

## On Simulacrum and Intellectualism in *Di Negeri Belalang* by Anwar Ridhwan

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### Abstract

This article is concerned with the tendency observable in the critical reception by literary scholars and critics of Anwar Ridhwan's third novel, *Di Negeri Belalang* (henceforth, DNB). Many scholars and critics believe that DNB is replete with intellectual discourse. Even Anwar Ridhwan's claims that his novels are written based on the Malay-Islamic tradition. However, this admission draws attention to the publisher's blurb of DNB which associates this work with the concept of simulacrum, a Western literary theory that is rooted in the philosophy of postmodernism. It is generally known that the philosophy of postmodernism is in stark conflict with the principle of *tawhid* in Islam. Indirectly, this reveals a certain contradiction in Anwar Ridhwan's admission of DNB's intellectualism. Therefore, this study aims to identify DNB's tendency, by fulfilling two objectives: analyzing the work by Anwar Ridhwan and summarizing the question of intellectualism that is said to be contained in its pages. This article employs the framework of *Persuratan Baru* (henceforth, PB), which is a framework of analysis that is formulated by a local scholar. This choice is based on the ideas of PB which discuss the questions of knowledge, intellectualism, and Islam in literature. By employing PB, this study succeeds in summarizing the question of intellectualism in DNB. This analysis can explain the tendency contained in *Di Negeri Belalang* which portrays the reality of human life as being ever surreal, which is one of the elements of simulacrum in the philosophy of postmodernism. This study finds that the tendency referred to contradicts the worldview of Islam that is rooted in *tawhid*.

**Keywords:** Intellectualism, Knowledge, Simulacrum, *Persuratan Baru*

### Introduction

The 85 pages *Di Negeri Belalang* (henceforth DNB) is the third work by Anwar Ridhwan (henceforth Anwar) and is published by Marwilis Publisher & Distributors Sdn. Bhd in 1989. The publication of this work has invited all sorts of critical receptions from literary scholars and critics. Among whom is Kelantan (1991) (henceforth Othman) who thinks that DNB is brought to light by Anwar's mastery of what he expressed as a 'new knowledge in literature', and therefore rendering DNB an 'intellectual novel'. Othman also explains what is meant by 'knowledge' as the utilization of new writing techniques, according to him has portrayed Anwar as a mature 'intellectual literature' (Othman, 1991, p. 84).

Another is Mawar Shafie (henceforth Mawar) views DNB as an intertextual novel since it provides information and 'new meanings' (Mawar's own words) on previous works (Mawar, 2010, p. 156). The intertextuality contained in this novel is said to have elevated it as an intellectual novel that 'enhances the authorship ideology' of Anwar, as she summarizes:

It [intertextuality] renders a Malay work [including *Di Negeri Belalang*] not stagnant, instead, a text of heteroglossia [which is produced out of heterogeneous sources and ideas] or a text of heteroglot and the author a creative-innovative one...enhancing the "authorship ideology" [often referred to as the "thought" or "intellectual" aspect] as presented by Anwar Ridhwan (Mawar, 2010, p. 444).

*Laporan Panel Anugerah Sastera Negara 2009* (henceforth LPASN 2009) sees DNB as filled with questions of sociopolitics and is strengthened with an experimental style of writing. Hence, DNB can be considered as challenging the intellect where readers are said to 'have to think' (LPASN words) to understand it (LPASN, 2009, p. 31-34). Consequently, LPASN considers DNB as an 'intellectual novel' that enlightens the readers since it guides them to what is expressed as an 'intellectual search', as stated in the following passage:

Readers [of DNB] are guided to see the social and human problems in an *intellectual search*, in an extensive manner, intensive, and goes beyond the boundaries of personal concerns [stress added] (LPASN, 2009, p. 37).

The critical receptions above tend to acknowledge DNB by Anwar Ridhwan as an 'intellectual novel'. Also closely related to this acknowledgment is Anwar's admission of the importance of 'intellectualism' in his literary activities. In an interview by Sahlan Mohd. Saman (henceforth Sahlan), Anwar stressed the importance of literature instilling 'intellectual' values in readers. In this context, Anwar emphasizes that good literary works could play their role as 'intellectual' platforms that contribute to human life (Sahlan, 1993, p. 55-58). No less important is the fact that his novels are written within the Malay-Islam tradition that encompasses his writings (Anwar, 1999, p. 17). Based on the critical reception, and Anwar's admission as the novelist, it is not a stretch to say that DNB presents itself in Malay literature as an 'intellectual novel' which is produced in the context of Malay-Islam tradition.

