

## CULTURE SHOCK EXPERIENCED BY CHRISTOPHER McCANDLESS IN *INTO THE WILD* FILM (A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH)

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**ABSTRAK:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui fase-fase *culture shock* dan penyebabnya yang dialami Christopher McCandless. Desain penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode deskriptif kualitatif. Pendekatan psikologis diadopsi untuk menganalisis fase dan penyebab *culture shock*. Data diambil dari film *Into the Wild* yang dialami oleh tokoh utama, Christopher McCandless. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat empat fase *culture shock* yang dialami Christopher McCandless dalam film *Into the Wild*, yaitu fase bulan madu, fase krisis, fase pemulihan, dan fase penyesuaian. Penulis juga menemukan dua penyebab *culture shock* yang dialami oleh tokoh Christopher McCandless, yaitu reaksi stres, kelelahan kognitif, *culture shock* peran, dan *culture shock* pribadi.

**Kata Kunci:** *culture shock*, film, psikologi

**ABSTRACT:** This study aimed at finding out the phases of culture shock and the causes of culture shock experienced by Christopher McCandless. The research design used was descriptive qualitative method. Psychological approach was adopted to analyze the phases and causes of culture shock. The data were taken from *Into the Wild* film experienced by the main character, Christopher McCandless. Based on the results of the study, it shows that there are four phases of culture shock experienced by Christopher McCandless in *Into the Wild* film namely the honeymoon Phase, the crisis phase, the recovery phase, the adjustment phase. The writer also found two causes of culture shock experienced by the character Christopher McCandless namely stress reactions, cognitive fatigue, role shock, and personal shock.

**Key words:** *culture shock*, film, psychological

### INTRODUCTION

Every culture has different customs and behaviors that include domestic and foreign culture. They have their own rules which are different from other culture. As Liliweri (2002: 8) culture is a view of life of a group of people in the form of behavior, beliefs, values, and symbols that they receive unconsciously all of which are passed on through the process of communication from one generation to the next. When someone is trying to communicate with people in different cultures and adjust the differences on them, it proves that the culture is studied. But there are some people will experience anxiety and discomfort when they enter to the new country that is different from their own country. One of the reasons for the inconvenience is that when someone enters a new culture, he does not know about how to communicate and accept the habits that have never been done. For example, feeling confusion about everything that must be done, feelings of tolerance or rejecting members of a new habit, and fear. In addition, physical and mental conditions will also cause discomfort so as to enable a person to experience cultural shock.

In the film, the culture is shown. Hence, film is a work of art that can be used as a medium of communication and a series of moving images recorded with sound that tells a story displayed on television or in the cinema

(Hornby, 2009:496). Films are produced by recording images from the world with a camera, or by creating images using animation techniques or visual effects. Film is a combination of human art and technology to produce high quality visual arts that also represent human life. Film descriptions are usually presented in detail by including large and complex social situations Hudson (2007:27). It deals with political and social issues, moving in the fields of human life, culture, and human relations. To support the story and make the story meaningful and understood by viewers, therefore the presence of literature in the film is important, it means that without the literature in a film the story does not make sense.

In this study, *Into the Wild* film becomes the object of the study. This film tells about the life journey of Christopher McCandless who seek identity in the wild. The film begins when Christopher McCandless recently graduated from his studies at Emory University. Christopher McCandless is a smart and brave young man who decides his life to become one with nature. The change occurred as he was disappointed in the life he lived. He was fed up with everything there was. Including the affection from his parents so far. Moreover, he himself witnessed that his parents were not people who get along. Christopher chose to leave his comfortable life, all of his family, his desire to go to college which was considered a fake and then decided to go in the wild without money, communication tools, and all the luxury. He then traveled from Atlanta to South Dakota, worked as a wheat grinder, sailed the Colorado River using illegal rowing boats, went to Mexico, golfed to be caught to safety to become an illegal passenger on a train, then to the salvation mountain, the slabs, and destinations end to alaska. On the way, he met many people, new friends, experienced very impressive trips, saw beautiful places, learned many life lessons, and became aware of the harshness of life and the difficulty of making money.

