

The Inner Conflict of the Main Character in the Novel “Tatkala Leukemia Meretas Cinta” by Siti Fadilah Supari

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the personality structure and defense mechanisms of the main character in the novel *Tatkala Leukemia Meretas Cinta* using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The novel was chosen because it vividly portrays psychological conflicts experienced by the main character when faced with a profoundly painful reality. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method with a content analysis approach. The data consist of narrative and dialogue excerpts that reflect the psychological aspects of the main character. Data collection was conducted through library research by reading and analyzing the novel in depth. The findings were then interpreted using Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego, as well as defense mechanism theory. The results show that the main character's personality structure consists of the id, dominated by emotional impulses such as anxiety, fear, and the need for self-preservation; the ego, which mediates rational decision-making; and the superego, which guides moral and spiritual values. The character employs six defense mechanisms repression, sublimation, rationalization, displacement, reaction formation, and regression to cope with psychological distress arising from life's hardships. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of psychological representation in Indonesian literature and serves as a reference for future studies exploring the intersection between literature and psychology, particularly in examining how individuals confront trauma through psychological defense mechanisms.

Keywords: Main Character, Novel, Psychological Conflict, Psychoanalysis

INTRODUCTION

Humans are social beings who constantly overcome various obstacles in life to test their emotional and mental fortitude (Titus, 2006). Humans often struggle internally when faced with challenging situations, such as not achieving desired goals, losing a loved one, problems when interacting with others, or facing a lot of pressure in life (Channuwong, 2025). These difficulties reveal the inner turmoil of human beings, which sometimes rages within a person but cannot be articulated outwardly.

The emotional reality of every human being when facing life's challenges shows that human interaction involves both the inner world and the outer world (Yan et al., 2025). An inseparable aspect of human experience is the internal struggle between fear and courage, between hope and reality, and between the desire to persevere and the temptation to give up (Setiawan, 2025). Internal conflict often accurately represents a person's emotional state, with various emotions such as confusion, anxiety, sadness, anger, and uncertainty compiling to form

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interconnected psychological dynamics that are difficult even for the person themselves to understand (Ai & Zhou, 2025).

Literature serves as a mirror of human life, often capturing the inner turmoil of its characters as a reflection of deep psychological depth, especially novels that are born from real experiences (Elkateb, 2025). Literary works rooted in the reality of the author's life are able to authentically and movingly depict the essence of emotional struggles (Aisha, 2025). Such novels not only present interesting narratives, but also feature characters who struggle with complex internal conflicts, ranging from moral dilemmas and identity crises to past traumas and turmoil in facing difficult life choices (Ezhugnayiru, 2025).

In this context, psychological analysis becomes essential in uncovering the underlying motivations and emotional dynamics of literary characters (Liu et al., 2025). By applying psychoanalytic theory, particularly Freud's structural model of personality id, ego, and superego readers can better understand how internal conflicts shape a character's thoughts, actions, and decisions (Shreyas et al., 2024). These elements reveal the tension between instinctual desires, rational considerations, and moral values that often drive the narrative forward (Deligonul & Cavusgil, 2025). Furthermore, the identification of defense mechanisms such as repression, sublimation, and rationalisation provides deeper insight into how characters cope with psychological pressure, allowing literature to serve not only as artistic expression but also as a profound study of the human psyche (Sihombing, 2024).

The novel *Tatkala Leukemia Meretas Cinta*, written by Siti Fadilah Supari, tells her personal story as a former Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia who is not only known for her work on the national and international stage, but also for her resilience in the face of emotional pain. Amidst her busy schedule, she had to care for her husband who was suffering from leukaemia, while also dealing with the fear, anxiety, and loneliness that slowly crept in as she faced the prospect of losing her husband.

Siti Fadilah Supari does not imagine events as in modern fiction novels, but truly experiences the bitter reality of accompanying her partner who has leukaemia. When the author pours her own experiences into her literary work, every emotion expressed in it is not the result of fabrication or imagination alone, but a real trace of the inner struggle that Siti has experienced. This makes every detail of the internal conflict depicted authentic and intense, something that is difficult to achieve for writers who rely solely on observation. In this case, readers can feel every doubt, fear, and inner struggle experienced by the main character because all of it comes from real life experiences.

Various previous studies have explored psychological aspects in literature and human behavior through diverse perspectives. Di Giuseppe and Perry (2021) established a theoretical hierarchy of defense mechanisms that helps classify psychological responses in literary characters. Merlo et al. (2021) emphasized how adaptive mechanisms such as suppression contribute to emotional stability, providing a foundation for understanding coping behaviors. Artioli et al. (2024) examined the psychosocial processes of women with leukemia, revealing emotional strength and resilience in facing illness-related trauma.

