



The Basic Anxiety of the Female Protagonist in the Novel *Midah, Si Manis Bergigi Emas* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer

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ABSTRACT

Literary works not only present stories but also record the complex inner struggles of human beings, including psychological conflicts concealed beneath the behavior of their characters. This study aims to analyze the basic anxiety of Midah, the female protagonist in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel *Midah, Si Manis Bergigi Emas* and the neurotic strategies she develops in response to the psychological pressures she faces. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method using Karen Horney's social psychoanalytic approach and intrinsic element analysis based on Burhan Nurgiyantoro's theory, through library research with reading and note-taking techniques. The findings reveal that Midah's basic anxiety stems from her father's authoritarian parenting and a lack of affection during childhood, which drives her to develop three neurotic strategies in an imbalanced manner: moving toward people, moving away from people, and moving against people. Midah has not fully recovered from her childhood trauma due to the absence of adequate emotional support from her surroundings. This study concludes that there is an interconnection between basic anxiety, neurotic strategies, and the inner conflicts of the main character, thus affirming the important role of the family environment in shaping an individual's psychological condition.

Keywords: Basic Anxiety, Neurotic Strategies, Karen Horney's social psychoanalysis, Literary Psychology

1. Introduction

Literary works not only present stories, but also record complex human inner struggles, including psychological conflicts that are often hidden behind the behaviour of their characters. Through the approach of literary psychology, literature can be understood as a representation of human psychological dynamics that reflect emotional experiences, trauma, and internal conflicts that affect individual actions. Thus, literature is not only a medium of entertainment, but also a means to study the psychological aspects of human beings in more depth.

One of the Indonesian literary works that features psychological conflicts is *the novel Midah, Si Manis Bergigi Emas* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Pramoedya is a great Indonesian writer known for his works that raise humanitarian issues and social criticism. He was born on February 6, 1925 in Blora, Central Java. Since childhood, Pramoedya had shown an interest in the world of writing even though his life was coloured by various difficulties, including pressure in education and economic limitations (Ministry of Education and Culture (2022)). These life experiences had also shaped his sensitivity to social and psychological issues, which were then reflected in his works.

One of Pramoedya's works, *Midah, Si Manis Bergigi Emas* (1954), tells the life of the main character, Midah, who experiences psychological distress due to an unharmonious relationship with her father. Authoritarian parenting, accompanied by a rejection of Midah's interest in art, causes fear, insecurity, and emotional discomfort that continues into adulthood. This condition shows the existence of complex and relevant inner conflicts to be studied through a literary psychology approach.

The selection of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's work in this study is based on its narrative power in revealing the personality of the female characters not only from the external side, but also from a deep psychological dimension. The female characters in Pramoedya's work are often depicted as having strong inner complexity and facing social pressures that are realistic and contextual with their times. In the novel *Midah, Si Manis Bergigi Emas*, this is reflected through the character of Midah who experiences inner conflict due to repressive family parenting, thus making this work relevant to be analysed from the perspective of literary psychology.

The psychological reading of Midah's character in this study cannot be separated from Pramoedya Ananta Toer's position as one of the modern Indonesian writers most involved in socio-political criticism. *Midah, Si Manis Bergigi Emas* (1954) was written in the early period of Pramoedya's career, when his works consistently highlighted patriarchy, class inequality, and religious hypocrisy in 1950s Indonesian society. Thus, Midah's basic anxieties do not solely stem from individual relationships with her father, but also represent broader structural pressures. Hadji Abdul, in this framework, can be read not only as a personally authoritarian father figure, but also as a representation of the patriarchal-religious system that governs women's bodies and life choices. Similarly, Hadji Terbus represents the economic power of men over women in the institution of marriage. This reading is in line with Karen Horney's own position as a feminist psychoanalyst who critically challenges Freud's view of women, especially through her criticism of the concept of *penis envy* and her emphasis that women's psychology is shaped more by socio-cultural factors than biological (Horney, 1967). Thus, the *basic anxiety framework* used in this study is in line with, rather than separate from, the gender criticism carried by Pramoedya through the character of Midah.

