



## Figurative language used in a novel by Arafat Nur on the Aceh conflict

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### Abstract

This paper aims to describe the figurative language used in the novel *Burung Terbang di Kelam Malam* (hereafter, BTKM, or translated as 'A Bird Flies in The Dark of Night'), written by Arafat Nur in 2014. BTKM is one of the ten novels by this author whose language style is strongly influenced by the 32-year long conflict between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement. The research data are the figurative language used in the novel in the form of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs; be it a part of the descriptions, the monologues, or the dialogues between characters. The data are analyzed using the stylistic analysis. The result of the research shows that the novel uses simile most (32 occurrences), followed by satire (22), hyperbole (18), metonymy (16), metaphor (13), sarcasm (11), synecdoche (9), personification and irony (each with 8 occurrences), and with litotes (6) as the least used figurative language. These results imply that the most used figurative language became powerful language tools to represent the social, political, and cultural problems in Acehnese society during the conflict and the post conflict era. The psychology of the characters is presented through language that associates with fear, sensitivity, anxiety and insecurity in the middle of the conflict and among people with power who are pitiless.

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### Introduction

Indonesian novelist Arafat Nur has written a number of compelling novels with an Acehnese background. The plots of his ten latest novels are closely linked to the various social, cultural, and political issues arising from the conflict between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement which started in 1973 (Shaw, 2008). The conflict finally ended after the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of Peace in Helsinki, Finland on August 15, 2005 (Ronnie, 2016). However, war crimes committed by both parties during the conflict are deeply imprinted in the collective memory of the Acehnese. Those crimes are partially depicted in the novels.

Bitter experiences such as rape and sex slavery, illegitimate children, arson, torture, sadistic killings, abandoned fields, paranoia, severe traumas, and children being forced out of school color the novels by Arafat Nur.

Arafat Nur was born in Lubuk Pakam, North Sumatra on December 22, 1974. Even though he has written many poems and short stories since he was young, he began his debut as a writer in 1997 when he had his works published in a number of mass media in Indonesia, such as in North Sumatra, Aceh and Jakarta. Nur has lived most of his life all over Aceh and was literally exposed to the effects of the political conflict between the Acehnese rebellions and the Indonesian government that started in 1973 until 2005. He has experienced being kidnapped, tortured and had his house burned down till his family had nowhere to live. This background ultimately influenced the themes of his works, raising the life of the

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Acehnese people during those times. Besides having worked as an honorary teacher, Nur also served as a journalist. His ability to produce quality works has led Nur to win several awards in Indonesia.

The use of various figurative languages seems to be caused by Nur's decades of empirical evidence involving trial and error; that he has lived through this is enough experience of living in a sadistic, sarcastic, and ironic setting of the Aceh conflict. Based on our preliminary study of the novels written by Nur, almost all of his works are known to use ironic, satirical, and sarcastic language, in addition to other forms of figurative language. Nevertheless, we found the novel *Burung Terbang di Kelam Malam* (hereafter, BTKM, or translated as 'A Bird Flies in The Dark of Night'), to be the most powerful of his novels in its use of various kinds of figurative language. This 376 pages novel is published by PT. Yogyakarta Library in 2014.

In Nur's BTKM, it can be said that the setting of the story is after the signing of the Helsinki MoU (Memorandum of Understanding), which was on August 15, 2005 (Ronnie, 2016). The beginning of the story starts with the condition of the people who are mostly in poverty due to the remnants of the war that has just ended (p. 1). The story then focuses on the progress of Mr. Beransyah's (the antagonist) election as mayor of Lamlhok, a city in Aceh. By the villagers, he is well known to be depraved but acts and pretends to be pious. He has many wives and mistresses, sells drugs, and maintained good relationship with corrupt armed forces. Fais (the protagonist), a journalist, reveals the mayor's corrupt endeavors through his writings in the newspapers. This leads Mr. Beransyah's resentment towards Fais, and secretly orders his men to assassinate Fais. Referring to the real situation in Aceh at the time, the election period of regents and mayors in post-conflict Aceh was on December 11, 2006, and they were inaugurated on February 8, 2007 (this is for northern Aceh and the city of Lhokseumawe) (Hasan, 2011). Therefore, despite the story does not provide the exact date of its setting, it can be said that the time of the story in this novel is between early December 2006 to late February, 2007.

