



The Superiority of the Main Character in Yusuf Idris's Short Story Thabliyyah Minas-Samā'

Vina Nadhifa¹, Fajriaty Jamil², Yeni Ratna Yuningsih³

¹²³Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, Indonesia

E-mail: vinanadhifa24@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id¹, fajriatyjamil24@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id²,
yeniratnayuningsih@uinjkt.ac.id³

Submission: 23-07-2026	Revised: 20-08-2026	Accepted: 06-09-2026	Published: 28-09-2026
------------------------	---------------------	----------------------	-----------------------

Abstract

This study examines the causal relationship between inferiority and superiority in the character of Sheikh Ali in Yusuf Idris's short story Thabliyyah Minas-Samā' through Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with close reading techniques, we investigate how feelings of inferiority trigger superior behavior as compensation. The findings reveal three primary sources of Sheikh Ali's inferiority: poverty and unemployment, the loss of religious authority as an imam, and failure to complete education at al-Azhar. These conditions drive compensatory mechanisms manifested in the strategic use of religious rhetoric to counter economic powerlessness, the preservation of spiritual authority after losing his formal post, and the deployment of religious identity to mask academic failure. The study concludes that his superiority does not resolve his underlying inferiority but functions as a psychological defense to maintain self-worth during the collapse of social recognition. Theoretically, this study offers a novel perspective in modern Arabic literary studies by shifting the paradigm from superficial clinical labeling of character abnormality toward an emancipatory understanding of how marginalized figures employ psychological defense mechanisms against systemic social alienation.

Keywords: Inferiority, Short Story, Superiority

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan kausal antara inferioritas dan superioritas tokoh Syekh Ali dalam cerpen Thabliyyah Minas-Samā' karya Yusuf Idris melalui perspektif Psikologi Individual Alfred Adler. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dan teknik pembacaan mendalam (*close reading*), penelitian ini berupaya mengungkap proses psikologis bagaimana perasaan inferior memicu perilaku superior sebagai bentuk kompensasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga sumber utama inferioritas tokoh: kemiskinan dan pengangguran, hilangnya otoritas religius sebagai imam, serta kegagalan menyelesaikan pendidikan di al-Azhar. Ketiga kondisi tersebut mendorong perilaku kompensasi berupa pemanfaatan retorika keagamaan dalam menghadapi ketidakberdayaan ekonomi, pemertahanan wibawa spiritual setelah kehilangan status imam, dan penggunaan identitas intelektual-keagamaan untuk menutupi kegagalan akademis. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa superioritas Syekh Ali bukan keberhasilan mengatasi kelemahan, melainkan mekanisme kompensasi defensif untuk



mempertahankan harga diri atas runtuhnya rekognisi sosial. Secara teoretis, temuan ini menawarkan kebaruan sekaligus implikasi penting dengan menggeser paradigma kajian sastra Arab modern dari sekadar pelabelan klinis atas abnormalitas kejiwaan menuju pemahaman emansipatif mengenai mekanisme pertahanan psikologis karakter marjinal terhadap tekanan sosial.

Kata kunci: *Cerpen, Inferioritas, Superioritas*

A. INTRODUCTION

Psychological phenomena are among the aspects commonly encountered in everyday life. These phenomena may appear in various forms of deviation, such as psychopathy, sexual deviation, and socially alienated personality, which are often referred to as abnormal personality traits. Such personality characteristics are frequently reflected in characters in literary works.

According to Nurgiyantoro, a character's personality can be portrayed through verbal expressions as well as nonverbal actions or behavior (Nurgiyantoro, 2018, p. 166). Meanwhile, Sariban argues that a character's behavior originates from aspects that are not directly observable and are subsequently manifested through concrete actions or behavior (Sariban, 2009, p. 164). These unobservable aspects may be understood as part of the character's psychological emotions. Therefore, understanding a character's personality requires a psychological approach to explore the emotions and psychological dynamics underlying the character's behavior.