This phenomenon is in line with the concept of *basic anxiety* put forward by Karen Horney, namely that individuals who do not receive affection, security, and emotional support in childhood tend to experience feelings of isolation, powerlessness, and unloved. Horney (1950) defines basic anxiety as "a feeling of being isolated and helpless in a potentially hostile world". To suppress this anxiety, the individual's spontaneous movements to approach, resist, and distance themselves from others turn into compulsive; all three are compatible in healthy individuals, but clash with each other in neurotic individuals, situations that Horney calls *basic conflicts*. This condition then encourages individuals to develop neurotic strategies as a self-defence mechanism, namely moving *toward people*, moving *against* others, or moving *away from people*. In the context of literature, this theory is relevant to uncover how traumatic experiences shape the personality and behaviour of the character. Therefore, this study uses a literary psychology approach with the perspective of Karen Horney's social psychoanalysis to analyse the personality dynamics of the character Midah, especially related to basic anxiety and neurotic strategies.

In the study of Indonesian literature, Karen Horney's theory has been used by several researchers, for example Fauzi and Parmin (2022) in their study of the novelette *Hidup Ini Brengsek, dan Aku Dipaksa Menikmatinya* (Life is a jerk, and I Am Forced to Enjoy It) found that the character "I" experiences a vicious circle that repeats from traumatic experiences since childhood that trigger the emergence of basic anxiety and basic hostility. This condition is characterized by anxiety and fear disorders that have the impact of giving rise to hostility with the form of aggressive shadows towards others. Meanwhile, Maulidah and Septiana (2023) in the novel *Sali* reveal three forms of resistance of Dani women, namely approaching, fighting, and staying away from others, based on Karen Horney's theory. Meanwhile, Azharani et al.'s (2023) research on the novel *Stigma* revealed the existence of basic anxiety and basic hostility in the main character. This condition is influenced by a lack of affection from parents, which then has an impact on the development of the character's personality.

Research on the character of Midah has been carried out with various approaches. Research by Sari, T.T. (2021) shows that violence in the family shapes Midah's character to become timid, submissive, and experience psychological pressure. Violence against women experienced by Midah includes physical, verbal, psychological, sexual, economic, and social violence. This finding is in line with Karen Horney's basic anxiety theory which states that a lack of security in childhood can form neurotic tendencies in adulthood. Furthermore, Sulastris (2020) shows that Midah has developed from a passive female figure to a more empowered figure gradually. This is in line with the research of Hespi Septiana et al. (2023) which shows the existence of three main forms of desire, namely the desire to rebel, courage, and freedom. The results of this study confirm that Midah has the urge to get out of social pressure, but has not specifically associated this impulse with childhood psychological trauma. Munawar and Haslinda (2022) shows that there are various forms of social injustice against women, such as violence, marginalization, subordination, stereotypes, and double workloads. This research strengthens the picture that the social environment plays a role in shaping the conflicts experienced by the character Midah. The research is strengthened by Arif Setiawan (2021) who shows that Javanese cultural values, such as obedience, patience, and acceptance (*nrimo*), greatly influenced Midah's attitude in dealing with her life. Research related to Midah's character conducted by Desy Hidayati and Sri Rahmawati (2021)

shows a strong character, never gives up, and has a strong stance. However, this study only describes the characterizations without exploring the psychological factors behind it.

Based on these studies, the researchers draw the conclusion that although studies of the character Midah have been conducted from various perspectives, such as gender, literary sociology, culture, and characterization, studies that specifically reveal the psychological condition of Midah based on childhood experiences and basic anxiety are still limited. Therefore, Karen Horney's psychoanalytic approach is used in this study to fill this gap, especially in explaining how childhood trauma affects the way Midah deals with anxiety and shapes her personality.