Next, attention is moved to DNB's appearance represented by its cover. The publisher's blurb written on the back cover states that DNB is produced based on the element of 'simulacrum'. The word 'simulacrum', according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (8th Edition), means "something that looks like something else or that is made to look like something else". According to *Oxford Reference* (2015), this word is used interchangeably with 'simulation' which is explained thus, "the simulacrum is essentially the copy of a copy, that is to say, the copy of something that is not itself an original and is hence an utterly degraded form". Based on these definitions, it can be said that the term and meaning of 'simulacrum' emerged within the discourse of postmodernism, which is a philosophy and a strand of thought hailed within the Western world at the end of the '70s and early '80s (Stuart, 1998, p. 3). Postmodernism is a philosophy that is based on the rejection of any 'absolute terms', as expressed famously by Jean-Francois Lyotard as an "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Hutcheon, 1994, p. 186). As a theory, it addresses the question of 'reality', which, in this case, rejects any form of absolute reality in life. As a result, any 'reality' that is presented and portrayed is considered

an 'artificial reality'. In other words, it celebrates the 'loss of (absolute) reality'. It is this 'loss of reality' that is referred to by Jean Baudrillard as 'hyperreality'. In this context, 'hyperreality' refers to the 'loss of reality' caused by the dissipation of the boundaries between 'reality' and 'imagination', as explained in *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought* (1998, p. 281), "[Hyperreality] is to indicate 'the loss of the real', where distinctions between surface and depth, the real and the imaginary no longer exist. The world of the hyperreal is where image and reality implode." To put it differently, the simulacrum theory rejects the 'absoluteness of reality'. Indeed, it is the very rejection of reality that puts the simulacrum theory under the discourse of postmodernism. It is the rejection of reality that underpins the postmodern principle of doubting every form of absoluteness (Stuart, 1998, p. 3).

In the context of literary writing, the simulacrum theory assumes the role of a storytelling technique which no longer pictures what is considered to be the reality of life. That is to say, 'literature' as a 'documentation of the reality of life' as espoused by *Realism* is rejected. Hence, the worlds pictured in works produced through simulacrum are not as they are. The simulacrum technique, therefore, presents a story with qualities and contents that are opposite to real life or 'reality'. In this context, it can be said that the stories told through this technique tend to be considered as 'surreal stories' that are opposed to 'reality'. This is because the 'real world' is fictionalized in a surreal way. 'Surrealness' that is meant here refers to images that are different from the original images, and therefore make possible images that can be considered surreal, and exotic as understood by the human eye (Barry, 1998, p. 123). Here, it is clear that the simulacrum that is associated with DNB by Anwar is a literary theory that emerged in the West and underpins the philosophy of postmodernism that doubts all forms of absolutes. This doubt is considered to be in opposition with the worldview of Islam that is based on *tawhid* and acknowledges Revelation as a source of true and absolute knowledge. Shortly put, as a worldview and a philosophy of life, postmodernism and Islam are clearly in opposition with each other.

### **Problem Statement and Research Objective**

Based on the above understanding, a problem arises concerning DNB. This is because it is portrayed as an intellectual novel that is produced in the context of Malay-Islam tradition. However, this portrayal seems contradictory to the statement found in the publisher's blurb of the novel, saying that DNB is written based on the element of 'simulacrum', a literary theory that underpins postmodernism that has emerged in the West, and, more importantly, is in stark opposition to the Malay-Islam tradition. Against the context of this problem, this article is written to identify the true tendency of DNB, whether towards the Malay-Islam tradition as admitted by its novelist, or towards simulacrum. Thus said, this article is structured to fulfill two objectives: to analyze Anwar's work, and to summarize the question of intellectualism that is supposedly contained within.

To actualize both of these objectives, this article employs the theory of *Persuratan Baru* (PB) as a framework for analysis. This choice is based on some pertinent considerations that are closely tied to the background of this article. Firstly, the question of 'intellectualism' is the focus of this article. This is closely related to the main idea of PB about 'knowledge-story', and its status as a platform of knowledge in literature. Secondly, the framework of *taklif* that underpins PB. As an integral principle of Islam, the utilization of *taklif* PB enables PB to propose a clear and legitimate criterion. The utilization of PB with its *taklif* framework is also

in line with Anwar's admission of the Malay-Islam tradition core that underlies his literary activities. Thirdly, and no less important is the status of PB as a framework of analysis as a product of a local scholar and critic. The status of PB in itself draws attention to Anwar's call that local theories or frameworks of analysis be utilized in the study of Malay literature, including his works. The choice for PB is therefore reasonable and relevant. This is further strengthened by the fact that PB has been made used in several academic research including at the doctorate level. Before embarking on the analysis, this article first briefly discusses the term 'intellectualism' to sketch some important understandings relevant in the following pages.

