Journal of Language
Volume 8, Number 2, pp: 588-598
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14555

Psychosocial Crises of Rizki in J.S. Khairen's *Kado Terbaik*: An Eriksonian Reading

[1]Nurbaiti Ali, [2]Doni Efrizah, [3]Indah Sari, [4]Eka Surya Fitriani, [5]Suriyadi
[1,2,3,4]Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, Indonesia
[5]Politeknik Negeri Medan, Medan, Indonesia
E-mail: nurbaitiali@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id

Article Info
Article history:
Received: October 10, 2026
Accepted: November 07, 2026
Published: November 13, 2026

Keywords:
Erik Erikson;
identity crisis;
isolation;
Kado Terbaik;
psychology of literature;
psychosocial development.

ABSTRACT
This study examines the psychosocial crises of Rizki, the protagonist of J.S. Khairen's novel *Kado Terbaik*, through Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Previous studies of the novel have described the protagonist's cognition, needs, personality, and motives, but none has examined how his sense of self is formed and damaged under sustained social pressure. Using a qualitative descriptive design within the psychology of literature approach, the study collected narration, dialogue, and interior monologue through close reading and note-taking, and analyzed them with an interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show three interrelated crises. First, abandonment by his mother at fourteen re-activates the crisis of trust versus mistrust and leaves a lasting distrust of adults and institutions. Second, in an illegal orphanage, Rizki faces identity versus role confusion: he commits to a moral identity by refusing to abuse younger children, yet internalizes the negative identity of a vagrant imposed by his environment. Third, after leaving the orphanage at eighteen, he briefly moves toward closeness with his youngest sister and with Rani but he resolves the crisis of intimacy versus isolation negatively by cutting off contact and withdrawing from communal life. The study concludes that only the identity crisis reaches a partial positive resolution, while the crises of trust and intimacy are resolved predominantly negatively, and that the novel portrays the psychosocial cost of institutional child neglect, in which a young person protects others while being unable to receive care himself.

Corresponding Author:
Nurbaiti Ali
Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, Indonesia
E-mail: nurbaitiali@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id

1. Introduction

Literature has long served as a record of how individuals experience and survive social conditions. Through its characters, a novel can show the inner consequences of poverty, violence, and neglect in ways that statistics cannot. The psychology of literature approach treats these characters as representations of human psychological processes, which can be read through established psychological theories (Endraswara, 2008; Wellek & Warren, 1956).

One recurring concern in contemporary Indonesian popular fiction is the fate of children who grow up without the protection of their families. This concern reflects a real social problem. In July 2025, Indonesia's Minister of Social Affairs reported that 2,238 child welfare institutions (*Lembaga Kesejahteraan Sosial Anak*, LKSA), the formal category for orphanages, were not accredited at all, while only 871 held the highest accreditation (Iswinarno & Varwati, 2025). The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) received 431 direct complaints of child exploitation and trafficking over three years, involving nearly

900 children (Muliawati, 2024), and links most exploitation cases to failures of parenting (Tribrata News Polri, 2024). J.S. Khairen's *Kado Terbaik*, published by Gramedia Widiasarana Indonesia in April 2022, addresses this concern directly. The novel follows Rizki, a fourteen-year-old boy who is left by his mother, together with his two younger sisters, at an orphanage that turns out to be an illegal institution exploiting the children in its care. The story is narrated from the perspective of Rizki at the age of twenty, seven days before Eid al-Fitr, as he looks back on his years in the orphanage and struggles to survive on the street.

The novel has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Studies have examined its moral and character-education values, its social aspects and social criticism, the main character's conflicts (Ayath et al., 2024), the cognitive development of its child characters through Piaget's theory (Nensilianti et al., 2024), the basic needs of the protagonist through Maslow's hierarchy (Azzahra & Hayati, 2023), and the forms and motives of crime through psychological criminology (Ardiati & Ahmadi, 2022). Islamic educational values in the novel have also been examined (Wahyudin et al., 2026). These studies show that the novel is rich in psychological material. However, they tend to describe the protagonist's personality, needs, or cognitive stages at a given moment, rather than the process by which his sense of self is formed, tested, and damaged by his social environment over time.