Yusuf Idris's short story entitled *طبلية من السماء* is included in the short-story collection *حادثة شرف*, which was republished by Hindawi in 2017. The story portrays Sheikh Ali as a harsh and quick-tempered man who frequently becomes the object of ridicule among the residents of Munyat al-Nasr. Sheikh Ali, who once served as a mosque imam before falling into poverty and unemployment, became a controversial figure because of his unconventional behavior, including publicly cursing God. He frequently erupts in anger, demands attention, and seeks fulfillment of his needs in unusual ways. The story also highlights the social dynamics of rural society, where mocking Sheikh Ali becomes a form of entertainment, while at the same time the villagers cannot ignore his presence. Through this story, Yusuf Idris depicts the complexity of an individual

struggling to find meaning and maintain self-worth under difficult circumstances, highlighting how feelings of inferiority can lead to compensatory behavior that often challenges social norms.

Based on this description, the main character experiences social alienation associated with his individual psychological disturbance and his attempt to establish religious superiority within society. This religious superiority is used to overcome the inferiority he experiences. As Adler argues, human beings are born physically weak and inferior and therefore require compensation in their striving toward superiority (Feist, 2009, p. 81). Accordingly, this study seeks to examine how the main character's feelings of inferiority emerge and subsequently contribute to the formation of superiority in Yusuf Idris's *Thabliyyah Minas-Samā'*, using Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology, particularly the concept of the superiority complex.

Within literary studies, Adlerian superiority has been examined in some previous studies. In 2017, Romadlon conducted a study entitled "Prinsip Superioritas yang Ditemukan pada Tokoh Utama Watarai Mao dalam Novel *Hidamari No Kanojo* Karya Koshigaya Osamu" (Romadlon, 2017). This was followed by Moge et al. (2021) with their study entitled "Perjuangan Ke Arah Superioritas Tokoh August Dalam Film *Wonder*." More recently, Ariska et al. (2024) conducted a study entitled "Prinsip Individual Alfred Adler Pada Tokoh Dalam Novel *Azzamine* Karya Sophie Aulia: Kajian Psikologi Sastra." However, studies specifically examining Yusuf Idris's *Thabliyyah Minas-Samā'* remain limited. Only two previous studies focusing on this short story were identified. The first is Farhah and Jannah's (2021) study entitled "Gangguan Kepribadian Tokoh Utama Dalam Cerpen *Thabliyyah Minas-Samā'* Karya Yusuf Idris (Kajian Psikologi Sastra)."" Their study examines the forms of personality disorders represented by the main character and identifies the factors contributing to these disorders. Their findings identify seven types of personality disorders in the main character: paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal, histrionic, narcissistic, borderline, and antisocial personality disorders. These personality disorders are attributed to negative past experiences, failures in affiliation systems, stressful life events, family and environmental socioeconomic conditions, and genetic factors (Farhah & Jannah, 2021).

The second study was conducted by Khasanah et al. (2024), entitled “Disfemisme Ungkapan Umpatan pada Terjemahan Arab-Indonesia Cerpen 'Thabliyyah Minas-Samā' Karya Yusuf Idris.” This study focuses on identifying the forms of dysphemism and abusive expressions used by the main character from a linguistic perspective within the context of Arabic-Indonesian translation. The findings demonstrate that the abusive and dysphemistic expressions uttered by the main character function as expressions of intense emotion, outlets for disappointment, and intimidating communicative devices in response to the social situations surrounding them (Khasanah et al., 2024).

Based on the review of these previous studies, existing research on Yusuf Idris's Thabliyyah Minas-Samā' has primarily focused on the taxonomic identification of the main character's psychological or personality disorders and on the linguistic dimensions of his emotional expressions. Consequently, other psychological dynamics underlying the main character's behavior have not been examined in depth. Therefore, rather than merely identifying forms of psychological abnormality or analyzing emotional utterances linguistically, the present study investigates the psychological causal process through which feelings of inferiority actively shape and trigger manifestations of superiority as a form of compensation, viewed through the framework of Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical method. The qualitative descriptive method was selected because the research data are not numerical but consist of linguistic expressions in the form of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. According to Moleong (2017, p. 4), qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior (Moleong, 2017, p. 4). The primary data source is Yusuf Idris's short story Thabliyyah Minas-Samā', accessed through the Hindawi digital platform. The secondary data sources comprise articles, books, and websites discussing Yusuf Idris's Thabliyyah Minas-Samā' and Adlerian psychological studies. www.hindawi.org