However, these studies have not specifically examined the psychological conflicts of the character Midah through Karen Horney's approach to social psychoanalysis in depth, especially in relating the concept of basic anxiety to the neurotic strategies that develop in the character. Thus, there is still a research gap in understanding the relationship between childhood experiences, basic anxiety, and the formation of Midah's personality comprehensively. The urgency of this research lies in the importance of examining the psychological dynamics of female characters in Indonesian literature related to traumatic experiences in the family. Based on the background that has been described, the formulation of the problem in this study is as follows: first, what is the form of psychological conflict experienced by the main character Midah in the novel *Midah Si Manis Bergigi Emas* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer? And second, how can Midah's *basic anxiety* be explained through Karen Horney's theory of social psychoanalysis?

The novel *Midah, Si Manis Bergigi Emas* represents social realities that are still relevant, such as authoritarian parenting and its impact on the development of individual personalities. The use of Karen Horney's theory in this study is important because it is able to explain more specifically the relationship between basic anxiety and neurotic strategies in shaping individual behaviour, which have not been studied in depth in previous research. Using Karen Horney's social psychoanalysis approach, this study aims to analyse the psychological conflicts experienced by the character Midah. The focus of the analysis is directed at the basic form of anxiety experienced by the character as well as the neurotic strategies developed in response to the psychological pressure she faces. This research is expected to show that the basic anxiety experienced by the female protagonist Midah plays a role in forming certain neurotic strategies in response to the psychological pressure she faces. In addition, this research is expected to contribute to the development of the study of literary psychology, especially in the application of Karen Horney's social psychoanalytic theory to Indonesian literary works, as well as enrich the understanding of the psychological dynamics of female characters.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a literary psychology approach. This method was chosen because the research aims to understand phenomena in depth, especially related to the psychological conflicts of characters in literary works. This is in line with Amanda and Albina (2025) who stated that qualitative research is used to explore the complexity of phenomena through descriptive and interpretive analysis. Thus, qualitative research does not focus on numerical data, but on the meaning and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The approach used in this study is social psychoanalysis from Karen Horney. This approach is used to analyse the psychological aspects of the character Midah, especially those related to basic anxiety and neurotic strategies, namely moving toward people, moving against people, and moving away from people.

In addition, this study also uses the study of intrinsic elements of literary works by referring to the theory of Burhan Nurgiyantoro (Nurgiyantoro, 2010). Intrinsic analysis is carried out to identify elements such as themes, plots, character and characterization, setting, point of view, language style, and moral values that build the story. The use of this theory aims to strengthen psychological analysis, because the inner conflict of the characters cannot be separated from the narrative structure that forms them. This research was carried out through several stages. First, the researcher determined the main source of data, namely the novel *Midah, Si Manis Bergigi Emas* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Second, the researcher read the text thoroughly to understand the storyline, the characterization, and the context of the event. Third, the researcher recorded quotations that contained psychological conflicts, especially those related to basic anxiety and neurotic strategies, as well as parts of the text that showed the intrinsic elements.

The data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data is in the form of the text of the novel *Midah, Si Manis Bergigi Emas*, while secondary data is obtained from books, scientific journals, and other sources relevant to the study of literary psychology, Karen Horney's theory of social psychoanalysis, and the theory of intrinsic elements of literary works. The data collection technique is carried out through a literature study using a reading and note method. This technique is used to identify parts of the

text that are in accordance with the focus of the research, both related to the psychological conflict of the character and the intrinsic elements of the work.

Furthermore, the data analysis technique was carried out through several stages, namely: (1) identification of data in the form of quotations that show psychological conflicts and intrinsic elements; (2) classification of data based on the concept of basic anxiety, neurotic strategies, and intrinsic structure of the work; (3) interpretation of data by associating text excerpts with the theories of Karen Horney and Burhan Nurgiyantoro; and (4) drawing conclusions to explain the relationship between the characters' past experiences, story structure, and the formation of their personalities and behaviours. Through these stages, this research method not only explains the research process carried out but also supports and strengthens the research findings. The analysis carried out systematically allows the researcher to reveal more deeply the relationship between basic anxiety, neurotic strategies, and the intrinsic elements that build the psychological conflict of the character Midah in the novel under study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Narrative Structure of the Novel

Story elements such as themes, plots, characters, settings, points of view, language style, and message, are interrelated and support the formation of the meaning of the story (Nurgiyantoro, 2010). In relation to the study of literary psychology, intrinsic elements not only function as narrative devices, but also as a window to see the inner conflicts and psychological dynamics of the characters.