Meanwhile, Ahmadi et al. (2023) investigated psychological reader-response in Indonesian literature, showing how readers' emotional and cultural backgrounds influence character interpretation. Lastly, Marwenti (2020) analyzed defense mechanisms in a contemporary novel, demonstrating how repression, displacement, and rationalization appear in fictional characters.

These studies collectively highlight the relevance of psychoanalytic and defense mechanism theories in understanding emotional and psychological conflicts. However, this present study differs by focusing specifically on *Tatkala Leukemia Meretas Cinta* by Siti Fadilah

Supari, combining Freud's structural personality theory (id, ego, and superego) with six identified defense mechanisms within an Indonesian cultural and moral context. This integration bridges clinical psychoanalytic concepts with local literary representation, offering a fresh contribution to Indonesian literary psychology studies.

The study of the main character's inner conflict in this novel is interesting to implement in order to reveal the hidden meanings of humanity, love, and self-awareness behind the narrative, thereby enriching the psychological approach to literature. This study can provide a new perspective on how Indonesian society experiences crises in personal relationships.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilised a qualitative descriptive method with a literary psychology approach (Huang & Yongquan, 2025). The primary data source for this study was the novel *Tatkala Leukemia Meretas Cinta* by Siti Fadilah Supari, while the secondary data sources were books, journals, and articles relevant to the study of inner conflict and literary psychology. The data collection technique used was the read and note technique, which involved carefully reading the novel and marking the parts that contained the main character's inner conflict, then recording the data on data cards or research instruments (Finley, 2025). The data analysis technique used a content analysis model with the following steps: (1) identification of data in the form of dialogue, narration, and monologue that describe the main character's inner conflict; (2) classification of data based on the types of inner conflict experienced by the character; (3) interpreting the data using literary psychology theory to reveal the meaning and factors causing the inner conflict; and (4) concluding the results of the analysis. The validity of the data was tested through theoretical triangulation using various perspectives of literary psychology theory to validate the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study is based on Sigmund Freud's theory regarding personality structure and defence mechanisms. This study found elements such as the id, ego, and superego, along with defence mechanisms experienced by the main character in the novel *Tatkala Leukemia Meretas Cinta*. Based on the results of the study of the novel *Tatkala Leukemia Meretas Cinta*, a total of 15 data points were obtained. The 15 data points were found to be elements of the id, ego, and superego, and contained the main character's defence mechanisms in the novel: repression (4), sublimation (4), rationalisation (4), displacement (1), reaction formation (1), and regression (1).

Table 1 Type Defence Mechanisms

Type	Amount	Percentage
Repression	4	26,7%
Sublimation	4	26,7%
Rationalisation	4	26,7%
Reaction Formation	1	6,7%
Displacement	1	6,7%
Regression	1	6,7%

Data 1 (Repression)

"Oh no... That's impossible!" I thought. Then I found myself back in the grip of time, rushing from one agenda to the next in pursuit of the goal of a healthy population. As I was about to leave for work, Mas Pari was still lying in the hospital. He wanted to go home that day."

In the text excerpt presented, the character shows a reaction of emotional rejection towards an unexpected reality. This rejection reflects the emergence of the id, which is the part of the personality that rejects pain and expresses emotional impulses directly. Siti is not ready to accept reality and instinctively rejects it.

After this emotional reaction, the character immediately 'slips back' into her routine as a figure responsible for a major health programme. In this section, the ego takes over by reorganising the character so that she is able to carry out her duties and obligations rationally, even though she is emotionally shaken. Then, the superego emerges when the character continues her work even though she knows that her lover is ill and wants to go home. She continues to carry out her social mission for the people even though she personally feels guilty. The superego encourages Siti to put greater interests above personal needs.

When viewed from the excerpt, the character's response shows a defence mechanism in the form of repression. Siti suppresses her feelings of sadness, fear, and inner dilemma into her subconscious so that she can continue to act functionally. Her emotions are held back so as not to interfere with the important task at hand.

Data 2 (Repression)

"Ah, dare to call... Ah, don't... Ah, dare... Ah, don't"

The main character's inner monologue reflects emotional impulses that spontaneously arise from the subconscious. These reactions are caused by anxiety, fear, and the urge to immediately relieve inner tension. In this monologue, the main character wants to call a doctor named Prof. Ari, but is still hesitant to do so.

