

THE ROOTLESS AND THE ROOTED, A DISCUSSION OF 'SELF' ON HANIFKUREISHI'S SHORT STORY "MY SON THE FANATIC"

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Abstract

Konflik antara ayah dan anak adalah tema yang abadi dan selalu ada dalam kehidupan kita sehari-hari. Cerita pendek "My Son the Fanatic" karya Hanif Kureishi ini tidak sekedar menyajikan konflik antara ayah dan anak, namun menggambarkan pencarian jati diri - 'self' dari tokoh utama cerita, yaitu Parvez, sang ayah dan Ali sebagai anak. Sebagai ayah dan anak, sejatinya mereka memiliki ikatan jati diri - 'self' yang sama sebagai keluarga, tetapi karena mereka terlalu kuat memegang 'self' masing-masing, akhirnya mereka saling 'meliyankan' - 'othering' satu sama lain. Paper ini mendiskusikan tentang pencarian jati diri - 'self' dari Parvez dan Ali melalui konflik mereka yang digambarkan dengan baik oleh Kureishi melalui dialog kedua tokoh utama dalam cerita. Masing-masing tokoh mewakili figure 'the rooted' dan 'the rootless' - yang berakar dan yang tercerabut dari akar budaya asal mereka sebagai imigran dari Pakistan yang tinggal di London melalui konflik nilai-nilai agama yang begitu cerdas dimainkan melalui dialog keduanya.

Keywords: self, other, other-self, the rooted, the rootless

This paper is to discuss about the conflict of the search of 'self' which is portrayed so vividly by Hanif Kureishi, a Pakistani descent English writer in his short story "My Son the Fanatic". Kureishi is known as a very productive writer of various genres: short stories, novels, non-fiction, fictions, dramas, screen plays; beside known as a film maker. Starting his career in 1970 as a pornography writer under pseudonyms Antonia French and Karim, he has proven himself to be an excellent writer. He has won several awards during his career as a writer; in 1980 he got Thames Television Playwright Award, in 1981 he won George Devine award for his plays *Outskirts* and *Borderline*. His novel *The Buddha of Suburb* won Whitbread First Novel award in 1990 and in 2007 his

short story "Weddings and Beheading" was in National Short Story competition shortlist. Kureishi was awarded the CBE for his services to literature in 2007 and the Chevalier de l'Ordre des arts des Lettres in France in the same year.

"My Son the Fanatic" was part of *Love in a Blue Time* compilation which published in 1997 and adapted as a film in 1998. The story tells not merely about the conflict between Western hedonism and Islamic religious values, but more about the conflict between father and son in their searching of self as Pakistani migrants who live in London. "My Son the Fanatic", like any other Kureishi's short stories, is full of engaging dialogues describing the conflict which is so vivid and humanistic. The conflict is mainly between Parvez, the father, a taxi driver who finds his comfort living in London and Ali, the son, an excellent student who just finds his way back to his root as a Moslem. The discussion about the 'self' leads to the discussion about the rooted and the rootless. It is interesting that actually it is Parvez who is supposed to be the rooted to the native country where he was born and growing up and to the faith he was raised since his childhood, is the rootless of the story because he – according to Ali, 'is too implicated' to Western life. Ali, on the other hand, who is supposed to be the rootless, is un-rooting himself from western way of life and finds his root as a fundamental Moslem he has just learned in a recent few months. The 'self', 'other', and 'other-self' will be discussed in this paper through the conflict between the father and the son in their searching of identity as the rooted and the rootless of the story.