### **'Intellectualism': An Operational Term**

The term 'intellectualism' comes from the Latin language and is the root word for intellect which means, "the capacity for understanding, thinking, and reasoning as distinct from feeling" (Collins English Dictionary, 1995, p. 803). The root, word intellect comes from the word 'intellectualism' in the womb of the Western intellectual tradition which refers to the human ability to think rationally, based on reasoning and logic, as explained in *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (1996, p. 739), which is "the ability to understand and learn and make judgments or have opinions that are based on reason." Within the same context, *Collins English Dictionary* (1995, p. 1288) gives a clearer picture of 'intellectualism', where "[intellectualism] is the belief that knowledge and truth are ascertained by rational thought and not by divine or supernatural revelation". At this stage, it can be comprehended that the definition of 'intellectualism', according to the Western intellectual tradition, is the human ability to think rationally, and therefore rejects myths, fairy tales, and religions.

As previously mentioned, there is a conflict between Anwar's admission of the Malay-Islam core of his works, and the presence of DNB that is built on the simulacrum technique, an element of postmodernism. This conflict invites a brief discussion on the terminology in the Islamic intellectual tradition that is equivalent to the term 'intellectualism'.

In the Islamic tradition, the term *tranquil* can be considered as the closest equivalent and can carry the meaning of 'intellectualism'. This term comes from the Arabic word *'aqala* or *'aql*, which refers to the human cognitive faculty to make judgments about the good and bad of something (al-Attas, 2011, p. 174). According to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (henceforth al-Attas), a Muslim thinker, the activity of thinking and making judgments involves the 'rational aspect', which is viewed as a light of the 'intellect'. In the context of the Islamic worldview, 'rational' is not limited only to logic and the physical dimension, but more importantly its ability to explore spiritual experiences and the metaphysical dimension (al-Attas, 2011, p. 42). In other words, 'intellectualism' in Islam encompasses the unity between the relationship and meaning of religion in the human worldly life. Consequently, 'rational' as a light of the 'intellect' in the worldview of Islam relates closely to the 'heart' (*al-qalb*), and therefore is not bounded to only empirical and logical experience, but also traverses into a human spiritual experience.

Indeed, the meaning of 'intellectualism' above is employed as the operational terminology to aid this article in addressing the question of 'intellectualism' in DNB. Essentially, this article refers to 'intellectualism' as rational thought (which is related to the 'heart' or *al-qalb*) that includes the human spiritual experience. Here, 'intellectualism' is inseparable from religion,

that is Islam. The employment of the term 'intellectualism' here is not far-fetched since DNB is a work by a Muslim and emerged in the Malay literary tradition which is also enveloped in Islamic values. And this meaning conforms with the status of PB as a framework of analysis that is established on the framework of *taklif* and 'true knowledge', as shall be explained in the next section.

### **Persuratan Baru as A Framework of Analysis**

Before discussing the core of PB as the analytical framework of this study, the discussion begins by explaining the reasons this theory was chosen. First, PB can be said as the only theory in Malay literature that seriously and consistently discusses the question of 'intellectualism'. Therefore, this is useful for this research to the fact on testimony of some scholars and literary critics about Anwar Ridhwan's novels as being 'knowledgeable' and 'intellectual', including *Di Negeri Belalang*. Second, in several statements by Anwar Ridhwan, he himself insisted that the framework of his writing was based on Islam. This again can be considered aligned with the framework of PB which is also based on the principles and views of Malay literature from the Islamic worldview. In addition, the selection of PB as an analytical framework is considered relevant and appropriate when PB is already well-established in Malay literature. This is because PB has been used in studies at various levels of research, including at the doctorate level. Discussion of the PB itself has been abundant and can be found easily. More importantly, Anwar Ridhwan himself in his statement once called for local theories to be used in evaluating local literary works including (Anwar, 2013: 22).

As mentioned earlier, PB is a framework of literary analysis that is based on Islam, which focuses seriously on the aspects of knowledge and thought, including intellectualism. The framework of *taklif* that underlies PB refers to the Primordial Covenant between man and God materialized in the Spirit Realm, which is the promise to worship God. This principle of *taklif* encompasses three important philosophies of PB: the Nature of Man, the Nature of Knowledge and Practice, and the Nature and Function of Literature.

