

ANALYSIS OF THE EMOTIONS OF AN IMMIGRANT AS THE MAIN CHARACTER IN JESSICA GEORGE'S MAAME

Friska Muslia Wanda¹, Dahlia Husain², Ana Mariana³, Atiq Aqiqotul Hasanah⁴, Hasna Nurain Mukhsin⁵

1-5 English Literature, Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo, Indonesia

Corresponding Author ✉ friskamusliawanda@gmail.com

Abstract

This study analyzes the emotional dynamics of Maddie, the main character in Jessica George's novel *Maame*, through David Krech's classification of emotions and a literary psychology approach. The research uses a descriptive qualitative design, with close reading employed to identify narrative expressions of emotion and categorize them as basic, sensory-related, self-evaluative, or interpersonal. Thirteen emotions are identified. Sadness is the most dominant, particularly in relation to bereavement, alienation, and identity conflict; anger and fear also recur strongly, whereas joy is brief and situational. Pain, disgust, and pleasure demonstrate the bodily dimension of emotional pressure, while pride, shame, guilt, and regret reveal Maddie's continuing self-evaluation. Love and hate further show how relationships can become sources of belonging, rejection, and resistance. Read alongside literature on acculturation, second-generation identity, intergenerational conflict, discrimination, and social support, Maddie's emotions reflect a psychological struggle that is simultaneously personal, familial, social, and cultural.

Keywords: emotion; immigrant; literary psychology; David Krech; *Maame*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis dinamika emosi Maddie, tokoh utama dalam novel *Maame* karya Jessica George, melalui klasifikasi emosi David Krech dan pendekatan psikologi sastra. Penelitian menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik close reading untuk mengidentifikasi ekspresi emosi dalam narasi dan mengelompokkannya ke dalam emosi dasar, emosi terkait sensori, emosi evaluasi diri, dan emosi interpersonal. Tiga belas emosi teridentifikasi. Kesedihan merupakan emosi paling dominan, terutama berkaitan dengan kehilangan, keterasingan, dan konflik identitas; kemarahan dan ketakutan juga muncul kuat, sedangkan kegembiraan bersifat singkat dan situasional. Rasa sakit, jijik, dan kenikmatan memperlihatkan dimensi tubuh dari tekanan emosional, sementara bangga, malu, bersalah, dan penyesalan menunjukkan proses evaluasi diri Maddie. Cinta dan benci menegaskan bahwa relasi dapat menjadi sumber rasa memiliki, penolakan, dan perlawanan. Dalam dialog dengan literatur tentang akulturasi dan identitas generasi kedua, pengalaman emosi Maddie mencerminkan pergulatan psikologis yang bersifat personal, keluarga, sosial, dan budaya.

Kata Kunci: emosi; imigran; psikologi sastra; David Krech; *Maame*



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INTRODUCTION

Immigration is a global phenomenon whose consequences extend beyond economic and political concerns to the psychological and emotional lives of individuals. Adaptation to a new social and cultural environment can require people to negotiate unfamiliar norms, changing identities, and unequal social relations. Berry (1997) conceptualizes acculturation as a process

shaped by both the orientations of migrants and the conditions of the receiving society. Later reviews likewise identify acculturative stress, ethnic identity, language, discrimination, and social support as important correlates of migrant mental health (Balidemaj & Small, 2019; Choy et al., 2021; Horne, 2024). In this context, alienation, uncertainty, identity disturbance, and perceived exclusion can become emotionally significant dimensions of migrant experience (Iqbal et al., 2025).

These pressures are particularly complex for younger and second-generation populations because adaptation does not necessarily involve abandoning one cultural frame in favor of another. Research on immigrant youth emphasizes that heritage and national identities may operate simultaneously and interact with psychological well-being (Berry et al., 2006; Phinney et al., 2001). Cultural and linguistic maintenance can also be associated with mental-health outcomes, although its effects vary across contexts and populations (Hasnain et al., 2024). When expectations differ across generations, the gap between family norms and the values of the receiving society may intensify conflict, guilt, and distress. Meta-analytic and longitudinal studies have shown that intergenerational cultural conflict and acculturation gaps can be consequential for young people's psychological adjustment (Lui, 2015; Ying & Han, 2007).

