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Research Article

Migration, Hybridity, and Identity in Salman Rushdie's *In the South*

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Abstract

Globalization has made migration a social phenomenon, with many people treating it as a life option without realizing the consequences. As a reflection of life, literature, especially migrant literature, can serve as a valuable source for studying this phenomenon. Salman Rushdie, a writer of migrant literature, raises the topic of migration in his work *In the South*. This study aims to examine how migration produces hybridity, liminality, and identity instability in the characters of the story. This study uses qualitative textual analysis of a literary work using Bhabha's postcolonial theory of hybridity in analyzing the data. The study's results reveal that the characters in the story exist in an in-between space where identities are fluid, unstable, and continually reconstructed through cultural blending in new environments. The cultural blending that occurs during the migration process causes several impacts on the identities of these characters, all of which lead to the formation of a new identity. The hybrid characters in the story emerge as a source of tension, highlighting the complexities of migrant experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Salman Rushdie is a writer of Indian descent who migrated to England long ago. His writings often hold a special place in the literary world, ranging from phenomenal to sensational. One of his works is *In the South* (2009), which was published by *The New Yorker* in 2009. Although other Rushdie's works have been widely discussed in scholarly literature, this story received limited attention. This literary work is set in India, marked by the mention of the place name Mumbai. The characters in the story also possess compelling characteristics, rather than the typical youth narrative that often dominates literary works. This story explores life's themes, including life and death, success, acceptance, and contemporary topics such as migration.

Migration, as one of the key topics in the story, reflects social phenomena in modern society. The International Organization for Migration (2019) defines migration as the movement of a person from their place of origin, either within a country or across international borders, temporarily or permanently, and for various reasons. The organization also stated that, as of 2020, there were 281 million migrants worldwide. This number has more than tripled since 1970. The wave of migrants has become a social and historical phenomenon that makes migrants the main characters of the 21st century, or the protagonists of the century (Frank, 2008). Like literary works in general, this work also departs from the author's social background. India is a country known for its people who migrate. In general, the success of migration by Indian people can be seen in the representation of famous figures, such as Rishi Sunak, who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 2022 to 2024, and Kamala Harris, who served as Vice President of the United States from 2021 to 2025. Both are of Indian descent, demonstrating that the Indian people have long migrated, giving birth to the next generation in their place of migration.

The phenomenon of migration among Indians has long been prevalent, including during the colonial period. During British colonial rule in India, Indians migrated due to the colonizers' need for human resources to work in the fields, operate railways, and build infrastructure in British Commonwealth countries such as Malaysia (Mustapha, 2015). The success of migrants from India contributed to the rapid growth of Indian migration, which was also driven by the promise of a better life than in their homeland.

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Migration typically occurs when people start to compare their standard of living with that of people in other countries. Most people participate without adequate preparation because they only think about the good things only in other places. This utopia will give the illusion without considering the consequences. Therefore, this study aims to identify the challenges faced by migrants, particularly issues related to identity, which can serve as a guide for the community in addressing this migration phenomenon.

Literature, as a reflection of life, can serve as a bridge to studying the phenomenon of migration. India, a country renowned for its migration success, can also serve as a valuable reference point for studying this phenomenon. In the field of literature, migrant writers from India have made significant contributions to the development of literary themes and genres, often incorporating representations of their cultural heritage. In literary studies, the works of these migrant writers are categorized under the genre of migrant literature.

Migrant literature has been a topic of discussion among academics worldwide, particularly those who study social phenomena and cultural identity. The article "Introduction: Genres, Poetics, and Subjectivities of Migration" (Wiegandt, 2023) provides an overview of the history of migration as a major topic in literary genres. The term "migrant literature" began to emerge as a scholarly concept in the 1990s. White's book "Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration" (1995) is one of the books that introduced this term. In 2019, “The Penguin Book of Migration Literature” (Ahmad, 2019) was published as the first anthology of migrant literature with a global and comparative scope. The book's editor, Dohra Ahmad, explained that societal perspectives on migrant literature have changed due to globalization. The book also reflects how globalization has transformed the way migrants understand their movements.

Migrant literature is frequently discussed in the context of world literature studies. The study of world literature is a study that recognizes culture through its projection of otherness. While the study of world literature was once often concerned with the transmission of national traditions, today the transnational histories of migrants, colonized peoples, or political refugees may be themes within world literature (Bhabha, 1994). With the advent of the term "migrant literature," these topics are more frequently encountered in this genre. Writers who engage intellectually with the movement of people and objects across geographies and cultures articulate in their work a "cosmopolitan, transnational, and hybrid vision of social life," which then becomes an element that produces migrant literature (Walkowitz, 2006).