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is well suited to address this gap. Unlike Piaget's focus on cognition or Maslow's focus on needs, Erikson explains development as a series of crises that arise from the encounter between the growing individual and the demands of society (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Each crisis, if resolved positively, produces a basic virtue such as hope, fidelity, or love; if resolved negatively, it leaves a vulnerability that may re-emerge later in life. Rizki's story, which moves from abandonment in childhood, through survival in a violent institution, to life alone on the street, offers a clear case for this kind of analysis. Erikson's framework has been productively applied to fictional characters facing family problems and trauma (Kosiaroh et al., 2017), but it has not yet been applied to *Kado Terbaik*.

This study therefore addresses three questions: (1) what psychosocial crises does Rizki experience in *Kado Terbaik*; (2) how do the pressures of the orphanage and of life outside it trigger these crises; and (3) how does Rizki resolve these crises, and which basic virtues are formed or fail to form? By answering these questions, the study offers a developmental reading of the novel and contributes to the literary discussion of child neglect and institutional abuse in Indonesian fiction.

2. Literature Review

The psychology of literature studies literary works as expressions of psychological reality. It can focus on the author, the reader, or the characters in the text; this study takes the third orientation, treating Rizki's thoughts, words, and actions as the material of analysis (Endraswara, 2008). The aim is not to diagnose a fictional person, but to use psychological theory as a lens that makes the meaning of the character's experience more visible.

Erikson (1963) describes human development as eight stages across the life span. Each stage is defined by a crisis between two opposing tendencies, such as trust versus mistrust or identity versus role confusion. A crisis in this sense is not a catastrophe but a turning point, a period of heightened vulnerability and potential. A favorable balance between the two poles produces a basic virtue: hope in the first stage, fidelity in the fifth, love in the sixth, and so on (Erikson, 1982).

Two features of the theory are central to this study. The first is the **epigenetic principle**: the stages build on one another, so a crisis that is poorly resolved does not

Journal of Language
Volume 8, Number 2, pp: 588-598
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14555

disappear but re-emerges in later stages and shapes how those stages are met (Erikson, 1968). The second is the **social character of development**: crises are triggered by the demands and opportunities that society places on the individual at each age. Institutions, families, and communities can therefore support or obstruct development. This makes the theory suitable for analyzing a character whose environment is as hostile as Rizki's.

Based on Rizki's age and experiences in the novel, three stages are most relevant. **Trust versus mistrust** is the first stage, normally faced in infancy, in which the child learns whether the world and its caregivers are reliable; its virtue is hope. Although Rizki is fourteen when the story begins, the sudden loss of both parents re-activates this crisis in line with the epigenetic principle. **Identity versus role confusion** is the fifth stage, faced in adolescence, in which the young person integrates past experiences and social roles into a coherent sense of who they are; its virtue is fidelity. Erikson (1968) notes that when positive roles are unavailable, a young person may adopt a **negative identity**, an identity built from the roles that society presents as undesirable. He also describes the **psychosocial moratorium**, a socially permitted delay in which adolescents can explore roles before committing to adult responsibilities. **Intimacy versus isolation** is the sixth stage, faced in early adulthood, in which the person must risk closeness and commitment to others; its virtue is love. Its negative pole includes **distantiation**, the readiness to repudiate and keep away from people whose closeness feels threatening (Erikson, 1963).

Marcia's (1966) elaboration of identity status further shows that identity can be achieved, foreclosed, diffused, or held in moratorium, depending on whether the young person has explored alternatives and made commitments. This distinction helps to describe identities that are formed under constraint rather than through free exploration.

3. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design within the psychology of literature approach. The data source is the novel *Kado Terbaik* by J.S. Khairen, published by Gramedia Widiasarana Indonesia (Khairen, 2022), first edition, 245 pages. The data consist of narration, dialogue, and interior monologue that indicate Rizki's psychosocial crises, the pressures that trigger them, and the ways he responds to them.

The data were collected through close reading and note-taking. The novel was read repeatedly, and each relevant passage was recorded in a data table with its page number, the psychosocial stage it relates to, the pole it indicates (positive or negative), and its trigger (the orphanage or the world outside it). Quotations are presented in the original Indonesian, followed by the author's English translation.