Relevant data were collected using reading and note-taking techniques. As Zed explains, reading and note-taking constitute an important part of library research, encompassing the collection of information from written sources, the extraction of relevant information, and its organization into analytical notes (Zed, 2008, p. 17). The reading technique was applied by carefully examining the entire sequence of sentences and paragraphs in Yusuf Idris's *Thabliyyah Minas-Samā'*. This process was conducted repeatedly through close reading and supported by literature relevant to Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology. The note-taking technique was then used to identify, classify, and record textual excerpts that specifically reflect the main character's forms of inferiority and compensatory behaviors that lead to the formation of superiority. The recorded and categorized data were subsequently analyzed descriptively.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Inferiority can be understood as a feeling of inadequacy in which an individual perceives himself as weak, powerless, and unable to overcome adverse circumstances, thereby continually attempting to change his condition for the better by various means (Nurodin, 2019, p. 31). This disturbed feeling causes behavior known as compensation. According to Adler, compensation is an effort or strategy used by an individual to overcome or conceal feelings of inferiority by using various strengths possessed within the self (in Boeree, 2010, p. 144). Individuals who do not develop healthy compensation tend to strive for personal superiority, whereas those with healthy compensation pursue superiority in ways that contribute to others and humanity as a whole (Feist et al., 2017, p. 77). In Yusuf Idris's *Thabliyyah Minas-Samā'*, the main character, Sheikh Ali, is portrayed as quick-tempered. His anger is closely associated with deep feelings of inferiority in his daily life. These feelings of inferiority can be observed in several aspects of his life, as follows:

1. Poverty and Unemployment

Although Sheikh Ali was once a student at al-Azhar, his life deteriorated after he was expelled for arguing with his teacher. He returned to his village and became a mosque imam, but this role also ended after an incident in which he performed the prayer with the wrong number of rak'ahs. The emptiness of his life further undermined his self-confidence. Sheikh Ali rejected work that he considered degrading to his dignity, yet he

remained unable to escape unemployment. The villagers frequently mocked him and exploited his temper for their amusement. They knew that Sheikh Ali was powerless to resist his circumstances.

Poverty had stripped Sheikh Ali of his self-esteem. When hunger overwhelmed him, he did not directly ask others for help; instead, he vented his frustration toward God and his fate. At the height of his anger, he demanded that a table of food descend from heaven. This behavior reflects despair and deep resentment toward a life he considered unjust. Ironically, although the villagers laughed at him, they still provided him with food, revealing a pattern of compromise between pity and fears of his threats. This can be seen in the following quotation:

وانتفض الشيخ علي انتفاضة عظيمة وقال: «هه! ح أعد لغاية عشرة والنبي إن ما بعث لي مائدة لكافر وعامل ما لا يُعمل».

Translation: Sheikh Ali sprang up violently and said, "Hey! I will count to ten, and by the Prophet, if You do not send me a table of food, I will become an unbeliever and do what should not be done."

The quotation shows that poverty has placed Sheikh Ali in a state of powerlessness in meeting his basic needs. When he can no longer endure hunger, he does not directly ask the community for food but demands that God send down a table of food from heaven. The threat expressed in the phrase *لكافر وعامل ما لا يُعمل*, meaning "I will become an unbeliever and do what should not be done," indicates that the pressures of life have developed into anger toward God. This condition reflects negative religious coping, in which life pressures lead an individual to struggle with God, question God's treatment, or interpret hardship through a negative relationship with God (Pargament et al., 2004).

Thus, poverty in this quotation functions not merely as an economic condition but also as a pressure that shapes how Sheikh Ali confronts his life. Meyer and Lobao state that economic hardship is associated with increased stress and depression, while religion can become an important element in the way individuals cope with economic pressure (Meyer & Lobao, 2003). In Sheikh Ali's case, religion appears in a conflictual form: rather than surrendering, he demands that God fulfill his needs and threatens to become an unbeliever if his demand is not met. Therefore, Sheikh Ali's anger can be understood as an outlet for the economic powerlessness that has undermined his self-worth, while also

demonstrating that religion becomes a space through which he confronts the pressures of poverty.