Consequently, language is considered as a system of signs that deliver ideas and the printed language is a powerful force that can influence the opinions and even emotions of the readers (Sari & Yusuf, 2012). The use of figurative language in a work can determine the quality of the literary work itself (Endraswara, 2008). Therefore, in order to further understand the use of figurative language in BTKM in the context of Aceh conflict would be an interesting study to conduct. The situation that triggered suffering, hatred, revenge, and lust for power are presented in an enthralling language. Various studies on the use of figurative language in Indonesian novels have been conducted before (Faricha, 2015; Noor & Santoso, 2017), but none has focused on the work by Arafat Nur. Therefore, this study intends to fill in the gap.

Figurative language is giving an effect to language that is considered ordinary or standard and these figures are essential to the way we think and perceive the world. According to Sakadolskis (2003, p. 24), "figurative language expresses one thing in terms normally denoting another with which it may be regarded as analogous" and it further refers to the style of language (Ratna, 2009). Therefore, figurative language can be a

part of literary stylistics. In relation to this, Endraswara (2008) explains that this style is meant to achieve beauty in many literary works. Therefore, authors use and play the language to neatly wrap their ideas with the intention of creating exquisiteness favored by readers.

In the case of language in novels, the style may be personal and social. A personal style is when the author's language is distinctive. Even when he or she dies, such distinctive work shall live within the hearts of readers. Meanwhile, the use of social style can change depending on the context of the story and it is not always sustained.

The main types of figurative language are metaphors, metonymy, personification, and synecdoche (*paris pro toto and totum pro parte*) (Junus, 1989). Simile, sarcasm and satire are also other types of figurative language (Endraswara, 2008). Additionally, there are dramatic elements of language, which is comparison (Sikana, 2008), and irony, sarcasm, litotes and hyperbole (Fananie, 2002). And so, it can be concluded that the major forms of figurative language are hyperbole, personification, irony, sarcasm, satire, metaphor, metonymy, simile, litotes, and synecdoche.

Hyperbole is a form of figurative language that contains an exaggerated statement by levitating something (Keraf, 2005) in terms of quantity, size, or nature in order to emphasize a statement or situation to intensify or enhance the implication and measurement. The aim is to enhance additional picture to a situation, even for the drive of propaganda. Additionally, there is also a figurative language that gives inanimate objects properties that are exclusive to humans. This is called personification. Here, there is a similarity between the nature of inanimate objects with the nature of human beings (Nurgiyantoro, 2002; Siswantoro, 2010) or an equation of inanimate objects with humans. And so, inanimate objects are made to do, think, see, hear, and so forth like humans do (Al-Ma'ruf, 2009).

Irony, on the other hand, is something that contradicts its references. This means that irony is a kind of figurative language that states things with little effort at generating a realistic picture. Black (2006, p. 110) explains irony as "a marked disparity between what is said and the situation is often indicative of irony". This is in accordance with the opinion of Keraf (2005) who expresses that irony is an allusion or contempt to insinuate something non-realistically. Thus, sarcasm is a type of figurative language with a greater reference than irony. Sarcasm may be either ironic or not, but it is clear that it is spiteful to hear (Keraf, 2005). Its aim is to mock, ridicule or teases someone or something. Similar to satire, most of the sarcasm in the novel is towards the government or corporations of the country. Meanwhile, Baldick (2008) defines satire as employing humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to uncover and criticize people's irrationality or depravities, especially in the context of politics and topical issues. It is further seen as humor used to communicate a political and critical social message (Hamukwaya, 2016).

A metaphor is the comparison between two objects or ideas that each act as the tenor (the object being compared) and the vehicle (the thing that it is compared to). According to Minderop (2005), a metaphor is a force that compares one object to another directly where one functions as the source

and the other as the target. Meanwhile, in novels, metaphors are usually divided into two types, explicit and implicit metaphors (Siswantoro, 2010). Implicit metaphors are metaphors that make comparisons, while metaphors that make comparisons in the clear form are known as explicit metaphors. Then there is metonymy that is used as a substitute for another name (Ratna, 2009) or a style that indicates a close link or linkage (Keraf, 2005; Nurgiyantoro, 2002). It is somewhat analogous to metaphor because both describe a connection by replacing one term for another. Nevertheless, metaphor is based on similarity and metonymy expresses relations between objects, such as part-whole, cause-effect, and so on.