The data were analyzed with the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the condensation stage, passages were selected and coded according to Erikson's stages. In the display stage, coded passages were grouped by stage and by period of the narrative. In the final stage, the groups were interpreted to determine how each crisis is resolved. Trustworthiness was supported by repeated close reading, in which each selected passage was re-examined within its narrative context, and by theoretical triangulation, which compared the interpretations with Erikson's theory and with previous studies of the novel.

4. Discussion

The analysis shows that Rizki experiences three interrelated crises, each tied to a distinct period of the narrative. Table 1 summarizes the findings, which are discussed in the following parts.

Table 1
Psychosocial crises of Rizki in Kado Terbaik

Stage (Erikson)	Period in the novel	Main evidence	Outcome
Trust vs. mistrust (re-activated)	Abandonment at the orphanage, age 14	Last time he loved his mother; mother left only fear; first night of violence	Predominantly negative: mistrust of adults and institutions; hope weakened
Identity vs. role confusion	Orphanage years, age 14–18	Protecting Rizka and the baby; refusing to become a "bajingan"; leaving the orphanage	Partially positive: moral identity achieved and tested by poverty, but burdened by a negative identity imposed by the environment
Intimacy vs. isolation	Outside the orphanage, age 18–20 and after	Buying Khanza Eid clothes; ignoring Rani's message and call; "Kosong. Sendiri."; skipping Eid prayer; never returning	Predominantly negative: isolation through distantiation; love not attained

4.1 Abandonment and the re-activation of trust versus mistrust

The novel opens at the moment that breaks Rizki's trust in the adult world. He introduces himself standing in front of the orphanage with his two younger sisters, and immediately makes clear that his situation is not that of an orphan:

> "Bukan. Aku bukan anak yatim piatu. Ibuku masih hidup. Tapi, dua menit yang lalu adalah terakhir kali aku bertemu dengan ibu. Hingga kelak aku dewasa, kami tak pernah bertemu lagi. Dua menit yang lalu, adalah kali terakhir aku mencintai ibu"
>
> (No. I am not an orphan. My mother is still alive. But two minutes ago was the last time I met her. Until I grew up, we never met again. Two minutes ago was the last time I loved my mother) (Khairen, 2022, p. 1)

The phrase "the last time I loved my mother" marks the abrupt collapse of the most basic relationship of trust. In Erikson's terms, the first crisis is about whether the primary caregiver can be relied upon. Rizki is no longer an infant, but the epigenetic principle explains why this crisis returns with full force: the foundation of trust is not built once and for all, and its sudden destruction re-opens the question of whether anyone can be depended upon. The loss is compounded by the death of his father, which Rizki describes as a misfortune that did not end with his father's heartbeat but "moved" into his own life and that of his sisters (Khairen, 2022, p. 1).

What the mother leaves behind confirms the negative pole of the crisis:

> "Adikku yang satu lagi baru lahir empat hari lalu. Ibu tak menitipkan apa-apa saat berpisah selain ketakutan. Sekalipun itu menitipkan nama untuknya"
>
> (My other sister was born only four days ago. When we parted, Mother left us nothing but fear. Not even a name for her) (Khairen, 2022, p. 3)

Fear, rather than care, is the legacy of the caregiver. The orphanage, which should have replaced the lost parents, immediately proves to be even less trustworthy. On the first night, Rizki recounts that the three of them nearly died (Khairen, 2022, p. 2), and when the owner's wife instructs that the four-day-old baby simply be given water, he reacts with alarm:

Journal of Language
Volume 8, Number 2, pp: 588-598
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14555

"Adikku bisa mati kalau begini" ("My sister could die like this") (Khairen, 2022, p. 3). The institution that is supposed to protect him becomes the source of danger.

The mistrust formed in this period does not disappear when Rizki becomes an adult. At the end of the novel, when his youngest sister is placed under the care of the social services office, he still cannot believe that any institution will look after her:

> "Khanza, apakah dia puasa sekarang? Kalau tidak, sudahkah ia makan? Apakah benar orang-orang dinas sosial itu akan menjaga adikku?"
>
> (Khanza, is she fasting now? If not, has she eaten? Will those social services people really look after my sister?) (Khairen, 2022, p. 233)

Six years after the abandonment, the question "will they really look after my sister?" repeats the original wound. The crisis of trust has been resolved toward mistrust, and the virtue of hope is weakened. As part c shows, the same mistrust later leads him to reject the one adult outside his family who tries to reach him (Khairen, 2022, p. 230).