2. Loss of Religious Authority

After being expelled from al-Azhar, Sheikh Ali returned to Munyat al-Nasr and was appointed as a mosque imam. This position gave him religious status and authority and served as a symbol of honor within the village community. However, an error in prayer, when he performed only three rak'ahs, marked the beginning of the collapse of that position. His inability to accept correction from the congregation, to which he responded with curses, eroded their trust in him. Eventually, he relinquished his position as an imam and stopped attending the mosque, a decision that marked the collapse of his religious authority.

Losing his position as an imam meant that Sheikh Ali lost not only social status but also an identity attached to his role as a guardian of religious values. This dealt a major blow to his self-esteem. In an attempt to deal with shame and powerlessness, he completely withdrew from religious practices and turned to habits that contradicted his former role, such as playing cards for gambling. His decision to abandon his religious role reflects not only alienation from society but also alienation from himself. His failure as an imam became rooted in a persistent feeling of inferiority. He attempted to conceal this wound through aggression and anger, yet beneath his harsh behavior was a fragile figure trapped in a sense of lost authority and self-worth. This can be seen in the following quotation:

ونسي ذات يوم وصلى الجمعة ثلاث ركعات، ولمّا حاول المصلّون وراءه تنبيهه لعن آباءهم جميعاً وطلق من يومها الإمامة والجامع،
ولأجل خاطرهم طلق الصلاة، وتعلّم الكوتشينة وظلّ يلعبها حتى باع كلّ ما يملكه،

Translation: One day, he mistakenly performed three rak'ahs in the Friday prayer. When the worshipers behind him tried to correct him, he cursed all their fathers. From that day on, he renounced the imamate and the mosque; because of them, he also abandoned prayer. He learned to play cards and continued playing until he sold everything he owned.

The quotation shows that Sheikh Ali's loss of religious authority began with his inability to accept correction after making an error in prayer. Instead of acknowledging his mistake, he responded to the congregation's warning with anger and curses, then abandoning his position as imam, the mosque, and even prayer itself. The correction from the congregation therefore affected more than a ritual mistake; it also shook his self-

esteem as a figure who had previously been trusted to lead the community's religious life. After losing this role, Sheikh Ali turned to play cards until he sold all his possessions, further demonstrating the deterioration of his life. From an Adlerian perspective, experiences in which an individual feels incapable or placed in an inferior position can generate feelings of inferiority that subsequently prompt particular responses to cope with the situation. This is consistent with Leary et al. (1995), who argued that self-esteem is closely related to social acceptance and rejection; when individuals perceive a decline in social acceptance or evaluation, their self-esteem may also be affected. Therefore, the loss of his position as an imam can be understood as an experience that reinforces Sheikh Ali's inferiority because he loses not only a religious office but also a source of social recognition that had previously supported his self-worth.

3. Educational Failure

Sheikh Ali harbors a deep sense of inferiority as a result of his failure to complete his education at al-Azhar. His expulsion, which began with a conflict with his teacher, damaged his self-esteem and left him without direction in life. He felt judged by an educational system that did not understand him and was forced to return to his village carrying the stigma of failure. This failure became an emotional wound that affected his life, making him quick-tempered and creating an emotional barrier between himself and the community. Education, which should have provided a path toward higher social status, instead became a source of humiliation that made him feel inadequate. This feeling was intensified by the villagers' view of him as a failure. These feelings can be observed in the following quotation:

وكان يقول موجِّهاً كلامه إلى السماء: «إنت عايز مني إيه؟! تقدر تقول لي، إنت عايز مني إيه؟! الأزر، وسببته عشان خاطر شوية المشايخ اللي عاملين أوصيا ع الدِّين،

Translation: He said while directing his words toward the sky, "What do You want from me? Can You tell me what You want from me? I left al-Azhar because some sheikhs acted as though they were the sole guardians of the faith."

