

AN ANALYSIS OF DEFENSE MECHANISMS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN DAVE PELZER'S *A CHILD CALLED 'IT'*

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Abstrak - Skripsi ini membahas tentang mekanisme pertahanan diri tokoh utama (David) yang ada di dalam novel *A Child Called 'It'* karya Dave Pelzer. Tujuan dari skripsi ini yaitu untuk mengetahui struktur kepribadian *id*, *ego* dan *superego*, macam-macam mekanisme pertahanan dan faktor pendorong tumbuhnya mekanisme pertahanan diri yang digunakan oleh David yang ada di dalam novel tersebut. Dalam proses analisis, penulis memanfaatkan metode kepustakaan dan pendekatan psikologi. Teori yang digunakan dalam analisis adalah teori mekanisme pertahanan diri yang dikemukakan pertama kali oleh Freud, teori kepribadian *id*, *ego*, dan *superego*, dan teori stress dan trauma.

Dalam menganalisis struktur kepribadian: *id*, *ego*, dan *superego*, diketahui bahwa hal-hal yang diinginkan oleh *id* adalah makanan, pakaian, dan rumah. Dari segi *superego*, diketahui bahwa David memiliki aturan-aturan yang seharusnya dan tidak seharusnya dia lakukan, seperti harus mematuhi orangtua, harus saling menyayangi, harus sabar, tidak boleh melawan apa yang diperintahkan orang tua, tidak boleh mencuri, dan tidak boleh berkelahi. Peraturan-peraturan seperti inilah yang menjadi dasar yang digunakan oleh David dalam menjalani kehidupannya dan juga membuat *ego*-nya mengalami tekanan dalam memutuskan apa yang seharusnya dia lakukan. Selain itu, hasil analisis dari skripsi ini menunjukkan bahwa sang tokoh utama, David, menggunakan beberapa mekanisme pertahanan diri seperti penekanan, pengganti, pemindahan, reaksi formasi, kemunduran, dan rasionalisasi. Penggunaan mekanisme pertahanan diri ini dipicu atau dipengaruhi oleh kondisi psikologis tokoh utama, seperti stress dan trauma.

Kata Kunci: *id*, *ego*, *superego*, stress, trauma, penekanan, pengganti, pemindahan, reaksi formasi, kemunduran, dan rasionalisasi.

INTRODUCTION

The writer chooses this Dave Pelzer's memoir as her object of analysis. The writer chooses the book because the content of the memoir is very sad and pitiful yet it is intriguing and inspiring. The main character of this memoir is a weak, lone, and shy boy, yet he can survive

against hardness with his defense mechanism as his self-protection for years. While pitying him, the writer also feels amazed of him. He faces many conflicts, trauma, and stressor in his life. Many people leave him and judge him as a bad boy without knowing what he faces and what he has been through. The most

important is that the story of the book (the main character) has problems that can be analyzed with psychological approach.

There are so many theories in psychology, but the writer will use theory of defense mechanism, such as suppression, substitution, regression, reaction formation, displacement, and rationalization. By applying this defense mechanism theory, the writer will use it to explain what kinds of defenses that the main character uses in order to survive from his ordeal and what reason that makes him use it.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theory used here is theory of defense mechanism: suppression, substitution, displacement, reaction formation, regression, and rationalization.

- Substitution is one of defense mechanism where an unacceptable, unattainable, or frightening thought or thing is replaced by something that is more acceptable and available (Strickland, 2001: 526).
- Denial is method of defense by ignoring the reality in order to protect the self from threatening impulses or events that can cause psychological and emotional problems (Freud on Strickland, 2001: 169).

- Displacement is defense mechanism that is used by directing a threatening or dangerous impulse toward other powerless people (Freud on Feist, 2008: 36).
- Reaction formation is method of defense by conducting the opposite action (Freud on Feist, 2008: 35).
- Regression is method of defense that works by returning to the previous or primitive development (Freud in Feist, 2008: 36).
- Rationalization is one of defense mechanisms that is used by a person by giving a plausible reason to excuse his or her action (Freud Schultz, 2009: 62).