The central theme of *Midah, Si Manis Bergigi Emas* lies in the exploration of childhood trauma and the struggle for female identity within the constraints of patriarchal social values. Midah is raised in a rigidly religious household where obedience to her father is demanded from an early age. Her passion for music, however, becomes a source of conflict, as her father punishes her and violently suppresses her interest in listening to records and singing. As the narrator recounts: "*Ia menyaksikan betapa amarah bapa telah menyebabkan piringan-piringan yang begitu ia cintai... pecah belah tak tertolong lagi.*" (p.10). This incident instils in Midah a profound sense of fear, insecurity, and rejection, shaping her perception of herself as unworthy of acceptance.

Since childhood, Midah has felt the difference in treatment in her family. Her relationship with her parents, especially her father, is very limited to rules and demands. Since her younger brother was born, Midah no longer receives attention from her father and mother.

"Sejak kelahiran si adik, ia tidak mendapatkan perhatian dari bapak juga tidak dari emak." (hlm.6).

"Since the birth of the younger brother, she has not received attention from her father nor from her mother." (p.6).

It was such a situation that made her feel left out, lose attention, and affection from her parents so that Midah grew up in a sense of loneliness and insecurity. This feeling becomes the initial basis of Midah's inner conflict, shapes her personality, and becomes the seed of the psychological trauma that she carries into adulthood. The conflict in Midah's novel does not only arise from the outside world, but from within the main protagonist. Midah received violence from her father and experienced oppression in her marriage. These negative experiences made her not dare to return to her parents because of childhood trauma that has not yet healed, as can be seen from the following conversation.

"Mengapa engkau tak langsung pulang ke rumah orang tuamu?" Riah-bekas babunya itu bertanya
"Takut", ia menjawab (hlm.12)

"Why don't you go straight back to your parents' house?" Riah-her former maid asked. "Afraid", she replied (p.12)

The short answer "afraid" in the above quote reflects the deep psychological wounds caused by her father's harsh parenting. This conflict is at the center of Midah's emotional upheaval throughout the story and shows how childhood trauma can continue to haunt a person into adulthood. In the settlement stage after various pressures and inner wounds that have accumulated since childhood, Midah finally chooses her own path in life. She decides to leave, not because she wants to fight violently, but in order to find her peace and independence as a woman.

In the novel Midah, the main protagonist is Midah who becomes the center of the storytelling and experiences the most events. She is described as a figure who lives under pressure and fear, especially due to her father's attitude. Nevertheless, Midah still shows the courage to determine her own path in life. This can be seen in the following quote, which shows her awareness that being yourself means being ready to face social opposition.

"Mempunyai pendirian sendiri adalah berhadapan dengan pendapat umum" (hlm. 105)

"To have one's own stand is to face public opinion" (p. 105)

Additional characters in this novel play a role in strengthening the conflicts experienced by Midah, both from the family and social environment. Hadji Abdul as a father is portrayed as harsh and restrained, especially in terms of music that he considers haram, as seen when he scolds and slaps Midah. Meanwhile, Nyonya Abdul as a mother tends to be passive, but still retains the affection that can be seen from her expressions as follows,

"Ah Midah, begitu lama aku cari-cari engkau" (hlm. 100).

"Ah Midah, I've been looking for you for so long" (p. 100).

On the other hand, Hadji Terbus, as a husband, treats Midah unjustly; she only discovers after becoming pregnant that he is not a bachelor but already married, revealing how little control she has over her own life. The following dialogues describes how infuriating the situation is for Midah.

"Hadji Terbus bukan bujang dan bukan muda. Ini diketahuinya waktu ia mengandung tiga bulan"(hlm.11)

"Hadji Terbus was not single and not young. This was known when she was three months pregnant." (p.11)

In addition, several secondary figures exert distinct influences on Midah's trajectory. Riah, in particular, emerges as a source of sympathy and emotional support, articulated through her words, which simultaneously function as an implicit critique of the severity of Midah's parents attitudes.