*Into the Wild* film is the interesting film that is analyzed in this study because it tells about the culture shock experienced by Christopher McCandless. He experienced culture shock in finding his true identity and decided to go to the wild. The writer needs to study more about this film because when Chris decided to go to nature from one place to another he found new friends, new places, and new life experiences, different clothes, customs, views, physical appearance and social behavior. In addition, there are a number of rules and etiquette that must be owned obediently committed. Therefore, this study aimed at finding out phases of culture shock and causes of culture shock experienced by Christopher McCandless in *Into the Wild* film.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

According to Oberg (1960: 142), culture shock is a disease related to work or occupation suffered by people suddenly due to migrating or being moved abroad. In this case, the job or position can be associated with people who are interacting with different cultures. Like most diseases, culture shock has its own symptoms and treatment. Culture shock is also caused by anxiety, loss of signs, and symbols in social interaction. Culture shocks are individual anxiety as a result of the loss of culture signs and symbols known in social interactions, especially when a person lives in a new culture for a long time (Kristian, 2013:10, Oetey and Franklin (2009: 151).

### *Phase of Culture Shock*

Ward, Bochner, and Furham (2001: 81), culture shock can be described as consisting of four distinct phases: honeymoon, crisis, recovery and adjustment. These phases are explained based on U-curve theory, where many theories describe how people adapt to the new culture environment. (1) *Honeymoon phase* Dealing with excitement, wonder, and euphoria and the so-called 'Honeymoon' emphasizes the first reaction of attraction. Crisis phase is a situation with which one does not know such as nervousness, anxiety and confusion arises. Martin and Nakayam (2010: 328) define this phase as a feeling of relative disorientation to environmental

unfamiliarity. Furthermore, Ward, Bochner, and Furham (2001:81) cite that the crisis is seen from the feeling of anxiety by the way habits and fears of someone who is not known by some differences in the new country.

Then, cultural differences in the way people communicate can be divided into (a) eetiquette that cultures differ in direct or indirect terms, how requests are made, and more importantly how requests are refused or refused (Ward, Bochner, and Furham, 2001: 54), (b) Non-verbal Communication is a person's behavior when they communicate with each other to convey feelings and emotions. Non-verbal communication is likely to be different because someone in each culture has a different interpretation with other cultures to respond to his attitude. This may be good in one culture but not in another. Ward, Bochner, and Furham (2001: 57) divides three non-verbal communication, namely mutual gaze, bodily contact, and gesture. (c) Form of address that varies between cultures, especially in terms of using first name, last name, and title. The use of the name honor shows a polite attitude on the part of the speaker and attracts social attention (Ward, Bochner, and Furham, 2001: 60); (2) *Recovery phase* is the stage where people will try to understand culture in the new environment and adapt to habits in the environment. Ward, Bochner, and Furham (2001:81) state that recovery is including crisis resolution in culture learning, (3) *adjustment phase*. In the Adjustment stage, Kevinsky (2010:8) explains that people will start to adapt and accept new cultures in new environments as new lifestyles, besides that things become more normal although they don't really become normal when people face the honeymoon phase beforehand, for example Travelers might have the ability to organize themselves and their beliefs. Individuals are able to participate fully and comfortably in the host culture. It is reflecting enjoyment and functional competence.

#### *Causes of Culture Shock*

Based on Winkelman (1994:122), there are several causes of culture shock namely stress reactions, cognitive fatigue, role shock, and personal shock. (1) Stress reactions. According to Winkelman (1994:122), the reaction that causes stress is when in a new environment and increases the body's physiological reactions that will cause dysfunction in increased adrenal pituitary activity. Stress induces various physiological reactions that involve mass release of the sympathetic nervous system, impaired immune system function, and increased susceptibility to all diseases; (2) cognitive fatigue. The main aspect of culture shock and the resulting stress is cognitive fatigue. The new culture requires a conscious effort to understand things that are processed unconsciously in one's own culture. Efforts must be made to interpret the meaning of new languages and new nonverbal, behavioral, contextual, and social communication. The shift from a function that is usually automatic, unconscious, without effort in one's own culture to the conscious effort and attention needed to understand all this new information is very tiring and results in mental or emotional exhaustion or fatigue, such as tension headaches and the desire to isolate yourself from contact social, especially in the later part of the day as cumulative information overload increases, (3) role shock. It is related to a person's identity which can affect well-being. A person's identity is maintained in part by social roles that contribute to well-being through structuring social interaction. In new culture settings, previous roles are largely eliminated and replaced by unknown roles and expectations. This leads to surprise roles due to ambiguity about one's social position, loss of relationships and normal social roles, and new roles that are inconsistent with previous self-concepts. For example, dependency relationships may no longer be supported, or vice versa, previously independent people may have to accept dependent relationships with authority figures; (4) Personal shock. Personal shock is compounded by events in new cultures that violate one's moral sense and moral values, values, logic, and beliefs about normality and politeness. Value conflicts contribute to feelings of disorientation and unrealism, increasing the sense of conflict that is pervasive with one's environment.