Then, the ego begins to act as a mediator in the phrase 'Ah, don't'. In this context, the ego serves to balance the desire with social reality. The character begins to consider whether this is the right time, whether their actions will be disruptive, and whether there will be consequences. The ego here tries to delay action for a more reasonable outcome.

The superego begins to appear in the phrase "Ah, brave... Ah, don't." The character Mungkin feels unworthy of directly calling a professor or feels guilty for possibly disturbing him. In this case, the superego functions as the "voice of conscience" or the set of norms that encourages the character to act according to moral standards.

From the protagonist's inner statement, the appropriate defense mechanism for this condition is repression. The character appears to suppress his emotional desire due to the influence of social values and moral norms, which are processed through ego consideration. This tension causes the character to repeatedly resist the urge to call Prof. Ari, even though the impulse continues to arise.

Data 3 (Rationalisation)

"With trembling hands, I replied, 'What's the point, Professor? If it's already clear, shouldn't it just be treated right away? What's the need to do that? Don't you feel sorry for her? She's most afraid of undergoing another BMP. She was traumatized when it was done the first time. Professor, if it's not truly necessary, if I may ask, please don't do anything to her.'"

In the quoted dialogue, the character begins to show an outburst of emotion and fear. The protagonist rejects the medical procedure not based on logical reasoning, but rather on feelings of pity, fear, and the past trauma experienced by her husband. This reflects the workings of the id, driven by the impulse to avoid pain both physical and emotional.

Then, the ego emerges in the argument, "If it's already clear, shouldn't it just be treated right away?" Here, there is an attempt to bring logic into an emotional situation, although the reasoning is still influenced by panic and hope. Finally, the character's polite and gentle plea, "if I may ask, please don't do anything," demonstrates the presence of moral control. The

protagonist does not force her opinion aggressively but instead adjusts her response according to social norms and shows respect toward the doctor's authority.

The defense mechanism reflected in this statement is rationalization. The character rejects the medical procedure by using seemingly logical reasons, such as pity, past trauma, and the clarity of the diagnosis. This rationalization functions as a defense to make the refusal of the medical action appear reasonable and socially acceptable.

Data 4 (Rationalisation)

"I agreed, though in tears. I had to sign the 'informed consent' related to the BMP and biopsy procedures to be performed on my husband the next morning under total anesthesia, because I didn't want him to suffer."

Based on the narrative statement presented, the id is evident when emotions flow as the character cries. This reflects the instinctive expression of sadness, fear, and unwillingness to face a difficult medical procedure involving her loved one. Then, the ego emerges when the character still chooses to sign the medical document despite being overwhelmed by emotion. Siti understands that the medical procedure must be carried out for her husband's safety and that she has to complete the administrative process required by the hospital.

Next, the superego appears through her empathy, as she does not want her husband to suffer. This reflects moral values such as compassion, care, and responsibility, leading Siti to choose the medical decision she perceives as the most humane and dignified for the person she loves.

The defense mechanism corresponding to this statement is rationalization. The protagonist rationalizes her difficult decision with logical reasons. Although the decision is deeply painful on an emotional level, such reasoning serves as a way to calm herself and justify her choice amid inner turmoil.

Data 5 (Repression)

"Oh God, I want to see him remain just as he is until the end of his life. I actually know very well the prognosis of that illness, but my heart keeps trying to deny it."

In the quoted passage, the id is evident in the line, "Oh God, I want to see him remain just as he is until the end of his life." The protagonist desires her husband to stay healthy and unchanged until the end, even though the situation makes that impossible. This quote represents the workings of the id, which operates on the pleasure principle, rejecting loss and painful reality. Then, the ego appears in the character's acknowledgment of her conscious understanding of her husband's medical condition. This means she is not entirely blinded by emotion, and the ego functions to balance emotional desires with the unpleasant objective truth. This is shown in the line, "I actually know very well the prognosis of that illness."

The superego is reflected in the line, "But my heart keeps trying to deny it," where Siti is ethically and emotionally unwilling to accept the painful reality. The superego strives to preserve an idealistic sense that denying reality is, in a way, an act of loyalty and love. From the perspective of defense mechanisms, this passage falls under repression. This is because Siti suppresses the reality she consciously understands into her subconscious to avoid fully experiencing it. This denial arises from her inability to face the pain and the impending loss of someone she deeply loves.

Data 6 (Repression)

"I closed my eyes, buried my feelings, and surrendered myself to God."

In the quoted passage, this part illustrates Siti's emotional impulse. She feels deep fear and anxiety at the thought of losing the man she deeply loves. She is uncertain about how to continue living on her own in the future. This depiction indicates that Siti is experiencing a painful and overwhelming reality.