Issues related to identity resulting from cultural assimilation are often the primary topic in migrant literature that can be studied through a postcolonial lens. Postcolonial examines issues related to identity, migration, and transnationality. This study will examine the representation of migrants in literary works as a social reflection of society, using a postcolonial approach and Homi K. Bhabha's hybrid theory. Discussions of the issues faced by migrants, as represented in literary works, are frequently encountered and serve as concrete reflections of the experiences of migrants. One study that unpacks this representation is the thesis entitled "Transculturality in Migrant Literature: Three Case Studies of Six Novels" by Olga Grjasnowa, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Leïla Houari (Kooistra, 2020). Furthermore, depictions of migrants' perspectives on their home, homeland, or region of origin can also be seen in migrant literature, as in the study "The Construction of Postcolonial Space Through Migrant Perspectives in Kazuo Ishiguro's Novel, A Pale View of Hills" (Pratiwi, 2019).

The problems of migrants related to identity can also be seen in research on the formation of new identities or what is then called hybridity, as seen in The Formation of New Identities of Immigrant Figures in Four Short Stories by Two Authors with Immigrant Backgrounds, Wladimir Kaminer and Dilek Güngör (Hawa et al., 2017). In the construction of identity, the issue of diaspora takes a special part in migrant literature research. Another study that discusses the same topic is "Diaspora-Indonesia Literature: Works of Indonesian Immigrants in America in the 2010s" by Peni Adji (2018).

The importance of migrant literature in the social context has also been examined and proven useful in reality. The relationship between migrant literature and social reality is discussed in the study entitled "Migrant literature in Spain: approaches, discourses and analysis" (Rostecka & Ascanio-Sánchez, 2021). Not only in the social context, but this genre is also discussed in the educational aspect.

In the study entitled Representing transition experiences: A multimodal critical discourse analysis of young immigrants in children's literature (Gu & Catalano, 2022), it is discussed how migrant literature presents depictions of migrants and acts of migration in problematic ways due to the fusion of cultures and ideologies, but also reveals how migrant children in children's books are represented visually and/or verbally in ways that create understanding and empathy for the characters. The findings are helpful for society in facing the social problem related to migration. These studies have shown how essential the topic of migration is in literature studies.

In line with those studies, this study aims to demonstrate societal representations of the migration phenomenon as found in Salman Rushdie's literary work, *In the South*. As the study of migrant literature has been shown to be highly beneficial in a social context, this study is expected to provide insight into the act of migration, which is often a dream for people in this era of globalization. This research also offers a representation of conflicts and challenges that must be faced by society and alternative ways of dealing with them, so that the potential for developing national character through literary works that represent the social context becomes very strategic because it can develop the adaptive abilities of society in facing real challenges from social phenomena and adapting to social changes.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method utilizing library studies. The first stage involves reading the research object, Salman Rushdie's *In the South*. The next stage involves collecting data, including primary data from the primary object and secondary data from books, scientific and popular articles, as well as other supporting data related to the research topic. The data is classified according to sections that support the research analysis.

The next stage involves research analysis using a postcolonial approach and Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity. This theory will be relevant for analyzing the research problem, specifically how migrants are represented in the story and how the act of migration affects identity construction. In the terminology of modern humanities, the issue of the influence of political power and colonial culture on the colonized is referred to as the post-colonial problem. The act of migration is inseparable from its political nature and power relations. These factors also influence the formation of identity caused by migration. As in the era of colonization, the modern era still feels the impact of that era. According to Bhabha, the relationship between colonizers and colonized is not integrated, stable, or contradictory. In his book, *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha explains the concept of cultural exchange. In this book, he developed the concept of post-colonialism theory, including hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, and stereotypes, which were used in the data analysis phase of this study. The final stage is data presentation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As a writer of Indian descent from a country that was once colonized, Salman Rushdie frequently incorporates postcolonial themes, such as migration, race, and identity, into his works. His works are often included in the migrant literature genre. Migrant literature is typically written by immigrant authors who tell the stories of migrants and their migration process; however, not all literary works written by migrant authors are considered migrant literature. Migrant literature is not concerned with origin or topic, but rather with migrant aesthetics (Mardorossian, 2002). Migrant aesthetics is more complex than the binary opposition between modern and traditional, or destination country and country of origin. Migrant aesthetics addresses new spaces for artistic and cultural expression that emerge from migrants' experiences, identities, and perspectives. These spaces are often associated with displacement, identity negotiation, cultural hybridity, nostalgia, a sense of belonging, and adaptation to new environments.