ANALYSIS

4.2.1.1 David's *Id*

The *id* is explained as an irrational component of mind and it contains instincts. In David, the things that are included in the *id* are food, shelter, anger, and passion or aggression.

4.2.1.2 David's *Ego*

David's *ego* appears in the story can be seen from the love, lie, and restrain in him.

4.2.1.3 David's *Superego* between the should and should not

4.2.1.3.1 Should

In his life, David is taught about what rules that are approved in his surrounding. These 'should' rule are:

- should respect parents
- should obey mother
- should become a good boy and love everybody: brothers, friends, and neighbors
- should finish the duties first, should do everything as what the mother says, and should be silent. It is the things that David must follows in his life.

4.2.1.3.1 Should not

The should not list that appears in David's *superego* can be understood from his experience in the house. It can be concluded that David is taught not to do something that his mother does not permit. Therefore, in David's life, there are so many should not be done list exist. Those are should not watch television, should not eat without permission, should not show emotion

4.2.2 David's Defense Mechanisms Drive in A Child Called 'It'

4.2.2.1 David's Stress for the Unwanted Life Changes

David's stress is reflected in David's action. He looks disturbed when he is going home and facing his mother. His thought is only filled with hope to be kept away from his mother. David's tension is always rising when he thinks about his mother. He cannot do whatever he wants because it is against Mrs. Pelzer. Because of the stress, David cannot think about the way out because his mind is possessed with negative thought about what will happen to him.

4.2.2.2 David's Traumatic Experiences from a Horrible Abuse

The proof of trauma can be found in many narrations of the book. This trauma can be seen from his reaction when his teacher, Mr. Hansen faces him. It shows how trauma reflection appears in David's action. David looks calm and quite. However, when Mr. Hansen makes David looks into his eyes, David starts to feel scared. It is obvious that David does not want to look into the principal's eyes. Sentence "I'm

afraid to look into his eyes, which is mostly a habit from trying to deal with my mother” is a definite proof of the fears that David has toward his mother. From this sentence, David becomes remembering his past when his mother asked him to look into her eyes.

4.2.3 David’s Defense Mechanisms in A Child Called ‘It’

David uses his own power for protection. Methods of defense he uses and appear in this analysis are suppression, regression, substitution, reaction formation, displacement, and rationalization.

4.2.3.1 David’s Suppression

4.2.3.1.1 David’s Suppression of Hunger

In the story, hunger is an uncomfortable condition David feels everyday. His life is not surrounded by food, only slavery. For him, food is one of the things that David wants. It is must and cannot be skipped. However, food is such a hard, scarce, and expensive material for him. Meanwhile, it is what he really needs. If it is not fulfilled, he will be sick and die. Therefore, to help his hunger, he must get the food. The

only method how he can resolve his hunger is with suppression.

I act timid, nodding to her threats. “Please,” I say to myself, “just let me eat. Hit me again, but I have to have food.” Another blow pushed my head against the tile counter top. I let the tears of mock defeat stream down my face as she storms out of the kitchen, seemingly satisfied with herself. After I count her steps, making sure she’s gone, I breathe a sigh of relief. The act worked. Mother can beat me all she wants, but I haven’t let her take away my will to somehow survive (Pelzer, 1995: 4).

Finally, he gets the food because he has finished the chores and gotten permission, “... *For my reward I receive breakfast – leftovers from one of my brothers’ cereal bowls*”.

4.2.3.1.2 David’s Suppression of Anger

David has been through a miserable life, an abuse from the parent and a bullying from friends. Therefore, it is normal if he saves a lot of anger inside him. David looks holding out his anger. His school friends that he is ignored always disrupt his day by mocking and bullying him. David ignores them because of his *superego* reminds him

that fight is forbidden. It is should not be done. He must avoid the fighting. Because of the influence of this *superego*, David's *ego* is also trying to follow up his morality value. Therefore, the safest way is by holding or suppressing the anger by not returning their mocking. He only stare or shows his angry eyes toward his friend who is seen by one of the gang. This way is working because he can get his peace and he also avoids the punishment if he is truly listen to his instinct to fight back.