Simile is an explicit and direct comparison; the objects are compared together using words such as 'like', 'as', and so forth. Sometimes the comparative words are not used, but are implied (Al-Ma'ruf, 2009) because it is "a direct comparison between things that do not always resemble essentially" (Minderop, 2005, p. 52). On the contrary, a form of figurative language in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of its contrary is called litotes. Yuan (2017, p. 253) defines it "a trope in which an affirmative is expressed by the negation of its opposite". This style is more likely to describe something not good or bad in a contrary manner, which is good or not bad. It can be interpreted as an expression of understating a fact with the intent to humble it. Finally, synecdoche means belonging together and being a part of a linkage, using a piece of something to represent the whole thing or using the whole thing to represent a part of it (Keraf, 2005; Nurgiyantoro, 2002). It can be said that its function is to replace a whole by the part or the part by the whole. Examples for each of the figurative language under discussion are presented in the results section to strengthen the meaning of those terms.

## Methodology

The source of data from this descriptive qualitative research is a document in the form of novel entitled *Burung Terbang di Kelam Malam* (or BTKM) by Arafat Nur. The data of this research is the sequences of the novel which contains figurative language. Data can be in the form of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, whether in the description, the monologues, as well as the dialogues between the characters in the novel.

To collect data in this research, the documenter technique is used in accordance with Satori and Komariah (2011) who state that a document study is one of qualitative research data collection techniques, besides interview and focus group discussion. Thus, the data are collected by the following steps.

1. Reading the novel *Burung Terbang di Kelam Malam* multiple times,
2. Marking the parts of the novel that use figurative language,
3. Sorting the marked data by the kind of figurative language found in the novel.

The data of this study were analyzed using stylistic analysis, especially of figurative language. Varghese (2012, p. 46) explains that "stylistic analysis is used as an analytical tool to see textual patterns and its significance. It is based on statistical data that validate how language, vocabulary and syntax are used to bring about interpretation of the text". Therefore, this

type of analysis is to assist in endorsing how words are expended to generate interpretation of the text. Additionally, it further uncovers the writer's meaning or style in writing.

## Results and Discussion

The figurative language found in the novel BTKM from the most used to the least is shown in Table 1.

Based on Table 1, the most used type of figurative language in the novel is simile; meanwhile the least used one is litotes. Each of these types of figurative language with definitions and examples found in the novel is presented in the following sub-sections.

**Table 1** Types of Figurative Language in the Novel BTKM

No	Types of figurative language	Occurrences	Percentage
1	Simile	32	21.62
2	Satire	22	14.87
3	Hyperbole	18	12.16
4	Metonymy	16	10.81
5	Sarcasm	16	10.81
6	Metaphor	13	8.78
7	Synecdoche	9	6.08
8	Personification	8	5.41
9	Irony	8	5.41
10	Litotes	6	4.05
Total		148	100.00

### Simile

Simile was found to be the most frequently-occurring type of figurative language in the novel, with 32 occurrences or 21.62 percent. An example for this figure extracted from the novel are as shown below (D refers to data, while D1 refers to the first data displayed in this sub-section, and so forth).

(D1) *Terdengar suara berisik bercampur tawa, sesekali teriakan tertahan, tak ubah seperti suasana pasar atau pesta di perkampungan.* [Loud noises filled with laughter were heard, with occasional suppressed screaming, **like the situation in a market or a party in the village.**] (Nur, 2014, p. 35).

The verdict in D1 is said by Fais, the protagonist and main character of the story. The noise and laughter are from Mr. Beransyah's guests who visit his house. Fais describes them as greedy-looking people who take advantages of the poor. The word *seperti* 'like' is used to compare the noises that Fais hears to sounds commonly heard in a busy market or a party in a village. In the Acehnese context, when a family holds a wedding party at their home, the whole village is invited, and even some neighboring villages and relatives who live farther. And so, a typical Acehnese wedding party in a village can be said to be noisy with hundreds (and sometimes even thousands of guests attending it), plus traditional dances and music for the newlyweds and guests (Yusuf, 2002). The image created in this event is that noises heard in the terminal (with people talking, laughing and music turned on in some shops or stands) are similar to the noises heard in parties or a busy market.