The ego appears when the character attempts to balance her emotions with reality. At this stage, Siti seems emotionally overwhelmed. She tries to face the situation but feels incapable of doing so. Therefore, she chooses to close her eyes and bury her feelings as a form of self-protection to prevent further emotional pain. Then, the superego emerges through the moral and spiritual values within Siti. This is seen when she decides to surrender herself to God. She seeks inner peace through prayer and spiritual faith, believing that everything happens under God's will.

The defense mechanism evident in this passage is repression. This can be identified through the character's act of closing her eyes and suppressing her feelings an unconscious effort to push away painful emotions and thoughts so that they do not continuously disturb her consciousness. Repression makes it seem as though she is storing her sorrow deep within her heart without expressing it outwardly. She chooses to surrender herself to God, reflecting an attempt to channel her anxiety and fear into spiritual faith as a form of inner protection.

Data 7 (Rationalisation)

"That may be true, but it doesn't mean I will simply believe your statements about the quality of the medicines you export to my country. Remember, not all foreign medicines come from your nation. Mr. Jullien, there is something more important than the quality of medicine a sense of fairness in trade. One aspect of that fairness is the implementation of benefit sharing, which allows our people to experience the benefits directly or indirectly. If you wish to trade medicines in this country, you should also consider building the factories here, so that our people can truly feel your presence. By establishing factories in our land, you will be providing employment opportunities for our citizens."

In the quoted passage, the id of the main character is reflected through an emotional drive of suspicion and resistance toward Mr. Jullien's claims, along with a desire to protect her people's interests from economic exploitation. Then, the ego acts as a mediator by processing the reality of international trade, presenting a logical argument about the importance of fairness in business, and proposing the establishment of local factories as a realistic win-win solution.

The superego is evident in the strong sense of morality and social responsibility displayed by Siti, as she prioritizes the welfare of her people and economic justice over mere profit. This demonstrates the presence of leadership values grounded in ethical responsibility toward her nation.

From the perspective of defense mechanisms, this passage falls under the category of rationalization, as the character presents logical and morally acceptable reasons to refuse or limit cooperation with Mr. Jullien. Although her stance is rooted in underlying distrust, Siti does not express it directly. Instead, she channels it into arguments about trade fairness and local economic empowerment. This rationalization serves to protect her ego from potential direct conflict while maintaining a composed and ethical image.

Data 8 (Rationalisation)

"But Mr. Andreas, right now the export of textiles from my country has been shut down or at least significantly reduced by European and American countries. The reason is something I can understand: the decline in people's purchasing power there," I quickly replied.

In the quoted passage, the id of the main character is reflected through emotional impulses of disappointment and frustration over the textile export restrictions that harm her country, along with a need for self-defense against potential accusations or criticism. Then, the ego functions as a mediator by processing the economic reality of the global market, presenting concrete facts about the decline in textile exports, and acknowledging the logical reason behind such policies namely, the decrease in purchasing power among people in developed countries.

The superego in this passage is shown through Siti's understanding and acceptance of global economic logic. Rather than emotionally blaming others, she demonstrates moral maturity by recognizing that there are reasonable and comprehensible causes behind the policy decisions.

From the case presented in the quotation, it can be seen that the defense mechanism used is rationalization. This rationalization occurs through the transformation of a painful emotional response into a rational and objective analysis of the global economic situation. Through this process, Siti grounds herself in logical reasoning to cope with the psychological pain caused by her country's economic losses, while maintaining her professionalism in the conversation. In doing so, she protects her ego from deeper emotional distress.

Data 9 (Sublimation)

"That is why there will be much unemployment in my country. If you gain profit from trading medicines here and then establish a manufacturing plant here as well, it would be fair for everyone. The unemployment caused by the halt of textile exports to your country would be compensated by the establishment of a pharmaceutical factory. I'm sorry, Mr. Jullien, this is what I have in my heart, even though it is not explicitly stated in the Minister of Health Regulation No. 1010 that I drafted. I hope you can understand. As a leader in the health sector of this country, I wish to do something fair for our people."

In the quoted passage, Siti's id is revealed through her emotional drive of worry and concern about the fate of her people who may face unemployment, along with a deep desire to protect and give back to the society she leads. Then, the ego acts as a mediator, transforming her anxiety into a realistic and strategic proposal suggesting a logical form of compensation through the establishment of a pharmaceutical factory to replace the lost textile jobs. She also honestly acknowledges that this motivation is not explicitly written in the official regulation but stems from her personal sense of care and responsibility.