4.2 Identity versus role confusion in the orphanage

Rizki enters the orphanage at fourteen, the age at which Erikson places the crisis of identity. Normal adolescence offers a psychosocial moratorium, a period to explore roles before committing to them. Rizki has no such moratorium. From the first day, he is forced to take on the role of protector and substitute parent to his sisters:

> "Rizka, usianya tujuh tahun. Rambutnya lurus, ada kawah indah di lesung pipi wajahnya. Lesung pipi itu yang barusan dipukul. Aku remuk melihatnya"
>
> (Rizka is seven years old. Her hair is straight, and there is a beautiful crater in the dimple of her cheek. That dimple had just been struck. I was crushed to see it) (Khairen, 2022, p. 2)

The tenderness of the description and the pain of "aku remuk" ("I was crushed") show that Rizki already identifies himself through his responsibility for his sisters. This identity is reinforced at the end of the first night, when Rizka returns past midnight and holds him tightly while holding back her tears, and he concludes: "Malam ini, kami bertiga, beradik kakak berdarah. Darah hitam kehidupan" ("Tonight, the three of us are siblings of blood. The black blood of life") (Khairen, 2022, p. 4). The bond between the siblings becomes the core of his identity, but it is a bond defined by shared injury.

The decisive moment of the identity crisis comes when Rizki reaches eighteen and must choose what kind of person he will become. The orphanage offers him a clear role: to become one of the "bajingan" (scoundrels) who control and abuse the younger children. He refuses:

> "Aku keluar dari sana karena menolak jadi seperti para bajingan itu. Bisa saja aku tetap tinggal, menjadi bajingan berikutnya, yang menyuruh-nyuruh dan menyiksa anak-anak kecil dan remaja. Itu akan jadi jaminan hidup bagiku. Namun aku tak sudi harus makan dari recehan dan tangis yang mereka kumpulkan setiap hari"
>
> (I left because I refused to become like those scoundrels. I could have stayed and become the next scoundrel, ordering around and torturing small children and teenagers. It would have guaranteed my living. But I would not stoop to eating from the coins and tears they collect every day) (Khairen, 2022, p. 5)

This passage is the clearest evidence of a positive movement in the identity crisis. Rizki recognizes two available identities, the abuser and the refuser, and commits to the second at the cost of his material security. In Marcia's (1966) terms, this is not a foreclosed identity inherited from authority; it is a commitment made against the authority of the institution. His readiness to resist Pak Tono, the owner of the orphanage, confirms it: Pak Tono laughs at his plan to find work outside, but Rizki notes that the old man can no longer stop him, and that he would hit back if attacked (Khairen, 2022, p. 5). The virtue of fidelity, loyalty to a chosen set of values, begins to appear.

Yet the identity he achieves is fragile and double-edged. His choice is framed as a trade-off: at the orphanage he would certainly be fed, on the street perhaps not, "Tapi setidaknya aku tak harus melihat orang-orang itu jahat pada adik-adikku" ("But at least I would not have to watch those people be cruel to my sisters") (Khairen, 2022, p. 6). Leaving to protect his integrity also means leaving his sisters behind. At the same time, he has absorbed the label that the institution gave him:

> "Rizka dan si mungil? Mereka masih di sana. Tempat itu berhasil mengubah kami jadi berandalan, gelandangan, sampah masyarakat. Sudah dua tahun juga aku tak lagi bertemu mereka"
>
> (Rizka and the little one? They are still there. That place succeeded in turning us into hooligans, vagrants, the scum of society. It has been two years since I last saw them) (Khairen, 2022, p. 5)

Erikson (1968) describes a negative identity as one assembled from the roles a society presents as most undesirable. Rizki has refused to become a perpetrator, but he still describes himself as "berandalan, gelandangan, sampah masyarakat" ("hooligans, vagrants, the scum of society"). The same self-image returns near the end of the novel, when he tells the reader that people would never even notice "gelandangan sepertiku" ("a vagrant like me") and that his life has nothing interesting in it (Khairen, 2022, p. 231). Rizki thus holds a moral identity and a negative social identity at the same time. He knows what he will not do, but he cannot see himself as someone of worth.