### Satire

Satire was the second most used figurative language in the novel, with 22 occurrences or 14.87 percent. Most of the satire employed in the novel is to ridicule the Indonesian government and corporations. An example from the novel is:

(D2) *Ketika hujan turun, langsung muncul kubangan di mana-mana. Tiga bulan selanjutnya, badan jalan pun sudah tumbuh rumput, dan rumput semakin subur manakala tumpah darah manusia di atasnya.* [When it rains, there are puddles everywhere. Three months later, the road has grown grass, and the grass is more fertile when human blood spills on it.] (Nur, 2014, p. 70).

The statement in D2 is Fais' testimony about the poor quality of the main roads in his city. During construction, most of the money from the government project are compensated illegally for the army, rebels, officials, and contractors. As a result, it is the people who suffer with the condition of the road being quickly damaged. Again, this story uses the setting of the Acehnese condition during the conflict between the Acehnese rebellions and the Indonesian government between the years 1973–2005. It illustrates the perversion of the government's lack of social and administrative responsibility in Aceh (Ronnie, 2016). Therefore, ridicule in the story is to criticize the development of the province and political issues at those times and is frequently found in the story. D2 contains satire for ridiculing the country's government. The government is known to always propose new development programs for change, such as fixing the roads, but the state of the country remains the same. The war between the Acehnese rebellions and the military also caused many deaths, and thus the phrase "when human blood spills on it" refers to this condition. Although the essential function of the government is to ensure or encourage its people's safety and prosperity, the Acehnese felt that they did not receive any of those from the Indonesian government. This condition is also described in reality by many reports who studied the conflict in Aceh (see Aspinall, 2008; Melvin, 2018; Reid, 2006; Ronnie, 2016).

### Hyperbole

The third most used figurative language in the novel is hyperbole, with 18 occurrences or 12.16 percent. Hyperbole in the novel is as in this example:

(D3) *Aku juga memikirkanmu, balasku berusaha menutupi kesalahan. Makanya, hari itu aku berusaha setengah mati untuk menemuimu.* [I think about you, too, I replied, trying to cover up (my) mistake. So, that day I **nearly died trying to meet you.**] (Nur, 2014, p. 23).

D3 expresses Fais' conversation with Safira in a clothing store. Safira is the shopkeeper who later becomes Fais' girlfriend. He loves her very much for she is gentle, understanding and modest. The use of hyperbole in the story has much to do with the psychology of the characters, especially with the existence of their pride and suffering from severe anxiety and fear of the situation, in addition to having a strong life spirit to go through the tough condition of their living. The phrase "tried half to death to meet you" in D3 implies that the speaker had tried with great difficulty and challenges to meet the girl. He did not almost die by doing so, yet his efforts were vigorous so that he

defines himself as if he almost did die. This situation can be related to reality during the time in which the novel is set, where mandatory "night watch" was held by the military and civilian militia groups in villages of the province. Individuals who were accused of being involved in rebellion or having any connections with the rebellions were caught, tortured and even be shot to death on sight (Melvin, 2018). Seeing the situation, the author of the story described how even romance between a man and a woman could be difficult at the time since the Acehnese were not even free to visit their neighbor's house without having the fear of being accused falsely and caught by the military.

### Metonymy

A number of 16 occurrences of metonymy or 10.81 percent were found in the novel. In the novel, metonymy illustrates inner conflicts of the characters that live among people who commit sins, are hypocritical and vicious, and good people who patiently endure tyranny. Therefore, these injustices and tyranny were depicted in the story through metonymy. For example:

(D4) *Masalah ini memang buruk sekali. Aku sudah terlanjur memulai lagi, melumuri diriku dengan lumpur, noda-noda yang mengotori dan merusak.* [This problem is indeed very bad. I already started doing it again, **smearing myself with mud, stains that are tainting and tarnishing.**] (Nur, 2014, p. 25).