Migration literature provides a narrative space in which these tensions can be represented not only as social conditions but also as intimate emotional experiences. Contini and Carrera (2022) stress the cultural complexity of migration and the continuing negotiation of belonging across places and identities. Fiction can render this negotiation at the level of everyday feeling: responsibility, shame, fear, grief, desire, attachment, and resistance. Jessica George's *Maame* (2023) is especially relevant because its protagonist, Maddie, is a young woman of Ghanaian descent living in London whose life is shaped by family obligation, caregiving, work, loss, intimate relationships, and a developing need for autonomy. Her emotional struggle occurs within the tension between Ghanaian familial expectations and British ideals of adult independence.

The present study approaches that struggle through literary psychology. It uses the classification of emotions attributed to David Krech and Crutchfield (1969), which in the source analytical framework is organized into four groups: basic emotions, sensory-related emotions, self-evaluative emotions, and interpersonal emotions. The basic category comprises joy, anger, fear, and sadness; sensory-related emotions include pain, disgust, and pleasure; self-evaluative emotions include pride, shame, guilt, and regret; and interpersonal emotions include love and hate. This framework makes it possible to examine how Maddie's psychological responses are connected to situations involving threat, loss, bodily experience, self-judgment, and relationships.

Existing migration research provides an important empirical context for understanding acculturation, identity, family conflict, discrimination, and social support, but the present study focuses on how comparable pressures are represented through the emotional life of a fictional character. Accordingly, the study aims to identify and interpret the types of emotion experienced by Maddie in *Maame* and to explain how those emotions contribute to her characterization as a second-generation woman negotiating family responsibility, cultural identity, and personal freedom. By bringing literary psychology into dialogue with migration literature, the analysis seeks to clarify how emotion functions as a narrative expression of identity conflict and adaptation rather than as an isolated private response.

METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a literary psychology approach. The qualitative design is appropriate because the object of analysis is the meaning of emotional expressions, narrative situations, and character development rather than numerical measurement. The study therefore interprets how emotions are represented through Maddie's speech, internal reflection, bodily responses, actions, and relationships.

The primary data source is Jessica George's Maame (2023). The units of analysis are narrative passages and situations that represent Maddie's emotional states in relation to family, caregiving, work, intimate relationships, bereavement, identity, and cultural expectations. The analysis retains the source manuscript's framing of Maddie as a second-generation woman of Ghanaian descent living within competing cultural demands.

Data were collected through close reading. The novel was read to identify passages that explicitly or implicitly represent Maddie's emotional experience. Relevant data were then categorized using the emotion classification associated with Krech and Crutchfield (1969): basic emotions (joy, anger, fear, sadness), sensory-related emotions (pain, disgust, pleasure), self-evaluative emotions (pride, shame, guilt, regret), and interpersonal emotions (love, hate). The categorization was used as an interpretive framework rather than as a quantitative scale.

Data analysis follows the three-stage qualitative model of Miles and Huberman (1994): data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting passages that most clearly represented the protagonist's emotional states. Data presentation involved organizing the selected passages according to the four emotion categories. The final stage interpreted the psychological meaning of the emotions and their role in Maddie's character development. Throughout the analysis, social and cultural context was considered alongside the textual evidence so that emotional responses could be related to family responsibility, gendered expectations, cultural adaptation, social judgment, discrimination, and the negotiation of second-generation identity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identifies thirteen types of emotion in Maddie's characterization: joy, anger, fear, sadness, pain, disgust, pleasure, pride, shame, guilt, regret, love, and hate. These are distributed across four categories in the Krech-based framework: four basic emotions, three sensory-related emotions, four self-evaluative emotions, and two interpersonal emotions. Their intensity is unequal. Sadness is the most persistent and dominant emotion, followed by recurrent anger and fear, while joy appears mainly in moments of relief, achievement, or anticipated independence. The remaining emotions deepen the psychological portrait by showing how social pressure is embodied, internalized through self-evaluation, and negotiated through relationships.