The quotation shows that Sheikh Ali does not fully accept his failure at al-Azhar due to his own inability. Although the story previously explained that he was expelled after arguing with his teacher, when recounting the event, Sheikh Ali instead said that he

left al-Azhar because some sheikhs acted as though they were guardians of religion. This attitude shows his effort to shift the cause of failure toward factors outside himself so that his self-esteem can be preserved. From Adler's perspective, Sheikh Ali's attitude represents a response to feelings of inferiority arising from educational failure. By blaming the attitudes of the sheikhs rather than acknowledging his own inability, Sheikh Ali attempts to maintain the view that his failure was not caused by deficient intellectual or religious ability. Thus, his experience at al-Azhar becomes a source of inferiority not only because it ended his education but also because it prompted him to protect his self-esteem from the experience of failure.

Based on these three forms of inferiority, Sheikh Ali's feelings of inadequacy do not arise from a single experience but are formed through an accumulation of failures in several areas of his life. His failure to complete his education at al-Azhar weakens his intellectual and religious identity, the loss of his position as an imam undermines the religious authority he once possessed, and poverty and unemployment further place him in a weak position within society. These three experiences share a common point: the loss of sources of recognition that had previously provided Sheikh Ali with a sense of worth. Therefore, his inferiority concerns not only material circumstances but also questions of identity and self-esteem.

However, these inferior conditions do not lead Sheikh Ali to fully accept himself as a failed and powerless figure. In Adler's Individual Psychology, feelings of inferiority can instead become a driving force that directs an individual from a perceived state of deficiency toward a state considered more complete. This psychological movement is known as striving for superiority. Alba explains that striving for superiority is an effort to overcome feelings of inferiority and constitutes one of the major driving forces in Adler's conception of personality (Alba, 2017, p. 2).

In this sense, superiority does not always refer to a desire to defeat or dominate others; rather, it is an effort toward self-improvement, competence, and mastery over perceived weaknesses. The American Psychological Association also explains that striving for superiority functions as a drive to realize one's potential and achieve self-perfection, rather than merely attaining a higher status than others (American Psychological Association, 2018). Adler believed that every person has a "fictional goal"

that guides their actions. This goal directs the individual's way of life and is aimed at overcoming weakness (in Clark, 1985, p. 35).

In the context of this short story, Sheikh Ali's superiority cannot be separated from the series of inferior experiences he has undergone. His failure to complete his education at al-Azhar, the loss of his position as an imam, and poverty and unemployment gradually weakened his social position. Nevertheless, these weaknesses do not make Sheikh Ali fully accept himself as a failure. Instead, he attempts to preserve his sense of self-worth in several ways, as follows:

Religious Rhetoric as Compensation for Economic Powerlessness

Sheikh Ali's superiority is reflected in his use of religious rhetoric as a means of compensating for his poverty. As explained in the discussion of inferiority, poverty places Sheikh Ali in a condition in which he is unable to meet his own basic needs, even to obtain food. Yet he does not present himself as someone seeking the community's pity. Instead, Sheikh Ali uses religious knowledge and language to shift his position from a person in need to someone who believes he has the right to demand. This tendency to turn to religion when personal control is weakened is consistent with Kay et al., who argued that religious belief can function as a source of compensatory control when personal or external sources of control decline (Kay et al., 2010). In other words, when personal control is threatened, individuals may seek order and control through external or metaphysical systems, including religion. In the short story, this condition appears in the following quotation:

وديني، ماني ساكت إلا أمّا بيعت لي مائدة من السما حالاً! أنا مش أقل من مريم! هي مهما كانت حُرْمة، إنما انا راجل، وهي ماكنتشي فقيرة،

Translation: By religion and all that is sacred, if someone comes to take me away—even if it is Azrael, the Angel of Death—I will strike him with this stick. I will not remain silent until He sends me a table filled with heavenly food right now. I am no less worth Maryam! She may be a woman, but I am a man, and she was not poor.

The quotation shows that Sheikh Ali uses religious narratives to respond to his inability to meet his material needs. The expression مائدة من السما, meaning "a table from heaven," demonstrates how the solution to his material problem is placed within a religious framework, while the mention of مريم (Maryam) serves as a comparative figure

through which he asserts his worthiness to receive divine assistance. Sheikh Ali's condition reflects the concept of religious coping, namely, the use of religious elements in dealing with life pressures. Olson et al. (2012) stated that groups facing socioeconomic limitations develop religious coping strategies that are related to individuals' psychological conditions (Olson et al., 2012). In Sheikh Ali's case, religion is not merely a system of belief but also becomes a religious coping strategy through the language and arguments available to him when confronting material powerlessness.