In D4, Fais describes his affairs with Nana, one of the wives of Mr. Beransyah, which are done repeatedly over time. Even though he feels guilty, but when his desire rises, his feeling of sin disappears. The excerpt in this example contains metonymy because it uses another name to describe someone who commits sins. The concept attached is "smearing myself with mud, stains that are tainting and tarnishing". The phrase "smearing with mud, stains" is the same as sinning because the word mud to the Acehnese is a thing that can pollute someone's body (i.e. make dirty).

### Sarcasm

A number of 16 occurrences or 10.81 percent are also found for sarcasm in the novel. In the novel, an example is:

(D5) *Namun, katanya, dia tidak suka membaca koran. Landok tua itu akan menjadi walikota? Yang benar saja? Apa kamu tidak salah dengar? Tanyanya heran* [However, he said, he did not like to read newspapers. **That old billy-goat will be the new mayor?** Are you kidding me? Did you hear it correctly? She asked with disbelief.] (Nur, 2014, p. 59).

The fuss in D5 is uttered by Haliza, one of Mr. Mr. Beransyah's wives who he has not slept with for quite a while and ignored. Haliza has even thought that Mr. Beransyah is dead. When Fais informs her that Mr. Beransyah is one of the candidates for mayor, she had a fit. The hidden circumstances in this story tells sarcasm of how some men in Aceh at the time could easily harass women because the laws were not well-defined in a conflicted area. Many uncivilized abuses of human rights were committed, leaving a lasting resentment in Acehnese society (Aspinall, 2008), and this included rapes and sexual harassments towards women (Ronnie, 2016). Similarly, the novel also exhibits this situation in the plot. The excerpt in D5 contains sarcasm for describing Mr. Beransyah as a *landok*

tua 'billy-goat'. In the Acehnese culture, billy-goats are associated with their carnal desire to mate with many female goats, so this expression is considered very harsh, because it directly describes men who are promiscuous or who harass women. This act is considered ill-mannered and offensive by the society.

#### Metaphor

The sixth used figurative language in the novel is metaphor, with 13 occurrences or 8.78 percent. For example in the novel:

(D6) *Tak jauh beda dengan Aida, begitulah kira-kira. Hanya saja, Haliza menjadi perempuan kota yang lebih maju dan terbuka, tapi bukan dalam artian binal.* [Not much different from Aida, that's about it. It's just that **Haliza became a more developed and open city woman, but not in a wild sense.**] (Nur, 2014, p. 50).

In D6, Fais describes Haliza as not much different from Aida, another one of Mr. Beransyah's wives. Both are innocent. As a journalist, Fais has first investigated the presence of Aida in Mr. Beransyah's life and her house before moving on to Haliza. Thus, in D6, the metaphor is in explaining the state of two of Mr. Beransyah's wives. Aida and Haliza are both village girls and Haliza has moved to the city during the conflict. The author made a comparison between the two women, that even though they both came from similar places for their upbringing, Haliza is now more developed and open minded compared to Aida who still lives in the village. Besides that, the author tacitly describe the conditions of villages in Aceh during the conflict were very under-developed; despite Aceh being the third largest contributor to Indonesia's national revenue in the 1980s, thus in the following decade, Aceh was the seventh poorest province out of the 27 provinces in Indonesia (Ronnie, 2016). Almost half of the Acehnese people lived in poverty, and almost half of villages were categorized as underdeveloped (Ronnie, 2016) and most had no electricity (Reid, 2006). Aspinall (2008) have reported that that the central issues of conflict were economic inequality and underdevelopment in which the Acehnese did not receive from the central government of Indonesia.

#### Synecdoche

Among the least used of figurative language in the novel is synecdoche, with only nine occurrences or 6.08 percent. An example from the novel is:

(D7) *Sebelum menjadi wartawan, aku tidak tahu apa-apa tentang dunia, apalagi mengenal sosok lelaki itu.* [Before becoming a journalist, I do not know anything about the world, let alone be acquainted with that man.] (Nur, 2014, p. 69).

In D7, Fais is describing his innocent being before becoming a journalist. After becoming a journalist, he found out that in this world there are depraved humans, such as Mr. Beransyah, who shows others that he is pious, but is actually lecherous. Hence, D7 contains synecdoche in the use of the phrase, 'I know nothing about the world'; it does not mean the whole world, but only Aceh (*totem pro parte*) in accordance with the context of the novel.

