age

3.2.3.1.1 Kenya's School Life

As the place where the activity of learning is extensively conducted, the school serves an important role in psychosocial development at the school age stage. At school, not only a child learns from the teacher, but he/she also learns from the interactions and plays with peers. Hence, one means to assess the development in this stage is by reflecting on one's learning performance and how one's peer interactions contribute to his/her learning process.

Before assessing Kenya's school life, it is important to note that she has a history of moving between two schools following her parents' divorce. Kenya spends her first five years of elementary school at Henry C. Lea School before transferring to Barrett Private School and has to restart from the fifth grade. These two schools provide different learning and social experiences to Kenya. Therefore, they require different explanations.

During her time at Henry Charles Lea School, Kenya rarely shows a willingness to participate in learning or playing activities. This is due to the bullying she experiences there. As her classmates ostracize her, Kenya prefers to stay

passive. This statement is proven when she chooses to watch with Charlena while her friends play a game of Double Dutch, as quoted:

“The point of being friends with Charlena was to have ... someone she could sit with on the sidelines of Double Dutch, trying to make watching look fun. Charlena couldn’t manage Double Dutch in her pioneer-length skirts and Kenya couldn’t manage it at all” (Solomon, 2015:5).

In the quotation above, it is indicated that Kenya is not fond of just sitting and watching the game, indicating her desire to join it. However, the fact that she “couldn’t manage it at all” shows that she does not even try to participate in the first place, and it is arguably caused by the mean treatment committed by her friends.

Following the painful years at Henry Charles Lea, Kenya’s family separation leads her to transfer to a new school, namely Barrett Private School. Unlike her previous school, Barrett is a fancy school with a supportive environment both academically and socially. There are so many spaces for Kenya to grow since she is constantly exposed to new learning experiences every day as quoted: “Each day at Barrett was a new sensory experience for Kenya” (Solomon, 2015:65). In terms of social interaction, Kenya does not experience bullying anymore. Most of the people that Kenya meets there are kind to her, such as the cafeteria staffs who greet her with friendly smiles and her classmates who often invite her to their birthday parties.

Still, no matter how supportive the new school is, the traumatic family breakup casts a larger influence on Kenya’s psychosocial development. As she gets mentally unstable and depressed due to the event, Kenya chooses to temporarily isolate herself from the activities and interactions with the people at the school. This action can be observed in the following quotation:

“Once Kenya was underwater, she tried to stay as long as she could. The murky echoes, soft shapes, and slow movement suited her. Everyone at Barrett was so nice. The school was so nice. Yet she did not want to come back up to the surface” (Solomon, 2015:65).

In the quotation above, Kenya admits that the school and the people there are kind to her. However, it also contains a connotative expression of Kenya’s desire to self-isolate. She relates it with the experience of swimming, where she prefers to stay underwater even though the surface, which resembles the real world, is the actual place where she belongs to.

3.2.3.2 Kenya’s Psychosocial Development at Adolescence

3.2.3.2.1 Kenya’s Expanding Social Interactions

Following the resolution of school age, the development continues to the turbulent period of adolescence. Pitted against the crisis of identity, adolescents are tasked to establish a more complete sense of identity. Since identity formation is a lifelong process, a complete identity can be achieved by synthesizing the past identity with new experiences gained during adolescence.

Unfortunate for Kenya, her sense of past identity is interrupted by her traumatic childhood, especially the family breakup. Kenya’s trauma becomes a crisis that has to be resolved before she can discover her true identity. Therefore, Kenya unconsciously explores various relationships to help her understand her trauma which also marks the expansion of her social range.

Among the relationships she has, Kenya starts with her mother, Sheila Curtis. However, Sheila, who similarly suffers from the traumatic breakup, refuses to talk about the past since it hurts her too much as quoted: ““I’m okay, Kenya,” Sheila said, turning to stare straight ahead at the television, “but it hurts too much

to think about it. Can you understand that?”” (Solomon, 2015:77-78). Based on the quotation, Sheila’s attitude prevents Kenya from understanding her trauma. Along with the upcoming conflict against her mother, Kenya starts to explore a new relationship.