"Seganas-ganasnya macan dia takkan makan anaknya sendiri" (hlm. 12)

"As ferocious as a tiger is, it will not eat its own cubs" (p. 12)

Conversely, Ahmad—whom Midah encounters after joining the keroncong group—initially appears supportive through his constant presence and the expectation that he might embody responsibility. However, his refusal to acknowledge Midah's pregnancy ultimately exposes his irresponsibility and intensifies the psychological wounds she carries. The following dialog emphasizes his unwillingness to marry Midah.

"Tidak! Engkau mau jebak aku, engkau mau paksa aku kawini kau" (hlm.93)

"No! You want to trap me, you want to force me to marry you" (p.93)

The judgmental stance is further exemplified by the hostess, who alters her attitude upon learning of Midah's pregnancy with Ahmad's child, declaring,

"Rumahku jadi rumah cabul" (hlm. 106)

"My house has become a house of debauchery" (p. 106)

Midah's social environment is thus increasingly depicted as unsupportive, particularly through the figures of Nini and Min. Nini adopts a rude and cynical demeanour, positioning herself as the most meritorious within the group, while Min dismisses Midah's capacity to work on account of her pregnancy. These responses reveal a profound lack of empathy within her surroundings, thereby compounding both the psychological and social burdens she endures as a woman. Consequently, characterization in this novel functions not merely as a vehicle for illustrating the pervasive pressures exerted by family and society, pressures that crystallize into the protagonist's inner conflict.

3.2 *Characterization and Basic Anxiety: A Social Psychoanalytic Approach to Midah's Inner Conflict*

Midah's psychological conflict can be examined more profoundly through Karen Horney's framework of social psychoanalysis. Central to this theory is the notion that basic anxiety originates in dysfunctional relationships between children and their immediate social environment, particularly within the family. Such anxiety subsequently generates neurotic survival strategies, expressed through three primary patterns of response: compliance or moving toward others, withdrawal or moving away from others, and aggression or moving against others. Midah's characterization reflects these psychological tendencies, ranging from fear of rejection and submission to parental authority to self-blame. Her succession of painful experiences illustrates not only the condition of women in a patriarchal context but also demonstrates how unresolved childhood wounds evolve into neurotic traits in adulthood. The following analysis will delineate Midah's psychological dynamics in greater detail, employing Horney's theoretical lens as the interpretive framework.

3.2.1. *The Impact of Paternal Authority on Midah's Psychological Conflicts*

Midah's relationship with her father exemplifies a profound restriction of her personal freedom. This is particularly evident in his prohibitive stance toward her engagement with music, a prohibition reinforced through acts of violence, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

"Haram-Haram siapa yang memutar lagu itu di rumah? Dan waktu dilihatnya midah masih asyik mengiringi lagu itu, Ia tampar gadis itu pada pipinya"(hlm.21)

"Haram-haram—who plays the song at home? And when he saw Midah still engrossed in accompanying the song, he slapped the girl on the cheek" (p.21)

This episode illustrates the systemic suppression of Midah's self-expression, instilling fear and emotional strain since childhood. Within Karen Horney's theoretical framework, such condition are understood as trigger to *basic anxiety*—an enduring sense of insecurity fostered by an environment that denies individual autonomy. The father's exercise of authority is further evident in his unilateral decision to arrange Midah's marriage without regard for her own volition, reinforcing the pattern of restraint that shapes her psychological conflict.

"Midah, sekarang engkau sudah besar. Sebentar lagi kawin jangan kira engkau tidak cantik. Sudah banyak bapakmu menerima lamaran. Tapi, bapakmu hanya mau menerima lamaran kalau ada hadji dari Cibatok yang mengerjakannya." (hlm.11)

"Midah, now you are grown. Soon you will get married, don't think you are not beautiful. Many proposals have been accepted by your father. But, your father only wants to accept if there is a hadji from Cibatok who propose it." (p.11)

This passage highlights the extent to which Midah's father dictates crucial decisions in her life, such as marriage, thereby constraining her autonomy. From Karen Horney's perspective, such repression fosters basic anxiety, rooted in the absence of safety and freedom of self-expression. It also carries the potential to generate basic hostility—latent anger toward the source of insecurity—which, in Midah's case, remains suppressed and manifests through silence and coerced obedience. Her avoidance of self-assertion exemplifies Horney's cycle of 'anxiety plus repressed hostility' (1936), wherein suppressed hostility combined with anxiety produces heightened sensitivity to rejection and an excessive need for affection. Consequently, Midah lacks the courage to resist her father's decision, enduring an unhappy marriage while suppressing her desires just to maintain paternal acceptance.