#### Personification

A number of 8 occurrences or 5.41 percent of personification were found in the novel. An example in the novel is shown below:

(D8) *Bus terus melaju kencang, bergoyang-goyang, mengguncang halus tubuh penumpang oleh banyaknya lubang di jalan.* [The bus kept on going fast, rocking, and shaking the passengers' bodies by the number of holes in the road.] (Nur, 2014, p. 106).

Here, Fais describes the terrible road conditions when he is on the bus and made the other passenger feel upset, too, with him. The excerpt in D8 displays personification by describing the nature of a car like a human that can shake, but the car is an inanimate object. Likewise, the phrase "shaking the passengers' bodies" mean as if the car can shake passengers in a polite way. Again, the personification in this example is followed by another criticism to the condition of the government's development programs that is not improving because of the terrible road conditions that are not established across the province.

#### Irony

Similar to personification, there were also 8 occurrences or 5.41 percent of irony that were found in the novel. An example in the novel is:

(D9) *Air sirop itu bukannya meredakan, melainkan malah menambah gatal tenggorokanku.* [The syrup (drink) did not heal me, but instead it made my throat itch even more.] (Nur, 2014, p. 121).

The expression above is described by Fais when he visited Rahmah to seek information on Mr. Beransyah. Rahmah is also one of Mr. Beransyah's wives who sincerely accepted polygamy and prayed for her husband to live quietly with his other wives. She gives him some syrup water that is described by Fais as in D9. And so, the excerpt in D9 contains irony directed at Rahmah, who is considered by Fais, to have serve him a drink that is distasteful. Instead of relieving thirst, the drink made Fais throat itches. In other words, the drink is disliked or does not have the proper taste to be served to the guest. The Acehnese are known for their hospitality (Fata, Yusuf, & Sari, 2018), as seen in their saying "*mulia jamee ranub lam puan, mulia rakan mameh suara*" [honor (your) guests by presenting betel in a fine container; honor (your) friends with good words]. Therefore, for guests, only the best food and drink shall be served by the host.

#### Litotes

Finally, litotes is the least frequently used types of figurative language found in the novel, with only 6 occurrences or 4.05 percent. For example in the novel:

(D10) *Tidak ada lelaki baik-baik yang bersedia mengawinku. Jadi, aku memilih jalan hidup seperti ini saja, mungkin hanya untuk sementara waktu atau bisa jadi selama-lamanya.* [No good man is willing to marry me. So, I chose this way of solitary life, maybe it is just temporary or it could be forever.] (Nur, 2014, p. 142).

D10 is Nana's expression to Fais. Nana is one of the wives of Tuan Beransyah. She is judged as a "bad girl" from her behavior

who likes to accept any man who can provide her with money and expensive things. Through the use of litotes, the language presents the act of desperation of the Acehnese men and women who are insecure. This trait illustrates the condition of the people who have lost self-confidence, trust and dignity, and these traits are replaced with anxiety and fear in the midst of embers of conflict. The excerpt in D10 shows that Nana has the intention to abase herself by saying that that she does not attract any good men so none wants to marry her.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

The study found 10 types of figurative language in the novel BTKM, which appears from the most to the least as: simile, satire, hyperbole, metonymy, metaphor, sarcasm, synecdoche, personification, irony, and litotes. Simile, satire, hyperbole, metonymy, metaphor and sarcasm become powerful language tools to represent the social, political, and cultural problems in Acehnese society during the conflict and the post conflict era. The psychology of the characters is presented through language that associates with fear, sensitivity, anxiety and insecurity in the middle of the conflict and among people with power who are pitiless.

Although this paper has attempted to answer the research questions of the study, there are also some limitations that are necessary to put forward. First, for the sake of focus and concision, we chose to focus on just one of Arafat Nur's novels that are written with the Acehnese conflict background, by choosing the most well-known one among them. As a result, to generalize the results, future research should also involve his other novels and even related novels written by other authors. Second, there are more types/or examples of figurative language in novels, and so future researchers should consider adding more of the figures to more novels under study to expand the analysis of figurative language use in novels which narrates about the lives of people living in a political conflict situation.

## Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of Interest.

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