Life outside the orphanage soon tests whether this moral identity can survive poverty. At a bus terminal, after two days without food, Rizki eats a plate of rice and fried tempeh without knowing how he will pay for it, and then sees a wallet lying unnoticed beside a bus:

> "Di saat beberapa sendok terakhir, aku masih belum tahu hendak membayar nasi ini dengan apa. Mataku kemudian terhenti pada satu benda kecil. Itu adalah dompet! Entah bagaimana ceritanya, dompet terjatuh dan tak ada yang melihat."
>
> (With the last few spoonfuls, I still did not know how I would pay for this rice. Then my eyes stopped on a small object. It was a wallet! Somehow it had fallen, and no one had seen it.) (Khairen, 2022, p. 9)

The scene stages the identity crisis as a concrete choice. When Rizki goes to pick up the wallet, his eyes meet those of the food-stall owner, who "hanya berdiri mematung, menanti apa yang akan aku lakukan berikutnya" ("just stood frozen, waiting to see what I would do next") (Khairen, 2022, p. 11). The watching eyes stand for society, which has already cast him as a likely thief. The wallet belongs to Rani, and when Rizki later chases her to return it, his first words are a defence of his identity rather than of his conduct: "Mba saya bukan copet, bukan maling" ("Miss, I am not a pickpocket, not a thief") (Khairen, 2022, p. 62). When the money inside turns out to have been taken by his sister Rizka, he tries to repay it from his own small earnings (Khairen, 2022, pp. 92, 111).

Journal of Language
Volume 8, Number 2, pp: 588-598
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14555

These efforts show that fidelity to his chosen values persists outside the orphanage, but under strain. Rizki also breaks open a mosque charity box during these desperate days (Khairen, 2022, p. 224), yet he counts it as a debt to be settled: "Lunas sudah utangku pada Khanza. Sekarang tinggal pada kotak amal" ("My debt to Khanza is paid. Now only the charity box remains") (Khairen, 2022, p. 88). He does not always act morally, but he continues to judge himself by the moral identity he chose. Others, however, judge him by the negative identity: Rani's family welcomes him, but she still watches him "seperti seorang penjahat" ("like a criminal") (Khairen, 2022, p. 101). Rizki's identity is thus divided between who he tries to be and who his environment insists he is.

4.3 Intimacy versus isolation outside the orphanage

When Rizki leaves the orphanage at eighteen, he enters the age of the sixth crisis, intimacy versus isolation. The task of this stage is to risk closeness and commitment to others. Rizki's most important relationships are with his sisters, and the novel shows that, in the end, he responds to the crisis by moving away from them rather than towards them. His relationship with them unfolds in three phases. First, after leaving the orphanage, he loses contact with them, so that when the narrative present begins, seven days before Eid, he has not seen them for two years (Khairen, 2022, p. 5). Second, during that final week the separation is briefly reversed: he is reunited with Khanza, whom Pak Tono is forcing to work, and he crosses paths with Rizka among the terminal gang (Khairen, 2022, pp. 224–225). Third, on the eve of Eid, after both sisters have been placed in new care, he withdraws again and chooses not to see them (Khairen, 2022, p. 235).

Within this final week, isolation is not his first response. In the days before Eid, Rizki moves toward closeness. He takes casual work carrying goods for shoppers (Khairen, 2022, p. 51), and when his youngest sister, Khanza, is being forced to work by Pak Tono, he brings her to his rented room to protect her (Khairen, 2022, p. 225). With the wages he earns, he keeps a promise to buy her Eid clothes:

> "Kini aku kembali merasakan keseruan memilih baju lebaran saat membelikan Khanza. “Tiga ya,” kataku menirukan kata ibu. Tapi entah memang dasarnya ia tak pernah hidup dengan orangtua, tak pernah merasakan bahwa punya baju Lebaran adalah sesuatu yang menyenangkan, Khanza hanya memilih satu saja."
>
> (Now I felt again the excitement of choosing Eid clothes as I bought them for Khanza. "Three, okay," I said, echoing my mother's words. But perhaps because she had never lived with parents, and had never felt that owning Eid clothes was something joyful, Khanza chose only one.) (Khairen, 2022, p. 85)

In this scene, Rizki steps into the role of the absent parent, even repeating his mother's words. For a moment, the warmth of family is restored, and he recalls that "Hatiku sempat senang sebentar setelah membelikan Khanza baju lebaran" ("My heart was briefly happy after buying Khanza her Eid clothes") (Khairen, 2022, p. 225). The word "sebentar" ("briefly") signals how fragile this closeness is.