Basic Emotions

Basic emotions are central to Maddie's psychological development because they register changes in autonomy, safety, belonging, and loss. In the application of Krech's framework used here, joy, anger, fear, and sadness emerge as responses to situations that affect personal goals and psychological needs. Their recurrence also places Maddie's private reactions within a wider social environment of family responsibility, employment pressure, and cultural expectations. This connection is compatible with migration research in which anxiety, depressive affect, and psychological distress frequently accompany acculturative strain, although the form and intensity

of such responses differ across populations and circumstances (Balidemaj & Small, 2019; Choy et al., 2021; Horne, 2024).

Joy

"I think I may have found the perfect flat" (Chapter 4, p. 50).

This statement marks one of Maddie's clearest moments of joy. The possibility of finding a new flat represents more than a successful housing search; it signifies privacy, independence, and temporary emotional freedom from the caregiving responsibility that has defined much of her life. The situation is positively appraised because it appears to answer a need for control over her own future. Joy therefore functions as an emotion of anticipated autonomy. Its importance lies partly in its brevity: because relief is intermittent, moments of happiness reveal how strongly Maddie desires a life in which family obligation does not entirely determine her choices.

Anger

Anger appears as accumulated frustration and resistance to burdens Maddie experiences as unfair, especially within family and work contexts. In Krech's framework, anger can arise when goals are obstructed or when treatment is perceived as unjust. Maddie's anger consequently becomes a way of defending self-respect and personal boundaries when she feels that demands are imposed on her without equivalent recognition or emotional reciprocity.

"That's not true!" Maddie shouts before a mug shatters against the wall (Chapter 18, p. 168).

The outburst shows anger moving from verbal protest into physical action. It is closely connected to Maddie's experience of being trapped by family expectations and by the role of "Maame," a responsibility assigned to her from childhood. The scene therefore represents more than spontaneous aggression. It exposes the cumulative effect of gendered caregiving, suppressed frustration, and a pattern in which Maddie is expected to absorb responsibility. Her anger functions defensively: it marks a point at which emotional pressure can no longer be contained within compliance.

Fear

Fear surrounds many of Maddie's experiences and is associated with uncertainty, perceived threat, social judgment, unstable work, family loss, and the possibility of making the wrong choice. It operates as a recurring background condition rather than as a single reaction to immediate danger. Research on acculturative stress offers a useful contextual parallel because anxiety and psychological distress may intensify when migrants encounter cultural conflict, discrimination, uncertainty, or limited support (Choy et al., 2021; Horne, 2024). In Maddie's case, however, the literary representation makes those pressures visible through her internal language of doubt and apprehension.

"I can't comprehend living to work, but then I'm afraid of working just to live" (Chapter 2, p. 19).

The statement expresses an existential fear that material necessity may consume life without providing meaning. Maddie is caught between the need to support herself and the anxiety that work may reproduce another form of obligation. The fear is therefore both economic and psychological. It also anticipates a broader pattern in the novel: Maddie repeatedly evaluates

possible choices against imagined consequences for family, security, and social acceptance. Fear constrains her autonomy even when no external prohibition is explicitly stated.

Sadness

Sadness is the most dominant and reflective emotion in the analysis. It arises from bereavement, disappointment, loneliness, social invisibility, and the loss of emotional stability. Maddie's grief after her father's death is the clearest source, but sadness also develops from feeling insufficiently recognized at work and within relationships. The emotion frequently overlaps with guilt, creating a sustained condition rather than a short-lived response. Migration research similarly identifies depression, alienation, and psychological distress as important dimensions of difficult acculturation experiences, while also emphasizing the protective relevance of social support (Balidemaj & Small, 2019; Horne, 2024).

"I just really don't want my dad to be dead. That's all." (Chapter 19, p. 179).

The directness of this sentence intensifies the sense of irreparable loss. Maddie is not reasoning through grief; she is confronting the impossibility of reversing it. Her father's death removes a person around whom much of her responsibility and daily routine had been organized, so bereavement also destabilizes her sense of purpose and identity. The predominance of sadness therefore explains why her movement toward independence cannot be interpreted as simple liberation. Freedom arrives together with grief, guilt, and the need to reconstruct a self that had long been defined through caregiving.