4.2.3.1.3 David's Suppression of Pain

For David, emotion such as love, hatred, and disappointment is forbidden to express. It must be kept and locked. It is what he must do if he wants to feel safe in the house. He must not show his feeling in his eyes especially in front of his mother. Therefore, when he feels something, he holds his emotions by acting as if he feels nothing.

The suppression is shown by his statement, "I wanted to scream, but I refused to give Mother the pleasure of hearing me cry".

This suppression and restrain can be seen in the title of the book, *A Child Called 'It'*. The word 'It' represents of the *id* that David tries to suppress. Therefore, it can be said that through the title of the book, David expresses that he calls or summons his *id* in the surface, so he can has a freedom to do whatever he wants to do and to have whatever he desire. In other words, with this title, David wants to break the key that locks his *id*.

4.2.3.2 David's Substitution

4.2.3.2.1 David's Substitution of Mother

David always dream of his mother. He loves her. He knows that loving his mother is forbidden. It is wrong thing to do in his family. He starts to feel the emptiness because of the absence of his mother in his life. To avoid the pain, David starts to substitute his mother with somebody else. By approaching the teacher, David begins to fill the empty spot of his mother.

4.2.3.2.2 David's Substitution of Aggression

David starts to release this aggression in a something that is more acceptable. That is by playing.

School was a haven for me. I was thrilled to be away from Mother. At recess I was a wild man. I blitzed through the barkcovered playground, Looking for new, adventurous things to do. I made friends easily and felt so happy to be at school (Pelzer, 1995: 36).

It is seen in the quotation above how wild David is as a boy. It is because of the influence of his *id* that demands the release of the aggression inside of him. He runs like a boy who does not have a problem.

David describes that he is allowed to play in the outside with the boys like what he has hoped. However, he knows that his mother is only pretending, so she can get an excuse to torture him. Because he does not want to get a trouble by playing in the outside, he substitutes it by playing with his toy alone in his room.

4.2.3.3 David's Displacement

4.2.3.3.1 David's Displacement of Anger

David uses displacement in only several occasions. He cannot show his anger to the person he hate most openly. David lessens the suppressed anger by displacing it his friends by screaming and swearing to the students he meets in the hallway. After wiping out all of his anger, there is no longer burden inside him. David feels little calmer, "I collapsed on the floor praying for a miracle". He is also no longer stuck in the despair. He can continue his life again waiting for new hope.

4.2.3.3.2 David's Displacement of Disappointment

David displaces his feeling toward his rag clothes by rubbing the clothes roughly.

After finishing my chores that day, I rushed downstairs. I had been ordered to wash my ragged clothes and another heap of smelly rags. But that day, Father's leaving had left me so sad that I buried myself in the pile of rags and cried. I cried for him to come back and take me away. After a few minutes of self-comfort, I settled down and began scrubbing my "Swiss cheese" clothes. I scrubbed until my knuckles bled. I no longer cared about my existence. Mother's house had become

unbearable. I wished I could somehow manage to escape the place I now called the “Madhouse” (Pelzer, 1995: 103).

David cannot show directly and freely his own feeling. The only way to avoid the frustration toward his father because he has failed him again is by substituting his father with the rag “Swish-cheese” cloth. By displacing his disappointment to a rag clothe, he is no longer filled with frustration, so he can make a new hope to come out from the hell.

4.2.3.4 David’s Reaction Formation from A Horrible Intention

In protecting himself, David also uses reaction formation as one of his method. It is the reverse action of the actual feeling. David uses reaction formation by staying in the house with his mother and taking care for her fever when he actually wishes her to die and leaves the house. There are two opposite reactions as described above: wishing for death and nursing for the recovery. Death and recovery are clearly a reversion. David’s *ego* understands David so well.

4.2.3.5 David’s Regression

4.2.3.5.1 David’s Regression from Trouble by Showing His Childish Side

David’s regression is seen from his childish action when he faces an unwanted situation before him. This regression is shown by his whimper, his mumbling, his shaking head, his whine, and his scream. David is seen doing something he never does before. He never breaks down because he is always in control. Therefore, mumbling, screaming, and whining, are something he rarely does.