His relationship with Rani follows the same pattern. It begins in mutual suspicion, as Rani takes him for a pickpocket (Khairen, 2022, pp. 62–63), and slowly turns toward trust. When he hesitates outside her family's house, he describes his approach as "satu langkah aku ragu, satu langkah aku yakin" ("one step I doubted, one step I was sure") (Khairen, 2022, p. 91), a precise image of the ambivalence of the intimacy stage. When he finally offers to repay

her money, Rani refuses it and, for the first time, addresses him respectfully as "Mas Rizki" (Khairen, 2022, p. 111). An opening for closeness appears. Rizki's response to it is decisive:

> "Tak aku balas pesan itu. Tak lama, Rani meneleponku. Tidak aku angkat. Sejak bertemu dengannya, banyak hal buruk terjadi di dalam hidupku. Begitu juga sejak bertemu denganku, banyak hal buruk terjadi pada ia dan keluarganya. Baiknya tak usahlah lagi berkomunikasi."
>
> (I did not reply to that message. Soon after, Rani called me. I did not answer. Since meeting her, many bad things had happened in my life. And since meeting me, many bad things had happened to her and her family. Better not to communicate anymore.) (Khairen, 2022, p. 230)

This passage is the clearest instance of distantiation in the novel. Rani's message brings good news, including that Khanza is now safe, yet Rizki ignores both her message and her call, and he even looks for a place to throw away the photo of her he has kept (Khairen, 2022, p. 230). His reason reveals the link between the stages: he believes that he brings misfortune to those close to him. Erikson (1968) argues that true intimacy is possible only when a person has a reasonably secure identity, because closeness risks the loss of a fragile self. Rizki's negative identity makes intimacy feel like harm, and withdrawal feels like protection, for others as much as for himself.

The negative resolution of the crisis is expressed most fully in the closing chapters, set on the eve of Eid al-Fitr. The festival, which in Indonesian culture is the most important moment of family reunion, becomes the measure of Rizki's isolation:

> "Malam tiba, suara takbiran bertalu-talu. Dulu saat masih dengan keluargaku, malam takbiran itu berbeda sekali. Udara di sekitar wajah pasti terasa seperti dimensi lain. Hangatnya percakapan, menu makanan, dan syukur, serta canda tawa memenuhi tiap ujung ruangan"
>
> (Night falls and the takbir calls ring out. Back when I was still with my family, the night of takbir was so different. The air around my face felt like another dimension. Warm conversation, food and gratitude, and laughter filled every corner of the room) (Khairen, 2022, p. 234)
>
> "Kini itu semua tak ada. Sudah lama tak ada. Kosong. Sendiri. Tak ada yang peduli."
>
> (Now all of that is gone. It has been gone for a long time. Empty. Alone. Nobody cares.) (Khairen, 2022, p. 234)

The contrast between the remembered warmth of family and the present emptiness shows that isolation is not Rizki's natural state but a loss he feels acutely. The short sentences "Kosong. Sendiri." ("Empty. Alone.") reduce his inner life to absence. Yet he also insists that the condition no longer deserves tears "karena memang sudah sangat terbiasa begini beberapa tahun terakhir" ("because I have grown so used to it these past few years") (Khairen, 2022, p. 234). Isolation has become habitual.

Rizki then withdraws not only from his family but from the wider community:

> "Mungkin besok aku takkan pergi shalat Idulfitri. Itu hanya akan membuatku sedih. Karena setiap orang sehabis itu pasti akan pergi ke rumah mereka atau bersilaturahim dengan keluarga sambil menikmati ketupat"

Journal of Language
Volume 8, Number 2, pp: 588-598
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14555

> (Maybe tomorrow I won't go to the Eid prayer. It would only make me sad. Because afterwards everyone will go home or visit their families while enjoying ketupat) (Khairen, 2022, p. 235)

Avoiding the Eid prayer is a form of what Erikson (1963) calls distantiation: keeping away from situations and people whose closeness threatens to expose one's pain. Rizki separates himself explicitly from the reader and from society: "Jika kalian di hari ini bersuka cita, maka aku tidak" ("If you rejoice today, I do not"), and he describes himself as growing ever drier in "gersangnya kehidupan" ("the barrenness of life") (Khairen, 2022, p. 231).