This religious strategy becomes Sheikh Ali's compensatory mechanism in constructing superiority in his life. Materially, he is in an inferior position because he is poor, hungry, and unable to provide food for himself. Verbally, however, he rejects this position through the expression *مش أقل*, "I am not inferior." The expression shows his attempt to restore his self-esteem within the community through the religious rhetoric he possesses. Kay et al. (2009) emphasize a causal relationship between reduced perceptions of personal control and increased reliance on external systems, including belief in God as a source of control (Kay et al., 2009). Therefore, Sheikh Ali's religious rhetoric functions as a compensatory strategy: when he lacks the material capacity to change his circumstances, he uses religious resources to preserve his self-worth.

Religious Authority as Compensation for the Loss of Imam Status

The loss of his position as an imam is an experience that shapes Sheikh Ali's inferiority because the position had previously provided him with recognition and religious standing within the community. After relinquishing this position, Sheikh Ali no longer possesses formal authority to lead the community's religious life as he did when he was an imam. However, the loss of this office does not eliminate his religious authority. Zulkifli explains that religious authority is not solely related to formal position but also depends on community recognition of figures considered to possess religious knowledge and capacity (Zulkifli, 2013). In Sheikh Ali's case, his background as someone who had studied at al-Azhar, together with his identity and title as "Sheikh," means that his religious speech continues to carry weight within the community. This condition can be seen in the following quotation:

فالكلمات التي يقولها الشيخ علي خطيرة، قد تُغضب الله سبحانه وتعالى وقد تحلُّ ببلدهم من جرّاء ذلك نقمة تأتي على الأخضر واليابس، كان كلام الشيخ علي يهدّد البلدة الأمانة كلّها، وكان لا بد من إسكاته، وعلى هذا بدأ العقلاء يُطلقون من بعيد كلمات طيّبات يرجون فيها من الشيخ علي أن يعود إليه رشده ويسكت

Translation: The words uttered by Sheikh Ali were extremely dangerous; they could provoke the wrath of Almighty God, and because of them, a calamity might descend upon their village and destroy everything, green and dry alike. Sheikh Ali's words threatened the safety of the entire peaceful village, and he had to be silenced.

The quotation shows that the villagers' fear is not merely caused by Sheikh Ali's anger but by their belief that his words could provoke God's wrath. The statement *وكان لا يسكاته*, meaning "he had to be silenced," indicates that the community felt compelled to take action to stop his speech. This response shows that although Sheikh Ali is no longer an imam, he has not entirely lost his religious authority in the eyes of the community. The quotation also shows the villagers becoming increasingly deferential when those regarded as wise do not respond to Sheikh Ali with anger but instead address him with *كلمات طيّبات*, "kind words," in the hope that he will regain his senses and stop. This response reflects a transformation in Sheikh Ali's authority. The community no longer treats him according to his formal office as an imam but according to the religious consequences they associate with his words.

Based on the discussion above, Sheikh Ali's formal office has indeed disappeared, yet the religious identity attached to him continues to give him a particular position within the community's social relations. This is consistent with Bhojani and Clarke's argument that religious authority does not always depend on domination or formal office but may also be formed through community recognition of an individual's religious capacity (Bhojani & Clarke, 2023). Therefore, the persistence of this authority constitutes a form of compensation for Sheikh Ali's inferiority following the loss of his religious status as an imam. Although he does not regain the imam position that had previously served as a source of recognition, he still has another space in which to preserve his self-worth through a religious identity that remains socially significant. His superiority lies not in his possessing formal office or power but in his ability to preserve his position so that he does not completely lose his sense of value after his formal authority collapses.