3.2.2. *Basic Anxiety in the Characterization of Midah*

Midah's basic anxiety emerges not only from her father's authoritarian control but also from the broader family dynamics that render her marginalized. The birth of her younger brother redirects familial attention—particularly the father's—away from Midah, leaving her displaced within the household. This experience of exclusion intensifies her sense of insecurity and deepens the psychological anxiety she endures, as reflected in the following quotation.

“Kelahiran si adik bukan saja menggoncang iman bapak! Juga hati Midah goncang karenanya”(hlm.6)

"The birth of the younger brother not only shakes her father's faith! Also her heart is shaken because of it" (p.6)

The term "shakes/shaken" in the quotation signifies not merely sadness but unstable emotional state, reflecting Midah's profound shift in affect following the loss of the attention she once received. Her sense of exclusion gradually erodes the security she previously felt within the family, while her father's altered attitude conveys indirect rejection, positioning her as no longer central to the household. Such experiences constitute more than isolated events; they represent formative emotional encounters that shape her personality. From Karen Horney's perspective, these conditions precipitate basic anxiety—an enduring insecurity arising when affection and protection within close relationships are withdrawn. Importantly, this anxiety is not only the product of overt violence but also of subtle, prolonged emotional neglect. Consequently, Midah's anxiety is rooted in childhood experiences that foster insecurities, fear of rejection, and an unfulfilled need for familial affection.

The critical issue, then, is whether Midah's anxiety should be understood as normal anxiety—a proportionate response to tangible threats or as neurotic anxiety, which, in Horney's terms, denotes a disproportionate reaction to hidden or subjective dangers (Horney, 1937). Given the physical violence and repression she endured, Midah's anxiety toward her father is best interpreted as a proportionate response to real conditions rather than an unfounded distortion. Nevertheless, this anxiety evolves into a neurotic pattern when carried into adulthood, manifesting in the persistent suppression of her needs and desires even in contexts where no immediate threat exists. This trajectory illustrates the transformation of situational fear into enduring neurotic strategies, thereby setting the stage for the subsequent analysis of Midah's psychological dynamics.

3.2.3. *Childhood Trauma as a Determinant of Adult Behaviour*

Midah's childhood trauma plays a decisive role in shaping her psychological development and adult decision-making. Experiences of being scolded, punished, misunderstood—particularly by her father—instilled a lasting sense of fear. The home, instead of functioning as a site of safety, became a locus of emotional wounding that continued to overshadow her inner life. These formative dynamics reveal how early familial interactions operate as enduring structures of trauma that inform adult behaviour, as reflected in the following quotation.

“Rumah adalah kenang-kenang itu sendiri baik sebagai isi ataupun tempat mereka akan labrak aku. Mereka akan sindir aku. Bapak akan tempeleng aku entah beberapa kali dan ibu memandang aku tanpa ada kesan terbaca pada wajahnya” (hlm. 98).

"The house is a memento in itself either as a content or a place where they will scold me. They will mock me. My father will slap me a few times and my mother will look at me without any impression on her face" (p. 98).

Expressions such as *labrak* (scold), *sindir* (sarcasm), and *tempeleng* (slap) reveal that Midah's home functioned not as a sanctuary but as a site of verbal and physical threat. The mother's indifference, marked by her lack of emotional response, further underscores the absence of protection within the family. This convergence of violence and neglect reinforced Midah's fear and insecurity, embedding childhood memories that persisted into adulthood. Interpreted through Karen Horney's framework, such experiences constitute the foundation of basic anxiety—an enduring sense of insecurity arising from environments devoid of affection and protection. Over time, this anxiety crystallized into neurotic tendencies, such as excessive fear, conflict avoidance, and a need to remain accepted by others, manifested in Midah's silence, obedience, and inability to assert her pursuit of happiness.