Kenya is eventually reunited with her childhood friend, Commodore. The two soon get closer and she abandons her old friends to hang out more with Commodore. While the main reason for this is her infatuation with him, Kenya also regards Commodore as someone with relatable experiences because of their shared childhood experiences. Through her interactions with Commodore, Kenya is able to regain the sense of her past self. This can be seen as they often reminisce about their past childhood as quoted: “At first they reminisced a lot about the Days and the way it had been with their parents” (Solomon, 2015:161). On another occasion, Kenya also takes Commodore to visit her old house in Philadelphia, somehow bringing a sense of nostalgia into herself. Kenya even admits that Commodore knows her better than her own mother. The way Kenya utilizes her relationship with Commodore to regain her sense of past self also marks that they undergo a shallow and uncommitted adolescent love.

However, as their relationship becomes less intense and Kenya cannot bear living with Teddy anymore, the series of events leads to Kenya’s reunion with her father. This new relationship turns out to be significant since the ensuing conflict between Kenya and Johnbrown leads her to recall the traumatic past. It ultimately ends in Kenya regaining the full understanding of her trauma as described in the following quotation:

“She punched him—not as hard as she meant, but low. “That is it! I’m calling the police!” yelled Sharon, who stood in the doorway. Johnbrown doubled over, making a soft, surprised sound, then snapped at Sharon that the cops were rednecks. In that instant, an unfamiliar wave of memory broke and washed over Kenya. She knew then that she’d been aiming the gun at Johnbrown and that Sheila had gotten in the way” (Solomon, 2015:238).

The quotation sums up how Kenya ends her argument with Johnbrown by attacking him physically. Somehow, Kenya also regains the missing memory that makes her unable to move on from her trauma. It turns out that during her parents’ final argument, she never intends to point the gun at Sheila, but at Johnbrown instead, for he is the real cause of Kenya and her mother’s misery.

3.2.3.2.2 Kenya’s Postponement of Making Commitment

The inability to make a long-lasting commitment, in fear that it will only lead to the wrong decision, is a common crisis faced by adolescents. In this sense, Kenya’s inability to make a commitment is represented in her dilemma of returning home or not.

Following the conflict against Johnbrown, it comes clear to Kenya that her father is the guilty party in her trauma. However, she is not ready to come back to her mother yet. What makes Kenya unsure to come home is the possibility of her mother who is still living with Teddy as quoted: “For the first couple of days at Commodore’s, Kenya planned to call home. But she imagined her mother answering the phone while Teddy sat a few inches away or, even worse, Teddy answering the phone” (Solomon, 2015:258).

As a result, Kenya chooses to postpone making a commitment. She takes a psychosocial moratorium to figure things out by staying at Commodore’s

apartment. When Commodore asks Kenya what she will do next, Kenya feels clueless about her future, as evident in the quotation below:

“Ooga Booga,” said Commodore, laughing, “what is your plan?”
 Kenya felt sure that some earlier version of her would have started crying right then. Perhaps even the self that had been at the farm. But there had been too much crying and it had gotten her exactly nothing she wanted. She could hear Oliver’s guitar scraping in his music room. “The Sad Dry Blues,” she thought.
 “I don’t know,” she said” (Solomon, 2015:259).

The quotation also shows how Kenya gets emotionally pressured by the question, as highlighted by her citing that the previous version of herself will cry after listening to such a question. It shows how hard it is for Kenya to make the decision. However, it also indicates her maturation since she learns to handle the question in a more stable and collected manner.

3.2.4 The Effects of Kenya Curtis’s Psychosocial Development in Asali Solomon’s *Disgruntled*

3.2.4.1 Kenya’s Inferior Feeling

Inferiority, which is the opposite of superiority, is the negative outcome of a problematic development at the school age stage. Both the bullying and traumatic family breakup Kenya experienced as a child contributes to her inferiority.

For example, by being bullied, Kenya appears uninterested in interacting with the children of her age, with Charlena as an exception. This is evident as she prefers to interact with people older than her, as seen in the following quotation:

“Every day of that grim week L’Tisha was nearby, muttering “boogeddy-boo.” And so, as was often the case, the Seven Days meeting was the thing Kenya most looked forward to. On Saturday night, Kenya washed up quickly after dinner and hovered by the windows, waiting for everyone to arrive.” (Solomon, 2015:21).

The quotation shows how Kenya spends her days at school being bullied by L'Tisha. Since school life does not offer the social interaction she needs, Kenya looks for an alternative by joining the meeting of the Seven Days, an African-American social organization formed by Johnbrown. Since most of the members are Johnbrown's friends, of course, they are adults and far from being Kenya's age.