4.2.3.5.2 David’s Regression by Acting like An Animal

Next, the regression method is also seen in his behavior when his father is seen in house. This regression is shown by imprinting his father’s action by following him everywhere like an animal, a duckling or puppy.

4.2.3.5 David’s Regression by Fantasizing His Past

Next regression is can be seen from his reaction when he faces something he does not like. David always hopes that his happy family

will come back for him. He will get everything like in his previous past. Therefore, when he feels alone, he starts to fantasize something in his past.

4.2.3.6 David's Rationalization

4.2.3.6.1 David's Rationalization from Stealing

When food becomes rare and limited, the hunger he feels is becoming dangerous. His sanity starts to disappear. He cannot think another way to help him suppressing his hunger. Therefore, the only method how he can get the food for his empty stomach is by stealing. David rationalizes his plan by saying that he just wants to get the food to fulfill his hunger. He is more afraid to die if he does not eat soon than being punished.

4.2.3.6.2 David's Rationalization from Hatred

David never says "I hate" to people who never does something bad to him. It is a bad example and of course contradicted with his *superego* that teaches him to respect and spread love to other people. David is a nice boy. He will never hurt someone else intentionally. He

is always taught to respect and love everyone else. Even to his mother who does terrible things to him, he never says defiantly that he hates her. To justify his anger and hatred toward baby Kevin he rationalize his action, remarked by, "I knew I would never live a life like my brothers. Worst of all, I knew that it was only a matter of time until Kevin would hate me, just like the others did". With saying hate him before he does is the excuse David says to let him live in hatred. At least by saying this reason, David will not feel guilty when he faces his little brother.

4.2.3.6.3 David's Rationalization of Freedom

David uses rationalization to reject the freedom that he thinks is deceitful by saying that he is better go to jail than be in the same place with his mother.

CONCLUSION

Based on the explanations in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that David has many wishes in his life such as food, happy family, freedom, and emotion. These are all the greed he really needs most. However, David is also living

in a world full of rules: no television, no food, no leisure, no freedom, only obedience toward what his mother orders him to. These rules become the concept David drives his life. He internalizes the rules set for him and it becomes understanding for his *superego*. The needs and rules that are too contradictive force the *ego* to work carefully in his action in everyday life. David starts to use types of defense mechanism to protect himself from danger and pain, such as suppression, substitution, displacement, reaction formation, regression, and rationalization. David uses suppression to hold his hunger, his leisure to play, his pain, and his love. He uses this suppression by holding on what he feels inside him, so his mother cannot see what he wants. David also uses substitution to replace his mother and aggression. He cannot get his mother's love, David begins to substitute his mother with the new teacher in his school. He also substitutes his aggression where he desires to play in the outside with the inside playground.

David employs displacement to avoid him confronting his mother, father, brothers, and friends. He displaces his anger and disappointment by substituting them with other objects such as bathroom, door, tiles, and rag Swish-cheesecloth. The form of displacement can be seen from his action when he slams, pounds, and screams to those objects. He also uses reaction formation to avoid his mother. He shows different action by nursing his mother when he actually wants her to die. David does regression when he faces troubles in his life. This action can be seen by his whimper, his mumbling, his shaking head, his whine, and his scream when he begs Mr. Hansen and the policeman to not phone his mother. This regression can also be seen by his action around his father. He looks like a duckling and a puppy when his father around in order to avoid Mrs. Pelzer because she is a threat for him. He is also doing a regression act by fantasizing his previous happy life in his childhood when he faces something he does not like. The last is rationalization.

David uses rationalization to justify unwanted things such as stealing, hatred, and freedom. By employing defense mechanisms, David can distort the unwanted reality, lessen the anxieties and distress, adapt to his new life, get through the stress and trauma happen to him, and put miracles and hope in his dark life.

There are two reasons why David builds defense mechanism, that are stress and trauma. David becomes stressful because he must adapt to a new life change happens in his family. He starts to lose his family, his freedom, and his happiness. The life changes befall in Pelzer family makes David experience trauma. He faces difficulties to adjust his new life because he fears the punishment and neglect that are given by his mother. He starts to live alone without somebody around to help and protect him.

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