#### **METHODS**

The research design used was descriptive qualitative approach. According to Creswell (2017: 13), a research design is plans and procedure for research that span the steps from broad assumption to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and

understanding the meaning individuals or group ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2017:14). The data source in this study was the film *Into the Wild* released in 2007 directed by Sean Peen with the allotted time of 2 hours 28 minutes 7 seconds. In collecting the data, some steps were adopted that watching *Into the Wild* film by understanding the movie and analyzing every motion and activity, and taking notes to identify utterances and actions that refer to phases and causes of culture shock. After obtaining the data, the data were analyzed by classifying, discussing, and making the conclusion based on the analysis.

## DISCUSSION

In this session, based on the problems of the study issued before, it is going to discuss about the phases of culture shock and the causes of culture shock experienced by Christopher McCandless seen in *into the wild* film. The phases of culture shock experienced by Christopher McCandless in *Into the Wild* film are the Honeymoon Phase, Crisis Phase, Recovery Phase, and Adjustment Phase. The causes of culture shock experienced by Christopher McCandless in *Into the Wild* film are Stress Reactions, and Personal Shock.

### *Phase of Culture Shock*

In this point, there are four phase of culture shock is experienced by Christopher McCandless in *Into the Wild* film. They are Honeymoon Phase, Crisis Phase, Recovery Phase, and Adjustment Phase.

### *Honeymoon phase*

In *Into the Wild* film, Christopher McCandless experiences a culture shock when he feels the joy of the beautiful scenery that can be seen in action. This is the first honeymoon phase showed by Christopher McCandless. At that time the Alaska forest was still covered with snow. Chris finally arrived in Alaska after he passed various obstacles and obstacles, through forests, rivers and others. The action occurred when Chris found the wreck of an old bus without its owner in the Alaskan forest. The action shown by Chris is when he is on the bus while looking out. Chris was excited and surprised at the beautiful view of the green trees surrounded by beautiful snow and Chris decided to stay on the old bus. Therefore, this action is included in the honeymoon phase. Another action that refers to the honeymoon phase is that Chris also saw beautiful natural scenery in the highlands. The action showed that Chris felt happy and surprised because he could see the beautiful natural scenery. The joy of the beautiful scenery directed by Chris is when he was in the highlands by seeing many mountains, the hills around him covered with snow, and the air is so fresh. That scene could not be seen by Chris when he was still living in an urban area. Means that Chris was very satisfied to be in the wild by seeing beautiful scenery and being able to see firsthand the wild life.

### *Crisis Phase*

This phase is the second stage of culture shock where the person experiences unknown and negative aspects. Crisis is seen from feeling uneasy with the way of habit and fear of someone unknown with some differences in the new country. The differences may stem from several aspects of interaction with the host country which include cross-culture differences in the way people convey. Differences may stem from several aspects of interaction with host countries that include cross-culture differences in the way people communicate. Ward (2001: 53) divides culture differences in the way people communicate:

### *Etiquette*

In *Into the Wild* film, the etiquette experienced by Christopher as a crisis phase can be known when Chris wanted to take a trip on the Colorado River, after arriving at the park guard's room Chris asked the guard if I wanted to row to the river where the best place to launch it was. The guard asked if you have experience and have permission to row. The utterance "A permit? Permit for what?" is the conversation between park rangers and Chris. In that sentence, it happened when Chris was surprised because there had to be a permit when rowing in the river and had to wait two years to be able to row in the river but Chris was determined to row in the river even without a permission.

### Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication is likely to be different because someone in each culture has a different interpretation with other cultures to respond to his attitude. This may be good in one culture but not in another. Ward (2001: 57) divides three non-verbal communications.

#### - Mutual Gaze

In *Into the Wild* film, the mutual gaze experienced by Christopher as a crisis phase is when Chris was in California and met again with Jan and Rainey. The utterance "You want to come and eat? or we'll sit here. Because I will sit here with you all night." It happened when Chris looked into Jan's eyes and invited him to dinner together. Chris's gaze at Jan really showed that Chris wanted to sit with Jan all night and sit and share stories and experiences together. Therefore, this is the mutual gaze that experienced by Christopher when he made eye contact with Jan.

#### - Bodily Contact

Argyle in Ward (2001: 57) states that culture has a variety in levels that allow them to make body contact. In non-contact communities, it is only permitted under very limited conditions, such as in the family, briefly by shaking hands with strangers, or in special relationships. In *Into the Wild* film, a crisis phase is when he felt astonishment from body contact. This scene occurred when Christopher traveled on the Colorado river by rowing like in a swift river. On the way Christopher met Mad and Sonja. The utterance "Hay Alex" occurred when Christopher feels shocked when he gets acquainted with shaking hands and hugs Sonja who is not wearing clothes as a stranger he does not know.