Another symptom of Kenya's inferiority emerges as the effect of her trauma, which is the lack of interest in trying and learning new things unless she is forced. This statement is shown when Kenya unwillingly participates in a class as quoted: "... as Kenya finally, after two weeks of increasingly irritable cajoling from Mrs. Winston, forced herself into the pool in gym class" (Solomon, 2015:65). Based on the quotation, it is shown that Mrs. Winston, Kenya's teacher at Barrett, has to force her for two weeks before she finally agrees to join a swimming practice.

3.2.4.2 Kenya's Prolonged Search for Identity

The event where Kenya decides to take a psychosocial moratorium happens at some point after she visits her father, where it is revealed that her age is nineteen years old. Normatively, that age is the end of adolescence and Kenya has not discovered her identity yet. It indicates her prolonged search for identity.

However, Kenya knows that she will come back to her mother sooner or later since it is the final task of resolving her trauma. Her fate of reuniting with her mother is somehow hastened by the course of time. During a party, Commodore's apartment is raided by the cops. It turns out that his roommate, Oliver, is a drug dealer. As Kenya gets arrested for interrogation, she hits the rock-bottom where she unconsciously expresses the longing for her mother as quoted below:

“I told you all I know.” She sighed. Suddenly she was thirsty. “Can I have some mother?” she asked.

The policeman looked at her strangely. “Did you want water? Or did you want to make your phone call?”

She did want water. But she wanted her mom more” (Solomon, 2015:279).

The quotation above depicts a scene where Kenya gets thirsty after being interrogated by a policeman. She intends to ask for water, but Kenya slips her tongue and says “mother” instead. After being proved innocent, Kenya is released and, finally, gets reunited with Sheila, who surprisingly already leaves Teddy. The story ultimately concludes as Kenya and her mother drive back to their old house in West Philadelphia.

Later, Kenya has a dream of “the butler”, who refers to Julian Carlton, her father’s favorite African-American activist figure. The butler is depicted as a violent murderer who often appears in Kenya’s nightmare as a child. However, this time the butler does not come to haunt Kenya. Instead, he tells her the key to her happiness, considering that she already resolves her traumatic past. This statement can be seen in the quotation below:

“You have to burn it all down, the butler had told her. She knew he didn’t mean for her to set fire to anyone’s home and kill anyone’s child with an ax. But she knew the key to the next part of her life, the good part, was figuring out exactly what he did mean” (Solomon, 2015: 285).

Based on the quotation, the butler tells Kenya to “burn it all down”, which means not to commit any violent demeanor, but rather making peace with the past to be able to move on. With such a resolution in her mind, Kenya commits herself to find the good part of her life. This marks the establishment of her newly found identity, which also refers to her psychosocial development at the adolescence stage successfully.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Development is an inseparable part of humans which can be understood as a process of growing up not only physically, but also mentally and behaviorally. This inner aspect of development is addressed in the field of developmental psychology. Similar to other kinds of development, psychological growth may lead either to positive or negative outcomes. With so many factors to consider, the world that lies before a person, more or less, plays a significant part in shaping one's psychological condition and development.

The phenomenon where psychological development is shaped by social environment also applies to Kenya Curtis, the main character in Asali Solomon's novel *Disgruntled*. Using Erik H. Erikson's stages of psychosocial development theory, the writer aims to analyze Kenya Curtis's psychosocial development. The writer finds that in the beginning, Kenya undergoes quite normal development, as shown by her competitive and caring attitude. However, as the story progresses, she experiences bullying and a traumatic family breakup. These events become the determining factors that impose negative influences on her psychosocial development as she goes through two of the stages. The first is the school age, in which Kenya is shown to be passive and discouraged from learning and interacting with her peers. After entering adolescence period, she faces an identity crisis that is based on her trauma. Thus, she unconsciously attempts to resolve the crisis by exploring various relationships and taking a psychosocial moratorium. Based on the

findings, it can be inferred that Kenya's traumatic family breakup casts a larger influence because it affects both the stages of development, while her bullying only plays a part in the development at school age stage. This negative psychosocial development inevitably leads to adverse effects as well, which, in Kenya's case, are the emergence of her inferiority and prolonged identity crisis.

Kenya's case, despite its fictitious nature, is a real evidence of psychosocial development of a character in a literary work. To conclude the final implication of this research thesis, a better understanding of psychosocial development is argued, since it will lead to a better understanding of human psychology and development as well.

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