The superego is reflected in Siti's responsible leadership values, where she prioritizes social justice and the welfare of the people over mere business interests. This attitude embodies the moral duty of a leader who strives to act fairly for her citizens. Regarding the defense mechanism, this passage illustrates sublimation. Sublimation occurs as Siti channels her personal anxiety and pressure into constructive, socially beneficial action focused on the well-being of others. Despite the political, economic, and personal pressures threatening her leadership stability due to rising unemployment, Siti does not express her fear directly. Instead, she frames her entire argument around compassion and fairness, thereby transforming potential conflict into a socially acceptable and noble mission.

Data 10 (Reaction Formation)

"Please make a list of the medicines you export to my country in limited quantities; I will review them again. But keep in mind that sharing profits for the benefit of the people is a principle you must understand. Do not apply the system of capitalist liberalization, which has proven not to bring shared prosperity to the world," I finally said.

In the quoted passage, Siti's id is reflected through her aggressive drive to control the situation and her subtle anger toward the capitalist system, which she perceives as exploitative. This is expressed through her firm tone and commanding language. Then, the ego serves as a mediator, translating these emotions into concrete and strategic actions by requesting a list of exported medicines for further evaluation while setting clear conditions. This demonstrates Siti's ability to use her position of power tactically and effectively in negotiation.

The superego is revealed in her moral emphasis on the fair distribution of profits, her critique of capitalist liberalization, and her commitment to collective welfare, all of which highlight her social values that prioritize the common good over personal or corporate interests.

From the perspective of defense mechanisms, this passage illustrates reaction formation. Siti's strong anti-capitalist and pro-people stance serves as a reaction to her anxiety about her position within the global economic system. Through this mechanism, Siti masks her internal conflict and possible feelings of powerlessness in the face of global capitalism by outwardly displaying a firm, oppositional stance, thereby transforming her anxiety into a posture of moral and political strength.

Data 11 (Displacement)

"You're careless!" I scolded the second-echelon official responsible for the press release. "Such recklessness is dangerous because he failed to give them an accurate picture of this struggle." I calmed myself with a sigh, hoping that the following press releases could make up for the damage caused by that report. "These are the kinds of things I worry about. Poor or inaccurate planning can lead to fatal consequences. Next time, I must be more thorough I must not trust anyone so easily."

From the excerpt, it is evident that Siti displays her id through expressions of anger and frustration toward her subordinate with the sharp reprimand, "You are careless!" This reaction reflects an aggressive impulse to release disappointment directly without rational filtering. Subsequently, the ego emerges as a mediator, shown through her introspective attitude when she calms herself and resolves to be more cautious and less trusting of others in the future.

Meanwhile, the superego is reflected in her strong sense of responsibility as a leader who worries about the negative consequences that may affect the greater struggle. Thus, Siti demonstrates leadership values that emphasize accountability and prudence in making strategic decisions.

Furthermore, the defense mechanism evident in this case is displacement. Siti redirects her anger and frustration from the true source of pressure her personal sense of responsibility and inner burden toward her subordinate who made a mistake. By scolding her subordinate, the character unconsciously channels her emotional tension to alleviate the stress within herself.

Data 12 (Sublimation)

"My beloved children, why am I standing here while my husband lies helpless in Jakarta, waiting for death from leukemia? I want to pass on to you the spirit of how to live as a nation and a state in accordance with our ideals of independence. How should we fight for our country through our professions? How must we firmly reject the liberalization that symbolizes the hegemony of globalization, which is deeply neocolonialistic? My children, there is no other way there is no place for liberalization on our homeland, especially in the field of health, which concerns human lives everywhere."

In the presented excerpt, the character's id appears as an emotional drive of sadness and anxiety over her husband's condition, who is suffering from leukemia. This feeling reflects a basic human need to love and to experience loss. However, the ego emerges when the character chooses to remain present before her students, controlling her emotions and striving to fulfill her duties as best as she can. In this case, the ego mediates between emotional impulses and the social responsibilities she must uphold.

Then, the superego is reflected in the moral and nationalistic values conveyed by Siti. She instills the spirit of struggle, patriotism, and rejection of liberalization, which she views as a threat to humanity and the nation's sovereignty, particularly in the field of health.

When viewed through the lens of defense mechanisms, this aligns with sublimation. This is because the main character channels her pain and anxiety about her husband's illness into energy for a larger political and ideological mission. Her personal suffering is transformed into motivation to inspire and educate others for greater values.