Religious Knowledge as Compensation for Educational Failure

Failure to complete his education at al-Azhar becomes a source of Sheikh Ali's inferiority. An education that should have provided intellectual and religious recognition instead ends after he becomes involved in a conflict with his teacher and is expelled from al-Azhar. Academic failure can be associated with self-worth, particularly when academic ability constitutes an important part of an individual's self-evaluation (Park et al., 2007). This can be seen in Sheikh Ali, who does not frame his failure at al-Azhar as a consequence of his own inability but rather as a decision to leave the institution because of conflict with the sheikhs. This attitude is evident in the following quotation:

وكان يقول موجِّهاً كلامه إلى السماء: «إنت عابز مني إيه؟! تقدر تقول لي، إنت عابز مني إيه؟! الأزهر، وسببته عشان خاطر شوية المشايخ اللي عاملين أوصيا ع الدِّين،

Translation: Sheikh Ali said while directing his words toward the sky, "What do You want from me?! Can You tell me what You want from me?! Al-Azhar—I left it because of some sheikhs who acted as though they were the guardians of religion."

The quotation shows that Sheikh Ali does not view his failure at al-Azhar as evidence that he lacks religious ability. Earlier, the story states that he was expelled from al-Azhar after arguing with his teacher; however, when recounting the event, Sheikh Ali says that he himself chose to leave al-Azhar. He also attributes his departure to the attitude of the sheikhs, whom he believes acted as though they were guardians of religion. In this way, Sheikh Ali locates the problem not in his own ability but in the people with whom he was in conflict. This attitude reflects an effort to preserve a positive view of himself after experiencing failure. This condition is consistent with Zuckerman's argument that individuals may explain failure in ways that help protect their self-esteem from negative judgments of personal ability (Zuckerman, 1979).

Therefore, this attitude can be understood as a form of compensation for inferiority arising from educational failure. Sheikh Ali does not succeed in completing his education at al-Azhar, yet he also refuses to accept this failure as a sign that he is intellectually or religiously inferior. This is reinforced by the fact that after returning to Munyat al-Nasr, he still serves as a preacher and imam. Thus, the religious knowledge and identity acquired during his education remain important parts of himself. Through them, Sheikh Ali preserves his sense of worth after losing the achievement associated with

formal education. Accordingly, intellectual-religious superiority can be understood as Sheikh Ali's form of compensation for the feelings of inferiority produced by his educational failure.

D. CONCLUSION

Through a literary-psychological reading, this study concludes that the religious superiority displayed by Sheikh Ali in Yusuf Idris's short story *Thabliyyah Minas-Samā'* is not a sign of overcoming his hardships, but rather a desperate attempt to mask a deep sense of inferiority. As his social status, livelihood, and education unraveled, Sheikh Ali turned to the only asset he had left—his religious identity—to preserve his dignity in a community that ridiculed him. This clearly illustrates Adlerian dynamics in practice: claims of superiority emerge precisely from unresolved feelings of inferiority.

These findings offer a fresh perspective on Idris's characters. Whereas figures like Sheikh Ali have often been viewed simply as mentally disturbed or prone to abusive language, this study shows that such behavior is a direct reaction to crushing poverty and social marginalization. By tracing the causal link from inferiority to compensation and superiority, this approach provides a more nuanced understanding of the inner struggles experienced by lower-class individuals in modern Arabic fiction.

That said, this study is limited to a single character in one short story. Future research could broaden this scope by examining other works by Yusuf Idris or comparing them with stories by contemporary Egyptian writers, offering a fuller picture of the psychological dynamics among marginalized communities of that era.