Taken together, the four basic emotions form an uneven emotional pattern. Joy appears when autonomy becomes imaginable, anger when responsibility becomes intolerable, fear when the future appears uncertain, and sadness when attachment and stability are lost. Their interaction turns Maddie's development into a movement through obligation, resistance, bereavement, and self-redefinition. Krech's classification makes these shifts visible as related responses rather than isolated moods.

Sensory-Related Emotions

The sensory-related emotions identified in the study are pain, disgust, and pleasure. These emotions foreground the body as a site where psychological and social pressure is experienced. Maddie's emotional life is therefore not confined to reflection or verbal expression; it is also registered through physical strain, bodily boundaries, and moments of comfort. This category is important because it reveals how responsibility and interpersonal experience become embodied.

Pain is represented both as a physical sensation and as an embodiment of burden. Maddie's back pain after lifting her father's body is interpreted as more than muscular strain. In the source analysis, it becomes associated with the weight of caregiving, restrictive family and gender expectations, and unresolved memories of earlier physical violence. The body thus functions as an archive of experience: present sensation evokes a history of responsibility and vulnerability that cannot be separated from Maddie's psychological development.

Disgust appears as a protective response when Maddie becomes aware of sexual behavior that she perceives as violating trust and bodily safety. The reaction is not limited to physical contamination; it also concerns a loss of control over the conditions of intimacy. Disgust therefore becomes an emotion of boundary protection. It allows Maddie to recognize that bodily autonomy is part of the broader independence she is trying to build, and it links sensory reaction with interpersonal judgment.

Pleasure provides a contrasting bodily register. Ordinary experiences such as eating, taking a relaxing bath, or receiving a gentle kiss create temporary spaces of warmth, relief, and self-care. These moments are small in narrative scale but psychologically significant because they interrupt a life structured by obligation. When Maddie imagines a bath with candles and foam, for example, she constructs a private environment in which the body can experience comfort rather than demand. Pleasure therefore functions as a resource for emotional recovery and as evidence that autonomy is also expressed through the right to rest and enjoy one's own body.

Together, pain, disgust, and pleasure position Maddie's body as an arena of burden, defense, and recovery. The category expands the analysis beyond cognitive appraisal by showing that the struggle for identity and self-determination is physically felt. Sensory emotion becomes one of the ways the narrative makes abstract cultural and interpersonal pressures intimate and immediate.

Self-Evaluative Emotions

The self-evaluative emotions identified in Maddie are pride, shame, guilt, and regret. They arise when she measures her actions, achievements, and responsibilities against personal standards and perceived social expectations. Because Maddie develops between Ghanaian family values and British ideals of adult independence, self-evaluation becomes a major site of cultural negotiation. Research on immigrant families provides a relevant parallel: acculturation mismatch and intergenerational cultural conflict can become psychologically consequential when younger family members negotiate expectations that differ from those of parents or heritage communities (Lui, 2015; Ying & Han, 2007).

Pride appears when Maddie evaluates her achievements positively. Her higher education in English literature, career planning, new friendships, and ability to imagine an independent future provide moments of satisfaction and increased self-esteem. Yet pride is not entirely individualistic. It is also connected to the expectation that success should validate the sacrifices made by her immigrant parents. This dual meaning shows that even positive self-evaluation is culturally situated: achievement is personal, but it is also understood in relation to family history.

Shame emerges when Maddie imagines herself through external social standards. As an adult woman who remains in her parents' home and is not yet fully economically independent, she becomes conscious of how her life may be judged. The analysis interprets this shame as intensified by the contrast between her family circumstances and dominant expectations of adult independence in British society. Shame thus results from comparison, and the comparison is complicated by the fact that the norms available to Maddie are not culturally uniform.

Guilt is closely connected to family responsibility and bereavement. It overlaps with sadness after Maddie's father dies and appears when she considers whether she has adequately fulfilled expectations toward those she loves. Guilt therefore reflects the internalization of responsibility: Maddie judges herself not only by what she wants but also by what she believes she owes to others. This emotional structure helps explain why independence can produce anxiety rather than uncomplicated relief.