1. The Story

The story begins with the suspicion of Parvez, a Pakistani immigrant living in London about the apparent changing on his son Ali. He finds his son's room is now very tidy; it is pleased him, but to find Ali's belonging – old toys, computer discs, video tapes, new books, and clothes the boy just bought a few months before beside the dustbin is really bewildered him. He also notices that the boy has already parted with his English girlfriend and his friends stop calling him. Parvez talks his worries with his taxi driver friends and Bettina, a prostitute who has special relationship with him. His friends suggest him to be more alert and severe with the boy in case Ali gets involved with drugs. Bettina tells him about the physical signs of one addicted with drugs; to his relief he does not find that signs on his son. Ali has been the father's pride and dream for his excellence at school and sports (cricket, swimming, and football), he studies accountant and gets straight "A's" in most subjects. All his dreams of 'doing well in England' – having a safe job as an accountant and a happy wedding for Ali crumble when he acknowledges his son embraces Islam

fundamental. The conflict becomes heightening when the son shows his offense again and again to the father's being too implicated in Western civilization by drinking alcohol, eating bacon and gambling which are prohibited by their religion law; the son is also questioning his father of not growing beard. Parvez feels he has lost his son. He is willing to pray again if it is what the boy want, but being told that he is going to hell really hurts him. Parvez cannot hold his indignation when his son insulted Bettina. He vigorously kicks and hits the boy who does not make any effort to hinder his father, at the end, the son is asking: "So who's the fanatic now?"

2. The Theory

The short story is about the searching of identity in the 'self', 'other' and 'other self'. The main conflict between the father and son in this story is the conflict of self and other, the two is 'othering' each other that makes the father and son's relationship become worse. According to Paipais in his journal, "the initial revelation of difference by the self is 'translated' as the 'inferiority' of the other." (Papais, 2011: 2) Further, he discusses self and other as follows:

... either compromise the other's true alterity so she/he becomes mirror image of the self or, in fear of some totalizing reduction bordering on violence, make the difference between sameness and strangeness so inaccessible that communication becomes impossible. (Paipais, 2011: 2)

Parves has tried to compromise with his son, he grows beard, but the son seems to not pay any notice of it. The father, after being told by Bettina, tries to build a bridge to his son by giving him support, only to get accused of "groveling" to the white. The son, every now and then offends his father of being 'rootless' from their religious belief; he obviously looks the father as inferior than him who is now find his 'root' of Islam. Parvez now faces a 'broken mirror' in his son who actually is a part of his self. "I feel as if I've lost my son." (Kureish, 2014: 105) Parvel fails to build communication with his son because the boundary being made by the young man who feels superior to his father with the new teaching he has gotten since only a few months ago.

I borrow the term 'rootless' from Ernest Hemingway who introduced the term *lost generation* and *rootless generation* in his novel *The Sun Also Rises*, to refer to the young generation after World War I. Parvez is the 'rootless' in the short story regarding he has assimilated to the Western way of life: drinking alcohol, eating bacon and gambling which all are prohibited by his religion he brought from his native country. In fact, he has avoided all religions ever since he was humiliated during studying the Koran when he was a little boy in Lahore. "You're not in the village

now, this is England. We have to fit in!" (Kureishi, 2014: 104) once he told his son. And ironically, it is the son, who is born and grown up in England, who is supposed to be the 'rootless' has now found his root in fundamental Islam. "Papa, how can you love something which hates you?" (Kureishi, 2014: 104) He blamed his father as too implicated in Western civilization. Ali is the 'rooted' of the story.

3. The Discussion

- The Self – the father and son

Identity is concerned with the extent to which we are the same as or different from others (Jagger, 2002: 46). Both father and son used to have something in common as a migrant family. Both of them work very hard to survive in the land of not their own. Parvez, as the father of the family works hard to make a good living for his family and more than that he wants his son to be a success as a professional accountant. He adopts English people way of life, drinking alcohol, eating bacon, and gambling, he also avoids all religions. For him, as long as he does not hurt others he does not sin. Ali, the son, before embracing Islam fundamental is an attentive scholar with straight "A's" in most subjects, excellent at cricket, swimming and food ball. A son's achievement is always a father's pride – because a son is a part of his self. Ali, with all his achievements at school and a lot of friends around, even an English girlfriend, actually has already found his 'root' – his self as the citizen of England, just like the father. Before the conflict arises, both father and son have a very close and intimate relationship, not only as father and son, but as brothers. The relationship between father and son is the relationship of self because they are bound in the same identity as a family. Their relationship is broken, however, because each of them finds their own self and begins 'othering' each other.