In the context of the Nature of Man, the principle of *taklif* explains the purpose of the existence of man as the servant of Allah and vicegerent on earth. As God's servant, man is commanded to submit himself totally to God by fulfilling all His commandments and distancing himself from His prohibitions. As the vicegerent of God, man is commanded to govern the earth in the best of affairs (Affandi, 2005, p. 15). To realize both of the roles, man is bestowed with 'aql to enable him to make judgments on the good and the bad of an action (Affandi, 2005, p. 16). To help him with making the best decisions, 'aql has to be guided by the instruction of true knowledge, the knowledge that lets a man know his Creator. It is in this context that PB emerges with the philosophy of the Nature of Knowledge and Practice which explains the nature of knowledge (true knowledge) and its roles in being the basis of good deeds. Without true knowledge, human activities are not considered as *'ibadah*, worthless, and tend towards corruption (*fasad*) (Affandi, 2005, p. 19-20). Based on the Primordial Covenant and the obligation of *'ibadah*, as well as the importance of the role of 'aql guided by true knowledge, PB conceptualizes the Nature and Function of Literature. In the context of writing activity, this philosophy explains that, in the sight of Islam, a litterateur is not exempted from the obligation to fulfill his promise to God. This renders the writing activity itself as an *'ibadah*. In this context, writing is done based on true knowledge by a believing and righteous author, who utilizes writing as a platform to convey true knowledge. This

understanding is based on verses 1-5 of Surah al-'Alaq which illustrate the role of *qalam* (an instrument of writing) as a medium to convey truth (Affandi, 2005, p. 23). It is important to emphasize that it is this meaning that underlies the term 'intellectualism' in this article.

In line with the philosophy above, PB then conceptualizes ideas and concepts that are utilizable as analytical instruments. Among them is the idea of 'knowledge-story'. Essentially, it differentiates between 'knowledge' and 'story', which then puts 'knowledge' in a more prioritized status than 'story'. Here, 'knowledge' is conceptualized as 'discourse' or thoughts that are constructed through intellectual arguments. Also included in intellectual arguments is the conveying of ideas, which is established on elaboration, analysis, and enhancement until a clear and profound conclusion arises. All of this gives rise to a cohesive intellectual 'discourse'. On the other hand, 'story' refers to the utilization of storytelling tools such as characters and characteristics, events, and more to build up a story. In this differentiating context between 'knowledge' and 'story', PB determines that the priority for an author is to build a 'discourse'. This then relegates 'story' only as a platform with which 'discourse' can be conveyed. Therefore, the role, status, and utilization of the story are strictly regulated by the priority and necessity to construct 'discourse'. Besides that, PB also introduces the concept of the 'narrative axis' to identify the priority of work, whether to build 'discourse' or 'story'. Here, it refers to the stance which reflects the outlook and tendency of a text towards an issue, theme, and question with which it grapples. The 'stance' of a work can be identified through the emphasis, priority, and tendency of a text in utilizing the storytelling tools such as character and characteristics, events, and more to build 'story', or in utilizing the tools to build 'discourse' such as arguments, analysis, and discussion to build 'discourse' (Affandi, 2002, p. 44-47). In addition to the above is the concept of 'narrative space' which conceptualizes a text as a 'space'. As a 'space', a literary text such as a novel can be filled with 'story' and 'discourse'. The relative composition of these two contents can shed light on the tendency of the analyzed text, whether prioritizing 'discourse' or 'story'. To illustrate the methodical employment of the above concepts, the following analysis of DNB shall be divided into three aspects: the establishment of a 'narrative axis', the construction and utilization of 'narrative space', and the moral evaluation of the story based on the principle of *taklif*.

#### **Analysis on *di negeri belalang* based on the framework of persuratan baru**

This article's analysis begins with scrutiny of the cover of DNB which can help understand the narrative axis of the novel. Among the most significant is the publisher's blurb which explains that it is written based on the element of 'simulacrum'. As explained, 'simulacrum' refers to a storytelling technique that emerged in the postmodern discourse, with the inclination to present a literary work with characteristics and contents that are in opposition to real life, and therefore creates surrealism. The blurb states:

Four fictional characters from *Sesudah Perang, Jika Esok Tiba, Dalam Kabus* dan *Tik! Tik! Tik!* is suddenly found alive by a character in this novelette. *They are found to be on a sojourn, in a world with life's rough and tumble. Almost everything is surreal.* [stress added]

This easily raises an expectation that DNB will be filled with exotic stories. This is further strengthened by the front cover image picturing a grasshopper donning a military uniform, and an aerosol directed at the sun, both of which are not normal, but surreal. All of this

successfully creates nuances of surrealism and therefore consolidates the expectation for a story brimming with exoticness. Indeed, this expectation does not disappoint where a cursory reading finds that DNB does revolve around weird stories surrounding the protagonist. These stories can never take place in real life, are opposed to it, and therefore are illogical. The surrealism faced by the protagonist is due to several reasons, as shall be illustrated further below. Here, the narrative axis is thus established, which is to 'exoticize the real world'. This narrative axis conforms to the publisher's blurb, which is built upon 'simulacrum', and therefore, in the context of literature, makes possible the exoticizing of the real world in this fictionalized realm. The 'surrealism' meant here refers to images that are unlike the original images and are therefore abnormal to the naked eye.