Data 13 (Regression)

"I immediately put aside my husband's shortcomings. My grip on God became even tighter. Oh God, please help me. Only You can help me out of a situation like this. I go through my days filled with fear, anxiety, and loneliness."

In the quoted passage, the id of the main character is shown through emotional impulses of fear, anxiety, and loneliness caused by her husband's illness, as well as the need for protection and security from the threat of loss. Then, the ego acts as a mediator by managing the painful reality she tries to set aside her husband's shortcomings, which reflects a cognitive effort to focus on the positive aspects and control her perception of an unchangeable situation while seeking comfort through prayer.

Furthermore, the superego emerges in her statement "my grip on God became even tighter" and her plea for help from Allah, revealing religious values that teach dependence on divine power when facing trials and acceptance that some things are beyond human control.

The defense mechanism reflected in this passage is regression a coping strategy characterized by returning to simpler, more childlike patterns of behavior. This can be seen in her expressions such as "Oh God, please help me" and "my grip on God became even tighter." Such behavior resembles that of a child seeking protection from a parent when feeling scared or helpless. In this case, Siti finds comfort in surrendering herself to God, which helps her escape feelings of fear, anxiety, and helplessness in facing harsh reality alone.

Data 14 (Sublimation)

"Finally, on the second day, my father passed away on the operating table. I handled everything on my own without my husband by my side. My father died exactly when I was supposed to present my thesis for my graduation as a cardiologist. Losing my father felt like losing half of my soul and half of my will to live. To whom else could I confide? An overwhelming sorrow enveloped my heart, which was torn and filled with grief."

In the presented excerpt, the id is evident when Siti experiences a deep emotional outburst, such as immense sorrow and a profound sense of loss due to her father's passing. The

statement "To whom else could I confide?" reflects an emotional need to seek a protective figure.

Then, the ego follows as Siti tries to face reality despite her grief. She takes care of all the funeral arrangements on her own without her husband's presence, realizing how difficult the situation is since her father's death coincided with her thesis defense schedule. Meanwhile, the superego is shown through Siti's strong sense of responsibility toward her father until his final moments and her determination to complete her cardiology education despite being in mourning. This indicates that Siti upholds values of devotion and filial piety toward her parents.

The defense mechanism related to the excerpt is sublimation. This is because, in her time of grief over losing her father, Siti channels her pain into strength to continue fulfilling her responsibilities both in managing the funeral and completing her cardiology studies. She does not express her sadness through anger or apathy but transforms her sense of loss into meaningful and productive actions.

Data 15 (Sublimation)

"O Allah, change my husband's heart so that mine can accept him. If You do not will it, O Allah, then change my heart so that I may accept him as he is. And if that too is not Your will, O Allah, replace it with Your mercy."

In the presented excerpt, Siti demonstrates the id through her emotional conflict between the desire to change her husband according to her expectations and the need to be accepted and loved as she is. She longs for harmony in a troubled relationship. Then, the ego emerges as a mediator that recognizes the human limitation in changing others, leading the main character to seek a realistic solution through prayer.

The superego is clearly reflected in her surrender to Allah and her willingness to accept any divine decision, even if it means separating from her husband. This illustrates religious values such as tawakkal (trust in God), ikhlas (sincerity), and submission to God's plan, which is believed to be better than personal desires.

The defense mechanism that fits this case is sublimation. Siti channels the conflict and frustration in her marriage into a spiritual activity that is socially and morally acceptable. She does not express her emotions through anger, blame, or by directly seeking divorce. Instead, she chooses to pray and draw closer to God. Through prayer and surrender, Siti alleviates her inner turmoil without damaging the relationship or violating her moral and religious values.

The findings of this study reveal that the main character in *Tatkala Leukemia Meretas Cinta* exhibits a complex interplay of personality structures and defense mechanisms in response to severe psychological distress. The analysis demonstrates how Siti Fadilah Supari navigates the emotional turmoil of her husband's terminal illness while maintaining her professional responsibilities as Minister of Health. This dual burden creates significant internal conflicts that manifest through various psychological processes, which can be understood through Freudian psychoanalytic theory.

Personality Structure: The Dynamics of Id, Ego, and Superego

The personality structure of the main character reflects the continuous negotiation between three fundamental psychological forces: the id, ego, and superego. According to Shreyas et al. (2024), Freud's structural model of personality provides a framework for understanding how individuals manage conflicting desires, realistic constraints, and moral obligations. In the context of this novel, the id represents Siti's raw emotional responses to her husband's deteriorating health condition, including fear of loss, anxiety about the future, and

the instinctive rejection of painful reality. These impulses are evident throughout the narrative, particularly in moments when she expresses denial or overwhelming sadness.