The most revealing passage is his silent farewell to his sisters:

> "Khanza, Rizka. Selamat berlebaran dengan tempat baru kalian masing-masing. Semoga hidup kalian membaik. Maaf tak ada keluarga. Besok baju lebaran yang abang belikan, pakai ya"
>
> (Khanza, Rizka. Happy Eid in your new homes. I hope your lives get better. Sorry there is no family. Tomorrow, wear the Eid clothes your big brother bought, okay) (Khairen, 2022, p. 235)

Here the two crises meet. The phrase "Maaf tak ada keluarga" ("Sorry there is no family") shows that Rizki still defines himself as the one responsible for giving his sisters a family, and blames himself for failing to do so. The Eid clothes he bought show that his care has not disappeared; the virtue of fidelity survives in a reduced form. But he expresses this care at a distance, without meeting them. According to the novel's ending, Rizki deliberately stays away because he feels he cannot even take care of himself, let alone others. Even when his sisters are adopted and the orphanage is re-established under Rani's care, he never returns. The crisis of intimacy is resolved towards isolation.

4.4 Uneven resolution of the crises and the meaning of the "best gift"

Read together, the three crises form a chain that illustrates the epigenetic principle. The mistrust created by abandonment makes it difficult for Rizki to believe that others, including institutions, will care for his sisters. The negative identity imposed by the orphanage makes him believe that he is "sampah masyarakat", someone who has nothing to offer. This movement from physical abuse to a damaging self-label echoes recent readings of violence in fiction, which show that institutional violence shifts from physical toward symbolic forms and reproduces itself across personal and social domains (Efrizah et al., 2026). When he reaches the stage in which he must commit to close relationships, these earlier vulnerabilities lead him to choose distance, even after Rani and Khanza offer him a place in their lives. His sense of failure as a substitute parent, a role he was forced to assume without any moratorium, becomes the reason he removes himself from the lives of those he loves.

The three crises, however, are not resolved to the same degree. The crisis of trust versus mistrust is resolved predominantly negatively: from the first page to the last, Rizki doubts that adults and institutions will care for those he loves. The crisis of identity versus role confusion reaches a partial positive resolution. Rizki makes a genuine moral commitment, refusing to abuse younger children and trying to repay what was lost, and in this sense he attains a measure of fidelity; at the same time, he continues to identify himself through the negative social label of a vagrant. The crisis of intimacy versus isolation is resolved predominantly negatively, since his brief moments of closeness with Khanza and Rani end in deliberate withdrawal. Rizki's development is therefore better described as

uneven than as simply unresolved: his moral identity survives, but it is not strong enough to carry him toward hope or love.

This reading adds a developmental dimension to previous studies of the novel. Nensilianti et al. (2024) found that the child characters pass through Piaget's cognitive stages, while Azzahra and Hayati (2023) traced the protagonist's efforts to meet his basic needs. The present analysis shows that cognitive maturation and the pursuit of needs do not guarantee psychosocial resolution: Rizki grows in understanding and acts with moral courage, yet the social conditions around him prevent him from achieving the virtues of hope and love.

The title of the novel gains an ironic force from this perspective. At the end of the story, Rani, Rizka, and Khanza regard Rizki as their "kado terbaik", the best gift, because his struggle moved Rani to rebuild the orphanage and to give the children a second chance at family. Rizki gives others the security he never receives himself. The novel thus suggests that the costs of institutional neglect fall most heavily on those who, like Rizki, are forced to become caregivers before they have been cared for.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the psychosocial crises of Rizki in J.S. Khairen's *Kado Terbaik* using Erik Erikson's theory. Three interrelated crises were identified. The crisis of trust versus mistrust is re-activated by his mother's abandonment and resolved toward mistrust of adults and institutions. The crisis of identity versus role confusion, faced in the orphanage without any psychosocial moratorium, produces a moral identity, shown in his refusal to become an abuser, alongside an internalized negative identity as a "vagrant". His moral identity survives the test of poverty outside the orphanage, although not without lapses. The crisis of intimacy versus isolation, faced after he leaves the orphanage, is resolved toward isolation: after brief moments of closeness with Khanza and Rani, he deliberately cuts off contact and withdraws from communal life.