#### - Gesture

This type of gesture is used in one culture and not in another. Furthermore, the same sign has a very diverse meaning, even opposites in different cultures Ward (2001:58). As Martin and Nakayama (2010: 275) explain that familiar gesture from one's culture will not mean the same thing abroad and they cannot deduce the meaning of every gesture they observe in other cultures. For example in Germany, the word 'stupid' is a finger on the forehead, while in America, it is a signal for 'smart'. The utterance "Is there anybody here? Guess not!" explains that Christopher found a bus wreck without an owner in the middle of the Alaska forest.

#### - Form of Address

In the form of address, there is also the action of Christopher McCandless which refers to culture shock. When Chris was in Los Angeles, he wanted to take care of his identity card so that he would no longer be chased by security officers. Chris then took care of his identity card and filled out a form so he could get a bed. When Chris introduced his name as Chrisander Supertramp to a female officer, the officer did not call his first name Chrisander but called his last name, Supertramp.

#### Recovery Phase

In *into the wild* film, the character of Christopher McCandless experienced a recovery phase as one of the culture shock when he began to adapt to his new environment that can be seen in action. When Christopher arrived in Alaska, he began his life with adequate equipment and food, he also began to adapt to Alaska natural environment by hunting animals, living his life sitting while reading books that were a source of inspiration during his leisure and also writing his diary all the time. The utterance "I like all this" is the conversation between Christopher and Wayne when Chris was excited to work and began to adapt to the daily habits of Wayne and his friends. Chris began to learn how to harvest wheat and run a tractor, use agriculture machinery, and start to do the habits when at night he went to the cafe to just joke and or drink.

#### Adjustment Phase

In the adjustment phase, the action experienced by Christopher is one of the culture shock when he underwent a change in his life. The action experienced by Christopher when he realized that to seek change and start by doing things that were useful. This means that Christopher had sought change when he first came to

Carthage, South Dakota. Chris changed his life by working in a wheat farming company. Chris started by working on harvesting wheat and having fun at the bar.

#### *Causes of Culture Shock*

In this point, there are two causes from four causes of culture shock experienced by Christopher McCandless. They are stress reactions and personal shock.

#### *Stress Reactions*

In *Into the Wild* film, character Christopher McCandless experienced stress reactions as the one of culture shock when he feels fear triggered by anxiety. The first stress reaction experienced by Christopher when he felt fear triggered by anxiety and worry. The utterance "Oh men. I've gotta go, you guys. I'm really sorry. I gotta go" means that Chris felt scared and tried to escape from the pursuit of the river patrolman because he did not have permission to row in the river. Again, Chris really enjoyed his trip and adventure in the wilds of Alaska until nature changed seasons to spring. The utterance "Shit. No! NO! Damn it! God down it fuck!" is the utterance expressed by Chris when he feels emotional because he doesn't know how to preserve food. When chasing a large deer Chris forgets that nature cannot preserve food, especially venison which he hunts because it will gradually rot and cannot be eaten.

#### *Personal Shock*

Personal shock is compounded by events in new cultures that violate one's moral sense and moral values, values, logic, and beliefs about normality and politeness. Value conflicts contribute to feelings of disorientation and unrealism, increasing the sense of conflict that is pervasive with one's environment. In *Into the Wild* film, Christopher McCandless experienced a personal shock when he felt sad when parting with people who he considers like family. On the way to Alaska, Chris had worked on a wheat farm. Chris met Wayne who was very kind to him, he was happy because he was given a place to live and work. But it all ended when Chris saw Wayne was considered by the police, he learned that Wayne was a fugitive. "Sorry, boys. We're gonna have shut down for a little while. Alex, you come back and work for me any time you want." When Chris decided to return to continue his trip to Alaska and say goodbye to Jan, Rainey and Tracy. The utterance "You too, New Year's resolution?" is the conversation between Christopher and Rainey when Christopher has to separate from Rainey again. Chris felt sad that he could not stay with Rainey until the New Year because he had to continue his journey to Alaska. Chris felt sad to be separated from Rainey who he considered as family and consider him as their biological child.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the problem of the study raised before, there are four phases of culture shock found in this study, namely the honeymoon phase, the crisis phase, the recovery phase, and the adjustment phase. Also, there are two causes of the culture shock experienced by Christopher McCandless namely the stress reaction, and personal shock.

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