The ego serves as a mediating force that allows Siti to function despite her emotional distress. Deligonul and Cavusgil (2025) emphasize that the ego operates as a rational decision-making mechanism that balances internal desires with external demands. In Siti's case, this is demonstrated when she continues to fulfill her ministerial duties even while her husband lies hospitalized, reflecting the ego's capacity to prioritize practical necessities over emotional impulses. The ego's role becomes particularly crucial in professional contexts where Siti must negotiate with international pharmaceutical companies while simultaneously managing her personal crisis.

The superego manifests through Siti's strong sense of moral duty, social responsibility, and spiritual values. As noted by Shreyas et al. (2024), the superego represents internalized societal norms and ethical standards that guide behavior according to principles of right and wrong. Throughout the novel, Siti's superego is evident in her commitment to public health advocacy, her compassion toward her husband despite their relationship challenges, and her reliance on religious faith to navigate suffering. This moral dimension adds complexity to her character, as she must reconcile personal desires with professional obligations and spiritual beliefs.

Defense Mechanisms as Coping Strategies

The analysis identified six defense mechanisms employed by the main character: repression, sublimation, rationalization, displacement, reaction formation, and regression. These mechanisms function as psychological protective strategies that help Siti manage overwhelming stress and maintain psychological equilibrium. Di Giuseppe and Perry (2021) established a hierarchical framework for understanding defense mechanisms, noting that different mechanisms serve varying adaptive functions depending on the severity and nature of psychological threats.

Repression emerged as one of the most frequently employed mechanisms (26.7%), involving the unconscious suppression of painful emotions and thoughts. When Siti states, "I actually know very well the prognosis of that illness, but my heart keeps trying to deny it," she demonstrates the classic pattern of repression wherein conscious knowledge is pushed into the unconscious to avoid emotional pain. Di Giuseppe and Perry (2021) explain that repression allows individuals to maintain functional behavior by preventing overwhelming emotions from disrupting daily activities. However, this mechanism comes at the cost of incomplete emotional processing, potentially leading to unresolved grief.

Sublimation also appeared prominently (26.7%), representing a more adaptive defense mechanism wherein negative emotions are channeled into socially constructive activities. Merlo et al. (2021) highlight sublimation as a mature defense mechanism that contributes to emotional stability and productive outcomes. In the novel, Siti transforms her anxiety about her husband's illness into passionate advocacy for public health and social justice. Her speech to students, where she channels personal suffering into nationalist ideology and educational mission, exemplifies this process. This finding resonates with Artioli et al. (2024), who observed similar patterns among women with leukemia, noting that many redirect their illness-related distress into activism, support work, or creative expression.

Rationalization, which also constituted 26.7% of the observed mechanisms, involves justifying difficult decisions or emotions with seemingly logical explanations. When Siti rationalizes her consent to painful medical procedures by emphasizing that she "didn't want him to suffer," she transforms an emotionally overwhelming decision into one that appears

reasonable and morally justified. Deligonul and Cavusgil (2025) discuss how rationalization serves ethical decision-making by providing cognitive coherence during moral dilemmas. This mechanism allows Siti to maintain her self-concept as a caring wife while making decisions that cause her significant emotional pain.

Displacement occurred less frequently (6.7%) but revealed important dynamics in how Siti manages frustration and powerlessness. When she scolds a subordinate for poor communication management, she unconsciously redirects anger and stress from the true source her inability to control her husband's illness toward a more manageable target. Di Giuseppe and Perry (2021) note that displacement represents a mid-level defense mechanism that, while less mature than sublimation, still allows for emotional expression without confronting the primary source of distress directly.

Reaction formation (6.7%) appeared in Siti's professional interactions, particularly when she adopts an aggressively anti-capitalist stance in pharmaceutical negotiations. This exaggerated moral position may serve as a defense against feelings of powerlessness in the face of global economic forces and her husband's incurable illness. By asserting strong ideological control in one domain, she compensates for the lack of control in her personal life. This aligns with Shreyas et al. (2024), who explain that reaction formation transforms anxiety-producing impulses into their opposite, creating a sense of psychological coherence.

Regression (6.7%) manifested in Siti's return to childlike dependence on divine protection during moments of acute distress. Her plea, "Oh God, please help me. Only You can help me out of a situation like this," reflects a regression to simpler, more dependent patterns of coping reminiscent of childhood security-seeking behavior. While regression is generally considered a less mature defense mechanism, Di Giuseppe and Perry (2021) acknowledge that temporary regression during severe crises can provide necessary psychological relief and facilitate subsequent coping.