By 'exoticizing the real world' as the narrative axis, the novel creates its narrative space. A preliminary reading finds the space begins with a man (a character named Saya) who explores weird stories and ends with a discovery that is no less weird. Thus, it can be said that the novel provides a usable space to be filled in with strange stories, through its narrative axis.

Furthermore, the novel also utilizes some storytelling tools. The most significant is certainly the character. The protagonist, Saya, is a man who is dissatisfied with his mundane reality which he thinks is not fulfilling his wishes. This leads him to label his life as monotonous (Anwar, 1989, p. 1). The novel also describes how the protagonist is overwhelmed by restlessness, anguish and considers his life a 'misfortune', and hence leading him to overthink (Anwar, 1989, p. 5). With such a character, it is not far from true to say that the character of Saya is close to a person with mental illness. This mentally unstable protagonist is pertinent to the story. This is because it allows the novel to present strange stories that revolve around the protagonist's hallucinations. This is particularly obvious when, in the next phase of the story's development, the protagonist is told to have witnessed a man strangely turning into a grasshopper (Anwar, 1989, p. 85). At this point, it is important to understand that to establish the narrative axis of 'exoticizing the real world', the novel fills its narrative space with a mentally unstable protagonist. This is manifested through his tendency to hallucinate as discussed previously. This tendency is further solidified when the religious background of the protagonist is not clarified and therefore is considered to have no strong religiosity. In other words, the story does not even open any possibilities for the protagonist to portray religious values, including Islam which is the novelist's own belief. This strategy allows the protagonist to wander into the world of infinite hallucinations and thereby fill in the narrative space with surreal stories. The protagonist is then allowed to create and explore strange characters and stories (Anwar, 1989, p. 4). As a result, with the protagonist and all his attributes and characteristics, the novel establishes its narrative axis, namely to 'exoticize the real world'.

Next, the article moves on to the secondary characters, whose roles are also important in establishing of the narrative axis and filling in the narrative space. As mentioned, the narrative space is filled with a mentally unstable protagonist who spends his time in a world of hallucinations. This is an important strategy since by manipulating the protagonist's hallucinations, the story develops and extends. It is in this context that the secondary characters emerge, enabling the creation of strange stories, and thereby establishing the narrative axis. Among the characters is Manto, a conversant of the protagonist. Manto is also a strange character. This is manifested through his ability to explore the absurd world, a world open to unreasonable and illogical possibilities. The ability of this character is significant to

allow the narrative space to be filled with stories of meetings between Manto and other fictional characters, according to whom he has met in the real world (Anwar, 1989, p. 6). Manto is also said to have the ability to detach his mouth and ears, to enable him to speak and listen in two different situations (Anwar, 1989, p. 2,54). He also can vanish into thin air in a short time (Anwar, 1989, p. 3). Here, it can be said that Manto is here as a fabulist of strange fables to the protagonist. Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that Manto as the protagonist's conversant, enables strange stories to fill the narrative space and thereby establishes the narrative axis of 'exoticizing the real world'.

As explained, Manto comes as a character who explores the absurd world and therefore enables him to meet exotic characters and stories. Another character that propels the narrative axis is a police officer by the name of Mata-Mata, with his peculiarities. It is said that he was born into this world without emotions (Anwar, 1989, p. 56). This in itself is strange since humans are naturally emotional creatures. However, this characteristic allows the novel to portray Mata-Mata's strange behavior and actions. This can be seen in Mata-Mata apprehending a man in jail, and then leaving him alone without reasonable justification (Anwar, 1989, p. 42). This is entailed by his action of quitting his profession as a policeman, and, also without justifiable reasons, letting his prisoners burn in custody (Anwar, 1989, p. 43-57). The peak of his peculiarity arises when he takes up the job as a gravestone carver, a profession that has nothing to do with his previous profession as a policeman, also without reason (Anwar, 1989, p. 57). The presence of Mata-Mata in this narrative space plays an obvious role in creating surrealism, and therefore establishing the narrative axis of 'exoticizing the real world'.