Kureishi's description about Parvez as a good and loving father signifies the self of the latter. "He had worked long hours and spent a lot of money paying for his education as an accountant. He had bought him good suits, all the books he required and a computer." (Kureishi, 2014: 99) His pride of his son's achievement at school and his dreams for his son's future: work a good job, marry the right girl and start a family can be said as the self of a father. For him, his self identity is working hard to pay his son's school fee, being a good person, and enjoying himself without hurting others. He does not care about religion dogmas, living in England has given him and his family a good living; he has already been rooted in the country he now lives in. "But I love England," Parvez said, watching his boy in the mirror. "They let you do almost anything here." (Kureishi, 2014: 105)

The mirror is broken now, he does not recognize his son as part of his self. His son has chosen a diverged way, to his belief root of being a Moslem; what makes the father frightened is his son becomes too fanatic. Ali changes so much, he is so different that the father is not able to identify him as his son. "I can't understand it!" burst out. "Everything is going from his room. And I can't talk to him anymore. We were not father and son - we were brothers! Where has he gone? Why is he torturing me?" (Kureishi, 2014: 100) The broken hearted father is now losing his hope, his dreams, his dignity and his self as a good father for his son.

Ali, upon finding his self as a Moslem, sees his father as his other. He has rooted himself to his new enlightenment as a fundamentalist; he throws away anything that is not in accordant with his belief: toys, computer discs, video tapes, books, fashionable clothes, the TV, video, sound system, the guitar, and pictures used been hung on the wall and breaks up his relationship with his English girlfriend. He grows bread - the only physical change Parvez finds in his son, prays five times a day without fail. But what disappoints the father is he drops his school and begins criticize and blame his father for violating countless rules of Koran.

"Don't you know it's wrong to drink alcohol?" he said.

"He spoke to me very harshly," Parvez told Bettina, "I was about to castigate the boy for being insolent, but I ménage to control myself."

He had explained patiently to Ali that for years he had worked more than ten hours a day, that he had few enjoyment or hobbies and never went on holiday. Surely it wasn't a crime to have a drink when he wanted one?

"But it is forbidden," the boy said

Parvez shrugged, "I know."

"And so is gambling, isn't it?"

"Yes. But surely we are only human?"

...

"When have I had time to be wicked?" he asked Ali.

In a low monotonous voice the boy explained that Parvez had not, in fact lived a good life. He had broken countless rules of the Koran.

"for instance?" Parvez demanded.

Ali hadn't needed time to think. As if he had been waiting for this moment, he asked his father if he didn't relish pork pies? (Kureishi, 2014: 103)

Ali certainly, with the self he has just found in the fundamental Islam, feels superior from his father. According to Paipais, "we (meaning any self-conscious being) are the limitations of our external facticity: we are what we learn, what we have learned and also what do not and have not learned." (Paipais, 2011: 5) He identifies his self as different from his father's; now his father is his other. Parvez' way of life as a 'citizen' of a modern country of England is totally inferior than, and wrong from, the son's perspective as a Moslem fundamentalist.

The other – the son, the father, the wife

The family bounding is now broken. The father fails to understand his son, and his son insists on bringing his father back to the right way as a good Moslem. There are no more understanding and respect between the old and the young man. They are like strangers to each other; Parvez, in his desperation of not understanding his son, is so afraid to be blamed for his son's changes, on the other hand, Ali finds himself as superior from his father and thinks have the right to 'preach' the old man what is right according to his belief.

"On the way home, the boy sat in the back of the taxi, as if he were a customer." (Kureishi, 2014; 104) The border line is now very clear, Ali sees his father as his other, the one who, according to his view has broken the law of Islam and makes Parvez like a big sinner who does not deserve paradise. Parvez' heart breaks into pieces, and feels humiliated. He is not able to comprehend his son's views.