3.3.4. *From Childhood Trauma to Neurotic Strategies: Midah's Character in the Perspective of Karen Horney*

Karen Horney identifies three primary strategies through which neurotic needs are expressed: *moving toward others*, *moving away from others*, and *moving against others*. These strategies function as adaptive responses to basic anxiety, compensating for the absence of security and affection in early relationships. In Midah's case, each of these patterns might emerge as a continuation of her childhood trauma, shaping her relational orientation and adult behaviour. The following discussion will examine how each of these strategies—toward, away, against—manifests in Midah's characterization.

The strategy of *moving toward others* is evident in Midah's persistent pursuit of acceptance and affection, particularly from her parents, despite the painful treatment she endures. Her tendency to remain obedient and avoid direct resistance reflects a deep-seated need to secure approval and maintain belonging. This behavioral orientation illustrates how basic anxiety translates into compliance and submission, as captured in the following quotation.

"Engkau ada di bawah atap rumahmu sendiri."

"Midah menghampiri mereka dengan tiada berani memandang wajah mereka." (hlm.103)

"You are under the roof of your own house."

"Midah approached them without daring to look at their faces." (p.103)

The attitude of 'not daring to look' reflects both fear and the underlying need for acceptance. Despite experiencing profound emotional distress, Midah suppresses her feelings and continues to return home, even after enduring unfair treatment and trauma, particularly from her father. Her inability to confront or resist directly, coupled with her desire to remain within the familial sphere, illustrates her dependence on recognition and belonging. This behavioural pattern exemplifies the strategy of *moving toward others*, wherein the pursuit of protection and validation is prioritized, even at the expense of personal well-being.

Conversely, Midah also demonstrates the strategy of *moving away from others* through her tendency to withdraw when confronted with pressure. Rather than articulating her emotions openly, she chooses avoidance and internalization, harbouring distress in silence. This withdrawal reflects a defensive mechanism aimed at reducing conflict and preserving fragile security, thereby exemplifying Horney's notion of detachment as a neurotic response to unresolved anxiety. In contrast to her earlier compliance, this avoidance highlights the interplay of different strategies—oscillating between seeking acceptance and retreating into isolation—as part of her broader neurotic pattern.

"Beberapa hari itu ia mengurung diri di dalam kamarnya. Ia malu pada emaknya, ia malu pada tetangganya... dan juga ia takut pada bapaknya." (hlm. 10)

"Those days she shut herself up in her room. She was ashamed of her mother, she was ashamed of her neighbors... and she was afraid of her father." (p. 10)

Midah's confinement reflects a conscious effort to distance herself emotionally and socially as a means of self-protection. Feelings of embarrassment and fear lead her to embrace isolation, underscoring her reliance on withdrawal as a strategy to avoid conflict and external pressure. This pattern of retreat exemplifies Horney's conception on *moving away from others* as a defensive mechanism against unresolved insecurity. Having examined this tendency toward detachment, the following discussion will turn to the third strategy *moving against others* which reveals a contrasting mode of response to the same underlying anxiety.

In contrast to the preceding strategies, Karen Horney's concept of moving against others—defined by hostility, exploitation, and domination—does not manifest strongly in Midah's characterization. Her decision to leave home, for instance, is expressed in a calm and respectful tone toward her parents, as described in the following quotation.

"Biarlah aku pergi sekarang, Ibu. Sampaikan kepada Bapak bahwa bukan maksudku melukai hatinya." (hlm. 112)

"Let me go now, Mother. Tell Father that I did not mean to hurt his heart." (p. 112)

This response demonstrates a refusal that remains considerate of other's feelings rather than an impulse to confront or dominate. Such evidence indicates that Midah's personality is more decisively shaped by the strategies of *moving toward others* and *moving away from others*, while the antagonistic posture associated with *moving against others* appears only marginally. Taken together, the analysis of these three strategies underscores how Midah's psychological orientation is primarily defined by compliance and withdrawal—patterns rooted in her childhood trauma—which continue to structure her adult relational behaviour and reinforce the persistence of basic anxiety.