Regret becomes important when Maddie looks backward at decisions that cannot be changed, including remaining too long in a job she disliked and not visiting her father before his death. Regret is retrospective, but it also contributes to character development because it forces her to recognize the value of time, relationships, and decisive action. The emotion transforms past

inaction into a basis for future self-understanding. In the context of an immigrant family, this evaluation is intensified by the feeling that choices should not waste the sacrifices of an earlier generation.

These four emotions reveal a protagonist negotiating two systems of value rather than choosing simply between them. Pride registers successful movement toward self-definition; shame and guilt expose tensions between social norms, family expectations, and personal desire; regret becomes a point of reflective reassessment. This pattern is consistent with acculturation scholarship emphasizing the simultaneous negotiation of heritage and receiving-culture identities (Berry et al., 2006; Phinney et al., 2001), while research on intergenerational conflict helps contextualize why mismatched expectations can intensify distress (Lui, 2015).

Interpersonal Emotions

Interpersonal emotions such as love and hate arise within relationships and shape the ways individuals experience attachment, rejection, and belonging. In Maame, these emotions occur across family ties, friendships, intimate relationships, and social conflict. This relational dimension is important because migration research repeatedly identifies social support, family relationships, and the receiving social environment as significant factors in psychological adaptation (Horne, 2024; Phinney et al., 2001). Maddie's emotional development likewise depends on whether relationships provide recognition or reproduce pressure.

Love appears through direct verbal affection, including exchanges such as "Love you" and "I love you too, Maame." Such expressions function as positive interpersonal emotions that reinforce connection and reduce isolation. For Maddie, affection provides an emotional counterweight to the alienation she experiences elsewhere. Love becomes a source of resilience because it confirms that belonging does not have to be based solely on obligation; it can also emerge from reciprocity, care, and chosen intimacy.

Hate and resentment, by contrast, are associated with rejection, injustice, betrayal, and social conflict. The source manuscript refers to anger toward an unsympathetic work system and to Maddie's growing resentment when the flat that once symbolized safety becomes associated with rejection by housemates. These negative interpersonal emotions function defensively. They allow Maddie to identify environments and relationships that threaten her sense of dignity or belonging. Research on perceived discrimination also supports the broader relevance of reading emotional regulation in relation to social context rather than as an exclusively private process (Dingoyan et al., 2022).

The interaction of love and hate therefore shows relationships as both sources of strength and sites of emotional danger. Love strengthens belonging, while resentment marks boundaries against rejection and injustice. In contextual terms, the pattern parallels evidence that social support can buffer distress whereas discrimination and intergenerational conflict can intensify psychological strain (Dingoyan et al., 2022; Lui, 2015). Within the novel, however, these dynamics are individualized through Maddie's changing capacity to decide which relationships deserve loyalty and which forms of pressure she is no longer willing to accept.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the complexity of Maddie's emotional experience in Jessica George's Maame through the classification of emotion associated with David Krech and Crutchfield. Thirteen types of emotion are identified across four categories. Among the basic

emotions, sadness is the most dominant, emerging from bereavement, social alienation, and identity conflict. Anger and fear are also significant responses to family pressure, uncertainty, and accumulated emotional strain, whereas joy appears intermittently in moments of achievement, relief, and anticipated independence.

The sensory-related emotions of pain, disgust, and pleasure show that Maddie's emotional life is embodied through burden, boundary protection, comfort, and recovery. Self-evaluative emotions—pride, shame, guilt, and regret—demonstrate how she continually measures herself against family responsibilities, personal aspirations, and social expectations. Interpersonal emotions of love and hate further reveal the importance of attachment, rejection, and relational conflict in shaping her sense of belonging. Literature on acculturation, second-generation identity, intergenerational cultural conflict, discrimination, and social support helps contextualize these fictional emotions without replacing the textual analysis.

Taken together, the findings show that Maddie's inner struggle is simultaneously personal and socio-cultural. Her emotional development reflects the tension between loyalty to family and cultural heritage on the one hand and the desire for autonomy on the other. By applying Krech's emotion classification through a literary psychology approach, the study contributes to psychological characterization in migration literature and demonstrates how emotion can function as a narrative form for representing identity negotiation. The analysis also suggests that Maddie's movement toward independence is not a simple rejection of family or heritage; rather, it is a process of redefining responsibility, belonging, and selfhood while living across intersecting cultural expectations.

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