"But why, why?" Parvez said

"For us the reward will be in paradise."

"Paradise!"

Finally, as Parvez's eyes filled with tears, the boy urged him to mend his ways.

"How is that possible?" Parzed asked.

"Pray." Ali said. "Pray beside me." (Kureishi, 2014: 104)

Ali addressed his father fluently, as if Parvez were a rowdy crowd that had to be quelled and convinced. The law of Islam would rule the world; ... The west was a sink of hypocrites, adulterers, homosexuals, drug takers and prostitutes.

...

"What made you like this?" Parvez asked him, afraid that somehow he was to blame for all this. "Is there a particular event which has influenced you?" (Kureishi, 2014: 104)

"Living in this country."

"Western education cultivates an anti-religious attitude." (Kureishi, 2014: 105)

Parvez feels aligned by his son's view and treated as if the poor man is a criminal, he cannot bear anymore. He wants to get Ali out of the house. According to Sami Schalk, "the modern individual comprehends who s/he, by recognizing what s/he is not" (Schalk, 2011: 197). Both Parvez and Ali have nothing in common as father and son; they are totally different strangers now. Further Schalk said:

The binary of self and other is perhaps one of the most basic theories of human consciousness and identity claiming, in short, that the existence of an other, a not-self, allows the possibility or recognition of a self. In other words: *I see you*.

I do not control your body or hear your thought. You are not me. Therefore, I am me."(Schalk, 2011: 197)

However hard Parvez tries to get his son back from his belief, the son always has ways to argue with the poor old man. The boy is evidently out of the father's control, he is very rude and losing his manner to his father.

"Nevertheless, Parvez tried to endure his son's looks and reproaches. He attempted to make conversation about his beliefs. But if Parvez ventured any criticism, Ali always had a brusque reply. On one occasion Ali accused Parvez of "groveling" to the white; in contrast, he explained, he was not "inferior"; there was more to the world than the west, though the West always thought it was best." (Kureishi, 2014: 105-106),

Actually, it should be the wife whom Parvez turns to when he has a problem concerning their son; instead, he comes to Bettina to find consultations and comfort. The writer of this story characterizes the wife as someone who does not have a role and power in the family, she is silent – no single conversation between the son and the mother mentioned in the story, nor any conversations between husband and wife found. The wife is only mentioned three times along the story without uttering a single word. First, on page 100, Kureishi described the drivers preferred to work at night and "they slept during the day, avoiding their wives." Secondly, Parvez will turn to Bettina to share his problems rather than to his wife: "He could talk to her about things he'd never be able to discuss with his own wife." (Kureishi, 101) And thirdly, on page 102, Parvez order her to sit down and keep quiet, although she has already neither stood up nor said a word. Here, Kureishi wants to portrair the traditional husband and wife relationship in Pakistani tradition where a wife does not have a role in the family, only the husband has. Husband has the power to decide and determine everything concerning the family. Parvez does not ask advice to, nor discuss about their son with the wife. The story even does not tell anything about the wife's feeling, whether she knows her husband's relationship with other woman or how she feels and thinks about the trouble caused by the son's radical view. All Parvez' concern is his son, his education and his future, it seems there is no place for his wife on his thought and mind. Ironically, Parvez finds his refugee in Bettina, who is actually supposed to be the other of the family. By ignoring the wife's presence, Parvez 'others' her.

- **The other-self – Parvez and Bettina**

"In an instant, an other can suddenly become an other-self, a person with whom we somehow identify, ... re-incorporate into ourselves." (Schalk, 2011: 199) Bettina is supposed to be the other of Parvez, but the man always comes to Bettina whenever he wants to talk about his prob-

lems, and Bettina is always ready to give her advice. She definitely is Parvez' other-self.