The novel also introduces the character Dia, a woman from Hiroshima, also with her strange characteristics. This is seen in her action where, without any particular motive, she stood on a theatrical stage, witnessed by many, just to express a single sentence (Anwar, 1989, p. 11). More strangely is the fact that she is pregnant with a time bomb as a result of her random promiscuous relationships (Anwar, 1989, p. 29). Dia's presence is also utilized to create the surrealist effect and therefore establishes the narrative axis.

Another strange character is a prisoner, Lelaki, apprehended by Mata-Mata and is locked in jail for tearing a flag (Anwar, 1989, p. 27-28). This strangeness can be seen when Lelaki is initially pictured as an adult who is big, tall, and strong (Anwar, 1989, p. 10). However, he later turned into a short and weak boy (Anwar, 1989, p. 26). This Lelaki, with his physical ability to transform from a strong adult to a weak child, is utilized in the narrative space to further establish the narrative axis of 'exoticizing the real world'.

At this point, this article manages to identify the novel's strategy in filling the narrative space and establishing its narrative axis. This strategy is the utilization of characters who share the same attribute, i.e., their strange characteristics, thereby enabling the narrative space to be filled with strange stories. This is manifested in the character of the mentally ill protagonist who hallucinates the existence of characters such as Manto, Dia and Lelaki in the narrative space. It is with this feature that the characters become a well-utilized storytelling tool to fill the narrative space and allow strange stories to be told from the beginning to the end of the novel. More importantly, this filling of the narrative space aids the establishment of the narrative axis.

Besides that, another utilized storytelling tool is events. It refers to the occurrences that take place in the story, significantly developing the story in its subsequent phases and its entirety. It is important to note that all these events occur in the hallucinatory world of the protagonist, as mentioned. The presence of this tool in the narrative space also helps in establishing the narrative axis. The first event that takes place to 'exoticize the real world' is the meeting between the protagonist and Manto. This is significant because it demonstrates how the protagonist embarks on his hallucinatory world. This is alluded to when it is said that only the protagonist is cognizant of the meeting (Anwar, 1989, p. 2). It is in this meeting that the strange abilities of Manto are portrayed, such as the ability to detach his mouth and ears. More significant is Manto's claim on his ability to explore the absurd world, and engage with strange characters and stories, which are said to be able to remedy the protagonist's ailment of being dissatisfied with his life (Anwar, 1989, p. 7). Based on this event, the narrative axis is further established.

Aside from the abovementioned event, there are also other noteworthy events. Among them is Mata-Mata's apprehension of Lelaki as his prisoner in jail. This event showcases Lelaki's ability to physically transform from an adult to a child (Anwar, 1989, p. 26). This event also tells about the action of Lelaki who climbs a long and slippery flag pole and tears a flag. The strangeness effect can be seen when Lelaki explains that his actions are not backed by any motive (Anwar, 1989, p. 27). His actions are contrary to normal human behavior which normally acts with a motive. This raises the strangeness. The strangeness is further exaggerated when Mata-Mata, who is tasked with interrogating Lelaki, abandons his responsibility with ease (Anwar, 1989, p. 43). Here, it can be said that in the meeting between Lelaki and Mata-Mata, there are two forms of strangeness. First, the physical transformation of Lelaki and his motiveless actions. Second, the absence of emotions in the character of Mata-Mata allows the possibility of him transgressing the boundary of his profession as a police officer. Therefore, it can be concluded that the meeting between Lelaki and Mata-Mata does create the surrealist effect and thereby establishes the narrative axis.

The inclusion of Dia (a woman from Hiroshima) who conceives a time bomb in the narrative space is no less important in establishing the narrative axis. In this bizarre story, she is said to have had random promiscuous relationships and therefore is pregnant with a time bomb. Her pregnancy triggers panic among the public, worrying that her carriage might explode. The period of her pregnancy also raises amazement since it is told that it spans the length of 90 years, an abnormal period for humans (Anwar, 1989, p. 30). More significant is the fact that her pregnancy was initially a national threat, but then was accepted well by society, thus making Dia a public figure liked by many (Anwar, 1989, p. 63). Therefore, this further creates the effect of surrealism and establishes its narrative axis.