3.2.5 Adaptive Shifts in Neurotic Strategies

Within Karen Horney's theoretical framework, the rigid and exclusive reliance on a single neurotic strategy signals psychological dysfunction, whereas the capacity to shift flexibly among moving toward, moving away from, and moving against others according to situational demands reflects a healthier mode of adaptation. From this perspective, Midah's employment of multiple strategies should not be interpreted merely as imbalance or failure of adjustment, but rather as an adaptive response to pressures of varying sources and intensities. Her coping patterns are not fixed: in certain contexts she demonstrates obedience, in others she withdraws, and at particular moments she articulates subtle forms of refusal. This dynamic shifting underscores her attempt to negotiate anxiety through situationally responsive behaviours, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

"Bahwa tidak sepatutnya aku merusakkan nama baik orangtuaku sendiri" (hlm. 107)

"That I ought not to have defamed my own parents" (p. 107)

"Aku tidak keberatan apabila tak mau mengakui anakmu sendiri... baiklah semua ini aku ambil untuk diriku sendiri" (hlm. 94)

"I don't mind if you don't want to admit your own son... well I take all these for myself" (p. 94)

These quotations reveal Midah's persistent concern for preserving her parent's reputation, even at the expense of her own suffering. This orientation reflects the strategy of moving toward others, characterized by the efforts to please and maintain acceptance. At the same time, her tendency to remain silent and refrain from expressing dissent illustrates the strategy of moving away from others, a withdrawal aimed at avoiding conflict. Midah's resignation and self-blame, even in situations where she is the victim, further demonstrate her inclination to internalize distress and endure it alone. These patterns suggest that her strategies are not balanced; rather, she suppresses her feelings excessively. In line with Karen Horney's views, individuals who experience anxiety from childhood often struggle to develop healthy mechanisms for coping with pressure. Thus, the multiplicity of strategies evident in Midah's behaviour is best understood not as a sign of psychological dysfunction, but as an incomplete attempt at integration—an adaptive process shaped by the layered pressures she has endured from childhood into adulthood.

3.2.6. Refleksi Akhir: Apakah Midah Pulih?

After enduring prolonged stress and deep psychological wounds since childhood, Midah ultimately chooses to chart her own course in life. She leaves her parental home, rejects an unwanted marriage, and attempts to establish independence. Yet the statement—"Selain bapak dan ibu dan dirinya, tak ada seorang pun di dunia pernah mencoba mengetahui apa sesungguhnya yang terjadi dan telah terjadi dalam dirinya/ Apart from her father and mother and herself, no one in the world has ever tried to know what really happened and has happened in her." (p.115)—reveals that she continue to carry profound pain.

Her inner burden remains unacknowledged, with no one truly listening to or understanding her feelings. Within Karen Horney's framework, recovery from fear and anxiety requires the presence of love and supportive relationships. Because Midah lacks such external affirmation, her apparent freedom does not translate into inner tranquillity. Thus, while she outwardly asserts autonomy, her psychological state reflects unresolved anxiety, underscoring that her journey toward recovery remains incomplete

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis carried out, the psychological conflict of the protagonist Midah in the novel *Midah, Si Manis Bergigi Emas* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer arises due to an authoritarian relationship with her father. Harsh parenting and lack of affection since childhood caused basic anxiety in the protagonist. This anxiety then affects the way Midah copes with the pressures of life as an adult, which is reflected in neurotic strategies in the form of a tendency to submit, withdraw, and occasionally show passive resistance.

Midah has not fully recovered from her childhood inner wounds due to the lack of adequate emotional support from her surrounding environment. In Karen Horney's perspective, this condition shows that the inner conflict experienced by Midah is a form of self-defense against the environment that she considers unsafe. The results of this study show a relationship between basic anxiety, neurotic strategies, and the inner conflicts of the main character. Thus, these findings confirm the importance of the role of the family environment in shaping the psychological state of the individual.

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