Cultural and Contextual Considerations

The defense mechanisms observed in this study must be understood within the Indonesian cultural and religious context that shapes Siti's psychological responses. Unlike Western psychological studies that may emphasize individualistic coping strategies, Siti's mechanisms frequently involve communal values, religious faith, and social responsibility. Her sublimation of personal suffering into nationalist advocacy and her reliance on prayer during regression reflect culturally specific forms of psychological adaptation. Ahmadi et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of cultural context in psychological reader-response to Indonesian literature, noting that readers' interpretations are significantly influenced by shared cultural values and moral frameworks.

The integration of Islamic spirituality into Siti's coping process, particularly through *tawakkal* (trust in God) and *ikhlas* (sincerity), represents a culturally embedded form of psychological resilience that may not fit neatly into Western psychoanalytic categories. Her prayer, "O Allah, change my husband's heart so that mine can accept him," demonstrates how religious practice serves both as sublimation and as a framework for accepting uncontrollable circumstances. This finding extends Artioli et al. (2024)'s observation that women facing serious illness develop psychosocial processes that combine medical realities with spiritual meaning-making.

The Intersection of Personal and Professional Identity

A distinctive feature of this novel is the complex interplay between Siti's personal crisis and her professional identity as a public health leader. The simultaneous management of her

husband's terminal illness and her responsibilities as Minister of Health creates unique psychological pressures that intensify her need for defense mechanisms. Her ability to compartmentalize personal suffering while functioning effectively in high-stakes professional negotiations demonstrates the ego's remarkable capacity for adaptive functioning under extreme stress.

This dual identity also shapes the specific forms her defense mechanisms take. Her sublimation frequently involves transforming personal pain into professional advocacy, while her rationalization often draws upon medical knowledge to justify emotional decisions. The displacement of frustration toward subordinates reflects the pressures of leadership responsibility, where expressing vulnerability might undermine her professional authority. These patterns suggest that defense mechanisms are not merely individual psychological responses but are also shaped by social roles and professional expectations.

Implications for Understanding Trauma and Resilience

The findings contribute to broader understanding of how individuals confront trauma through psychological defense mechanisms. Artioli et al. (2024) describe the journey of women with leukemia as involving both "inner strength and fighting prejudice," highlighting the dual nature of psychological and social challenges. Similarly, Siti's experience illustrates how defense mechanisms serve not only to protect the individual psyche but also to enable continued social functioning and meaningful engagement with the world despite ongoing trauma.

The variety of defense mechanisms employed by Siti suggests a flexible psychological repertoire that adapts to different challenges throughout her husband's illness. Rather than relying on a single coping strategy, she draws upon multiple mechanisms depending on the specific context and intensity of distress. This flexibility may represent psychological resilience, as diverse coping strategies allow for more comprehensive emotional regulation. Merlo et al. (2021) support this interpretation, noting that adaptive mechanisms like sublimation and suppression contribute to maintaining emotional stability across varying life circumstances.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates how literary analysis can illuminate psychological processes in ways that complement clinical research. While psychological studies often examine defense mechanisms in controlled settings or through structured interviews, literary works provide rich, contextualized narratives that reveal the nuanced operation of these mechanisms in lived experience. Ahmadi et al. (2023) advocate for integrating psychological perspectives into literary analysis, arguing that such approaches deepen understanding of both literature and human psychology.

The autobiographical nature of this novel adds particular significance to these findings. Unlike fictional works where authors may construct psychological profiles based on imagination or observation, Siti Fadilah Supari's firsthand account of her emotional journey provides authentic insight into how defense mechanisms operate during real trauma. This authenticity enhances the reliability of the psychological analysis while also demonstrating literature's power to document and communicate complex psychological experiences.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study on the novel *Tatkala Leukemia Meretas Cinta* by Siti Fadilah Supari, it can be concluded that the main character demonstrates a complex personality dynamic through the interaction of the id, ego, and superego in dealing with psychological conflicts arising from her husband's leukemia. The id is dominated by emotional

drives such as anxiety and fear, the ego functions as a mediator balancing reality demands and emotional needs, while the superego guides her through moral, spiritual, and social responsibilities. The main character also employs six defense mechanisms repression, sublimation, rationalization, displacement, reaction formation, and regression to cope with inner stress. Based on these findings, it is suggested that future researchers explore literary works using other psychological approaches such as Jung's theory or humanistic psychology, and that literature educators integrate psychological perspectives into literary analysis to deepen students' understanding and analytical skills.

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