There is also a strange event in which all of the already strange characters are involved. This is where all of the characters, now dead, meet with the gravestone carver (Mata-Mata), to make reservations for their respective gravestones, due to their manner of death where they were stripped naked, humiliated, and brutally murdered (Anwar, 1989, p. 78). The peak of this novel's surrealism is the event in which all the citizens of Negara Belalang gather in the city. In this event, it is pictured that everyone is struck with hysteria when a huge placard comes out from their heads. This is followed by the same occurrence repeated, again and again, portraying the picture of a chaotic situation, as expressed in the following passage,

“The one who has foretold his fate sways and falls like a train wagon falling away from its rail; but the rail catches it, and they continue to sway and fall away again. The process repeats itself again and again like a replay” (Anwar, 1989, p. 84). Next, humans are said to transform into grasshoppers (Anwar, 1989, p. 85). The event that marks the ending of this novel portrays an absurdity that can never happen in the real world. Therefore, the filling of the narrative space in such a way establishes the narrative axis, which is to ‘exoticize the real world’. All of this is made possible with the use of ‘simulacrum’ which serves as the foundation for DNB, as discussed in the earlier section. It is within this context that the acknowledgments vested by Othman and Mawar about the intellectual nature of DNB should be understood. In other words, the parts that are expressed by Othman and Mawar as ‘intellectual’ actually refer to the strange stories inspired by the use of ‘simulacrum’, a storytelling technique that emerged within the Western philosophy of postmodernism.

At this point, this article finds that characters and events are the two storytelling techniques utilized maximally throughout DNB's narrative space. The utilization of these two techniques is structured in a way to establish the narrative axis. To put it differently, the filling in of the narrative space and the establishment of the narrative axis enable DNB to come up with stories that revolve around strangeness and peculiarities through the hallucinations of the protagonist. More importantly, the analysis finds that the utilization of characters and events as storytelling techniques enables the stories in DNB to be set in motion, developed, and maintained until the end of the story. Within the same context, it can be understood that it is this ‘simulacrum’ technique that is considered by literary researchers as experimental. This is because the Western technique is seen as yet to be explored and used widely in the practice of Malay literature. In his other writing, Anwar also concedes his leniency towards experimental techniques from the West, which he considers expedient to the intellectual purpose, as expressed by him, “Read good experimental works and learn the reflections or philosophies behind them” (Anwar, 1992, p. 6). Based on the result of this analysis, an important conclusion that can be drawn from this is that DNB is built with the manipulation of stories, conceptualized using a Western experimental technique (simulacrum). This conclusion, then, invites scrutiny on the presence of ‘knowledge’ that is claimed to reside in DNB.

As discussed in the introduction, Kelantan (1991, p. 87) views that DNB is constructed on the bones of intellectualism, and therefore is inclined to see it as an ‘intellectual novel’. This is strengthened by Mawar Shafie (2010, p. 441) who also tends to consider DNB as an ‘idea novel’ since it reflects the ‘authorial maturity’ (‘thoughts’/‘ideas’) of Anwar [Mawar’s expression] who adopts intertextuality and ‘simulacrum’ in DNB to present so-called challenging ‘ideas’. It is important to note that ‘intellectual’ and ‘ideas’ meant here refer to the experimental writing technique that is utilized to build DNB. Based on this understanding, it can be said that the ‘intellectual’ and the ‘ideas’ refer to the stories that are constructed using the experimental writing technique (simulacrum) that comes from the West. This is especially clear when literary researchers such as Othman and Mawar present examples from the absurd events in the protagonist’s hallucinations to refer to the ‘intellectual’ in DNB. Therefore, this article argues that the readings done by Othman and Mawar that acknowledge DNB’s intellectualism are, in reality, attributed to the manifestation of stories and not discourse. It is also significant that Othman, in his writing, also acknowledges the tendency of DNB towards stories, as written by him below:

This novel portrays the maturity of the author in presenting the techniques and characteristics; and *displaying heterogeneity* in plot and style. *The thoughts that are exhibited through images and symbols are enticing...* This novel puts in view the human predicament in *all the situations pictured in the well-amalgamated imagination* [emphasis added] (Othman, 1991, p. 87).

In this passage, Othman acknowledges the high quality of the stories in DNB. Similarly, Mawar's acknowledgment of the presence of 'information' and 'new meaning' in DNB is attributed to stories, as written by her :

Chapters 9 and 10 of *Di Negeri Belalang* are a transposition of four hypertexts that are focused on developing its fictional characters such that it creates new backgrounds and story directions. Both of these chapters are like an abstract copy space by elaborating on the early ideas of the author that catapult from the four focused short stories. In Chapter 9, "*Besi Semberani*", gather the characters of the gravestone Carver, the bomb Lady, and Sally in a place... Before, the author displays a life full of roughs and tumbles such as defamation, enmity, hatred, jealousy, or mutual animosity in politics (Mawar, 2010, p. 153).