REFERENCES

- Alba, B. (2017). Striving for Superiority. In V. Zeigler-Hill & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences* (pp. 1–4). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_1428-1
- American Psychological Association. (2018). Striving for superiority. <https://dictionary.apa.org/striving-for-superiority>. Accessed September 22, 2026
- Ariska, R., Widayati, D., & Riyanto, B. (2024). Prinsip Individual Alfred Adler Pada Tokoh dalam Novel Azzamine Karya Sophie Aulia: Kajian Psikologi Sastra. *Innovative: Journal Of Social Science Research*, 4(5), 3516–3528.
- Bhojani, A.-R., & Clarke, M. (2023). Religious Authority beyond Domination and Discipline: Epistemic Authority and Its Vernacular Uses in the Shi'i Diaspora. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 65(2), 272–295. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417522000470>
- Boeree, C. G. (2010). Personality theories: Melacak kepribadian anda bersama psikolog dunia. *Jogjakarta: Prismsophie*.
- Clark, P. A. (1985). Individual Education: Application of Adler's Personality Theory. *The Clearing House*, 59(1), 35–38.
- Farhah, E., & Jannah, A. W. (2021). Gangguan Kepribadian Tokoh Utama dalam Cerpen Thabliyyah Minas-Samā' Karya Yusuf Idris: (Kajian Psikologi Sastra). *Al-Fathin: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab*, 4(02), 157–170.
- Feist, J. (2009). Freud: Psikoanalisis dalam teori kepribadian: Theories of personality. *Jakarta: Salemba Medika*.
- Feist, J., Feist, G. J., & Roberts, T. A. (2017). Teori kepribadian edisi kedelapan. *Jakarta: Salemba Humanika*.
- Kay, A. C., Gaucher, D., McGregor, I., & Nash, K. (2010). Religious belief as compensatory control. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 14(1), 37–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868309353750>
- Kay, A. C., Whitson, J. A., Gaucher, D., & Galinsky, A. D. (2009). Compensatory Control: Achieving Order Through the Mind, Our Institutions, and the Heavens. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 18(5), 264–268, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8721.2009.01649.x.
- Khasanah, U., Zawawi, M., & Zarnubi, M. (2024). Disfemisme Ungkapan Umpatan pada Terjemahan Arab-Indonesia Cerpen “طبلية من السماء” Karya Yusuf Idris. *Mantiq Tayr: Journal of Arabic Language*, 4(2), 740–756.

- Leary, M. R., Tambor, E. S., Terdal, S. K., & Downs, D. L. (1995). Self-esteem as an interpersonal monitor: The sociometer hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68(3), 518–530. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.68.3.518>
- Meyer, K., & Lobao, L. (2003). Economic hardship, religion and mental health during the midwestern farm crisis. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19(2), 139–155. doi: 10.1016/S0743-0167(02)00069-4
- Mogea, T. S. D., Sigarlaki, S. J., & Manus, J. A. (2021). Perjuangan Ke Arah Superioritas Tokoh August Dalam Film Wonder. *Jurnal Elektronik Fakultas Sastra Universitas Sam Ratulangi*, 22.
- Moleong, L. J. (2017). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif/Lexy J. Moleong*.
- Nurdiyantoro, B. (2018). *Teori pengkajian fiksi*. UGM press.
- Nurodin. (2019). *Teori Psikologi Kepribadian (Sebuah Pandangan Tentang Hakikat Manusia)*. PT. Refika Aditama.
- Olson, M. M., Trevino, D. B., Geske, J. A., & Vanderpool, H. (2012). Religious Coping and Mental Health Outcomes: An Exploratory Study of Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Patients. *EXPLORE*, 8(3), 172–176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2012.02.005>
- Pargament, K. I., Koenig, H. G., Tarakeshwar, N., & Hahn, J. (2004). Religious Coping Methods as Predictors of Psychological, Physical and Spiritual Outcomes among Medically Ill Elderly Patients: A Two-year Longitudinal Study. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 9(6), 713–730. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105304045366>
- Park, L. E., Crocker, J., & Kiefer, A. K. (2007). Contingencies of self-worth, academic failure, and goal pursuit. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 33(11), 1503–1517. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167207305538>
- ROMADLON, E. R. (2017). PRINSIP SUPERIORITAS YANG TERDAPAT PADA TOKOH UTAMA WATARAI MAO????? DALAM NOVEL HIDAMARI NO KANOJO KARYA KOSHIGAYA OSAMU????? *Hikari*, 6(1).
- Sariban. (2009). *Teori dan Penerapan Penelitian Sastra*. Lentera Cedekia.
- Zed, M. (2008). *Metode penelitian kepustakaan*. Yayasan Pustaka Obor, Indonesia.
- Zuckerman, M. (1979). Attribution of success and failure revisited: The motivational bias is alive and well in attribution theory. *Journal of Personality*, 47(2), 245–287. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1979.tb00202.x>
- Zulkifli, Z. (2013). The Ulama in Indonesia: Between Religious Authority and Symbolic Power. *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman*, 37(1). <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v37i1.79>