"He could talk to her about things he'd never able to discuss with his own wife. Bettina in turn, always reported on her night's activities. He liked to know where she was and with whom. Once he had rescued her from a violent client, and since then they had come to care for one another." (Kureishi, 345)

Parvez always tries to be patient with his son's cynicism and rudeness, he even postpones his decision to get rid of his son because Bettina asks him to talk to the son and give him support. He, however, cannot tolerate his son being rude to her that cause her getting out from his taxi while the taxi still running. He kicks and hits his son vigorously.

- **The rooted and the rootless**

From the discussion above, we can see that the story is an irony. Parvez, the father, who was born and grown up in Pakistan, is now so rooted in the England way of life, he is so westernized in his way and view of life. He becomes the rootless from his native country and culture. Ali, the son, on the other hand, who is born and grown up in England and has western education actually is supposed to be the rootless. After joining the Islam fundamental, Ali finds his root and identity as a Moslem; he is deeply rooted to his belief and thinks Western education cultivates and anti-religious attitude.

For Parvez, as they are now in England, they have to fit in themselves in the country which has given them a good life. He does not regard abandoning religion rules by drinking alcohol, eating pork, gambling, not reading Koran and praying and having a special relationship with Bettina are sinful. As long as he works hard and does not hurt others he is a good man. Western life has changed his way of life and perspective once he got from his native country. For him, it is human to treat oneself some entertainment after being exhausted from hard work. Being rootless from any religious dogmas frees him to enjoy his life as a migrant in England. He is so grateful to England which gives him a good life compared with the life once he had in his native land. The father has tried every effort to please his son and get the boy back to normal life by willing to pray and grow beard. He has tried to be back to his root as the son wants him to do so, to be disappointed with his son's respond. The young man does not appreciate his effort, even Ali always finds his way to criticize and humiliate the poor old man.

Ali, on the contrary, does not regard all the facilities provided by the country – good education and environment to grow up as a blessing. He disgusts the west as a sink of hypocrites, adulterers, homosexuals, drug takers and prostitutes and he believes that someday Islam will rule the world. Western education is not suitable to religious attitude (Kureishi,

2014: 104). He is un-rooting himself from Western civilization where he has belonged since he was born and is firmly rooting himself to his belief. As the father is not capable of understanding the son; so is the son incapable to comprehend his father. Ali asks his father how he loves something which hates the father. In his view, the country where they live now, hates them because it has corrupted his father way of life which can lead him into the hell. He accuses his father as 'too implicated' in Western civilization. He is so firm with his point of view that the father should be back to his root as a Pakistani, as a Moslem.

4. Conclusion

Father and son relationship sometimes has troubles because of the gap between them. But in this story, the gap is too wide to bridge through because both father and son, especially the son is so firm with his own self identity. Both father and son fail to identify their self identity as a family once they are bound to. Parvez has found his root in England and already felt the country as his home, the country has given them everything for a good living he did not have in his native country. Parvez is the rootless of the story, by rooting his self to the Western life and un-rooting his identity as a Pakistani Moslem. Ali, on the contrary, is un-rooting his self from Western civilization in which he is supposed to be rooted in and dignifying his belief as his true self. For Ali, England hates them because the country brings them to violating religion law. He is back to the root of the 'right' Islam teaching as his true self. Ali is the rooted of the story. With his self identity as a fundamental Moslem, Ali feels superior from his father whom he accuses as breaking the law of Islam. In only a few months time, Ali has changed a lot. The father finds the mirror of identifying the son with his self has been broken by his son's stubbornness and rudeness to him.

The father and son become the other to one and another, regardless the family bounding they have. It also happens with the wife, by ignoring her presence and not discussing the problems caused by their son, is Parvez' way of othering the wife. Bettina, who is supposed to be the outsider of the family – the other, is the one whom Parvez turns to find refugee and comfort. He can talk anything to this woman, and so can she to the man. Bettina is the other-self to Parvez. The story has successfully conveyed the idea of 'self', 'other', and 'other-self', through the conflicts among the characters, especially the conflict between Parvez and Ali – the father and son.

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