It can be said that the absence of discourse in DNB is also made possible by the novel's storytelling strategy. This refers to the choice of a protagonist who is mentally ill and hallucinates, and therefore closes the possibility of having a serious discourse, or knowledge, as acknowledged by the literary researchers. With the said choice of protagonist, the novel cannot but make room for surreal stories to be told through the hallucinations of the protagonist. In other words, 'knowledge' as profoundly defined by PB, which refers to ideas that are constructed systematically using discourse-building tools such as argumentation and analysis, clearly is not manifested in DNB. In consequence therewith, what is claimed by the literary critics as 'intellectual' and 'ideology' to elevate DNB as an 'idea novel' and 'intellectual novel', are in reality based on stories that are conceived using a Western experimental technique.

This analysis shows that story is the only content that is manipulated thoroughly to construct DNB. Hence, the proceeding discussion shall focus on the moral of the story, suiting DNB's status as being constructed as a story. Conforming to PB's status as a framework of analysis, the evaluation of the moral of the story is based on the philosophy of *taklif* that serves as its root. When referring to the moral of the story, this article detects a distinct tendency in DNB, which is the tendency to present irreligious characters, mentally unstable and confused. This tendency is manifested clearly in the portrayal of the protagonist, Saya, who is without any religious belief. This is clear when he shows ingratitude and hates life which is viewed as a 'calamity' for not satisfying his liking (Anwar, 1989, p. 5). This leads the protagonist to be confused and continue spiraling down into the pit holes of anxiety (Anwar, 1989, p. 2). Without proper religious guidance, it is almost impossible for the novel to enable the protagonist to find happiness (in the context of Islam, which is the creed of the novelist), and therefore remedy his mental illness. Due to his irreligiosity, anxiety, and dissatisfaction, the protagonist creates a world of hallucinations and therefore allowing him to fill it with what he thinks might make him happy. In this context, he chooses corrupt, immoral and weak characters to fill his hallucinatory world like the untrustworthy Mata-Mata, the promiscuous

Dia and the purposeless Lelaki. It is clear that the characters of DNB, whether in perception or actions, do not reflect qualities that signify religious purity and good character. Based on the filling of the narrative space using these characters, it can be identified that religion, an aspect that usually serves as the foundation of and guide to life, has no place in this novel. Instead, the presence of the characters further strengthens the novel's priority in building stories, and establishes its narrative axis, which is to 'exoticize the real world'.

### **Conclusion**

By implementing the framework of PB, the analysis of this article on DNB arrives at several important findings. Among which is the narrative axis, which revolves around exoticizing the real world. In establishing this narrative axis, the novel is found to have filled its narrative space with a few storytelling techniques. Among the storytelling techniques are character and characteristic. The main character or the protagonist, Saya, is mentally ill and is deep in his hallucinatory world. To further exaggerate the protagonist's absurdity, ignorance and weakness, the novel has created several secondary characters who live in absurdity, ignorance and confusion such as Manto and Mata-Mata. This article finds that the strategy of utilizing such characters and characteristics allows the narrative space to be filled with the strangeness of the real world, caused by human ignorance and weakness, whether through physical or emotional representations of the characters. It is necessary to emphasize that, in the context of the philosophy of *taklif* that underlies the ideas of *Persuratan Baru* (as a framework of analysis), the presence of the abovementioned characters places them as strange, ignorant, confused, and weak secondary characters. This necessarily closes the door for any intellectual ideas, thoughts, and discourses, the availability of which can only be supported by characters of high moral standards, intelligence, and strong character.

This means that the narrative space in DNB contains no intellectual discourse. As a result, this article finds that what is represented by several literary researchers and critics as well as Anwar himself as 'intellectualism', 'thought', or 'idea' refers essentially to the manifestations of the absurd stories that are produced by the actions and physical expressions as well as the emotions of the characters. DNB also utilizes another storytelling technique, i.e., events. This can be seen in certain events, all of which serve to display the exoticized human life. In other words, the narrative space of this novel is only filled with story, not discourse. Thus, the conclusion arrived at by this article is that there is no intellectual aspect to DNB. In the context of *Persuratan Baru*, what is obvious from the utilization of the storytelling techniques is the tendency to present and exaggerate stories, and not the intellectual ideas themselves. Therefore, the manifestations of the story itself are not of lesser importance. The philosophy of *taklif* that underlies *Persuratan Baru* could not acknowledge the life perspective, philosophy, tradition, or even culture that are represented in the manifestations of stories in DNB. This refers to the manifestation of the Western life perspective, rooted in the philosophy of postmodernism and opposed to tawhid's perspective. And this weakens DNB even more, even its status as a story.

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