None of the three crises reaches a fully positive resolution, but they differ in degree: the crises of trust and intimacy are resolved predominantly negatively, whereas the identity crisis reaches a partial positive resolution through moral commitment, even as negative social identification persists. This pattern illustrates Erikson's view that poorly resolved early crises shape how later ones are met. The novel portrays how institutional child neglect can obstruct the formation of basic virtues even in a young person of strong moral character. This study is limited to a single novel and to three of Erikson's stages. Further research could compare *Kado Terbaik* with other Indonesian novels about children in institutional care, or examine the sisters' development as a contrast to Rizki's.

References

Ardiati, A. R., & Ahmadi, A. (2022). Novel *Kado Terbaik* karya JS Khairen: Kajian psikologi kriminologi. *Bapala, 6*(4), 107–119.

Ayath, M. I. S., Badara, A., & Dinar, S. S. (2024). Konflik tokoh utama dalam novel *Kado Terbaik* karya J.S. Khairen. *Jurnal Pesastra (Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra), 1*(1), 22–31. https://doi.org/10.36709/pesastra.v1i1.7

Azzahra, H., & Hayati, Y. (2023). Hierarki kebutuhan dasar tokoh utama dalam novel *Kado Terbaik* karya J.S. Khairen. *Persona: Kajian Bahasa dan Sastra, 2*(4), 638–652. https://doi.org/10.24036/jpers.v2i4.185

Efrizah, D., Purwarno, P., Sari, I., Ali, N., & Fitriani, E. S. (2026). Interdependent cultural and postcolonial readings of violence in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *Aksara, 38*(1), 280–293. https://doi.org/10.29255/aksara.v38i1.4961.280-293

Endraswara, S. (2008). *Metodologi penelitian psikologi sastra*. MedPress.

Journal of Language
Volume 8, Number 2, pp: 588-598
e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v8i2.14555

Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood and society* (2nd ed.). W. W. Norton.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. W. W. Norton.

Erikson, E. H. (1982). *The life cycle completed*. W. W. Norton.

Iswinarno, C., & Varwati, L. (2025, July 29). *Ribuan panti asuhan diduga ilegal dan berkedok donasi, Kemensos ancam tutup paksa*. Suara.com. https://www.suara.com/news/2025/07/29/080609/ribuan-panti-asuhan-diduga-ilegal-dan-berkedok-donasi-kemensos-ancam-tutup-paksa

Khairen, J. S. (2022). *Kado terbaik*. Gramedia Widiasarana Indonesia.

Kosiaroh, L., Sunggingwati, D., & Ashanty, C. (2017). Jesse's psychosocial development in the novel *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult (2004). *Ilmu Budaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, dan Budaya, 1*(2), 171–181. https://doi.org/10.30872/jbssb.v1i2.684

Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego-identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*(5), 551–558. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023281

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Muliawati, A. (2024, July 26). *KPAI: Ada 431 kasus eksploitasi anak 2021–2023, perlu cyberpol tiap Polda*. detikNews. https://news.detik.com/berita/d-7458452/kpai-ada-431-kasus-eksploitasi-anak-2021-2023-perlu-cyberpol-tiap-polda

Nensilianti, N., Ridwan, R., & Imran, M. (2024). Perkembangan kognitif tokoh anak dalam novel "Kado Terbaik" karya J.S Khairen (kajian psikologi Jean Piaget). *Jurnal Sastra Indonesia (SASINDO), 13*(2), 448–460. https://doi.org/10.24114/sasindo.v13i2.57860

Tribrata News Polri. (2024, July 23). *KPAI beberkan data eksploitasi anak selama 2023*. https://tribratanews.polri.go.id/blog/pppa-9/kpai-beberkan-data-eksploitasi-anak-selama-2023-76776

Wahyudin, W., Abidin, Z., & Isnaini, I. (2026). Nilai-nilai pendidikan agama Islam dalam novel "Kado Terbaik" karya JS Khairen. *Jurnal Humanitas: Katalisator Perubahan dan Inovator Pendidikan, 12*(2), 625–640. https://doi.org/10.29408/jhm.v12i2.34524

Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1956). *Theory of literature* (3rd ed.). Harcourt, Brace & World.