One of his works that addresses these issues is a short story *In the South*. Just like migrant writers, their work often contains elements related to their homeland. Although this work was published in the American media, the story features Indian characters and is set in an Indian context. The work

tells the story of two middle-aged Indians living in South India. They share the same name with the initials V. However, they are more often referred to as Senior V and Junior V. The prefix "Senior" is attached because Senior is seventeen days older than Junior. They both have very different life backgrounds. Senior is someone who has everything. He is a retired railway worker who has traveled extensively, been married twice, and has a large family. Meanwhile, Junior has an ordinary life, has never moved, and does not have a wife. Salman Rushdie clearly has an intention for the representation of the opposition he describes in his short story.

Rushdie highlights the differences between them, depicting Senior as someone who has a perfect life. When he was young, he was an accomplished long-distance runner and retired from a railway company, which has allowed him to travel extensively. The opposition is presented by Junior, who has an ordinary life. He has lofty dreams of traveling by land, air, and space, but he has long abandoned those dreams. Junior has never moved. In this short story, Rushdie uses the term "he had failed to be a participant in the parade of life" to describe the life of Junior.

In analyzing the depiction of East and West, the opposition depicted is not the same as that between East and West. In other words, Senior is not the West, and Junior is not the East. Rushdie includes a character named D'Mello, a friend of Junior's. D'Mello is portrayed as a character who always talks about the city of Mumbai, a metropolis with all its splendor. D'Mello grew up in Mumbai, thus representing the city's inhabitants, as demonstrated in the following quote:

> D’Mello always arrived with stories—sometimes angry accounts of injustices against the poor in a Mumbai slum, sometimes funny anecdotes about the characters who took their ease at the Wayside Inn, the famous Mumbai café in the Kala Ghoda area, named for a no longer present equestrian statue, “the Black Horse district from which the black horse has been exiled.” D’Mello fell in love with movie stars… (Rushdie, 2009).

Not only does this quote reveal the character's identity, but it also shows how D'Mello has become a person who lives in nostalgia and consistently romanticizes his hometown, Mumbai. Two factors influence D'Mello's actions. First, nostalgia can occur because, as a migrant in a new place, D'Mello finds himself living in a dystopia that provides a worse life than his hometown. Second, nostalgia is a form of life stage in adapting to a new place, as well as a resistance to one's original identity. However, as a migrant who moved from the city to a smaller place, D'Mello can also be seen as a representation of the West, with all his actions still attached to his identity.

His identity as a representation of the West is supported by the self-description of the character D'Mello, who is portrayed as a city person, leading a fulfilling life and being connected to the world. The fact that D'Mello can speak English makes Senior and Junior view D'Mello as someone superior, cosmopolitan, and dynamic, as depicted in the following quote:

> When D’Mello was present and talking, Junior had the sense that he was living another, very different life, a life of action and color; that he was becoming, vicariously, the type of man he had never been—dynamic, passionate, engaged with the world (Rushdie, 2009).

Meanwhile, Senior and Junior represent the East, who view D'Mello as superior, just as the East views the West. This is a Western construct intended to subjugate the East. This is evident in the story, as D'Mello is 20 years younger than Senior and Junior, yet he manages to make the two older men listen to his story and even imagine themselves as him. He successfully transforms Senior and Junior into someone who dreams of a life like his. Despite D'Mello speaking English, which is the language of the colonialists, this proves that D'Mello, who represents The Wets, has successfully controlled Senior and Junior, who represent the East.

The quote also shows how Junior views D'Mello's hometown as a utopia. For Junior, who has never migrated, one thing he can only dream about is his dreams. The image of the beautiful stories he heard about the place makes him see it as full of better things. Junior's views on the city of Mumbai and the character of D'Mello also demonstrate how postcolonial constructions work in the projection of migration. As the essence of postcolonialism is no longer about colonizing land, but rather through culture. Utopia is the result of Western cultural constructions that colonize Eastern perspectives, portraying the West as better and superior. Utopia is the opposite of dystopia (Herman, 2018), a term that describes a place that is perfect, wise, and good (More, 1991).

As Bhaba's theory suggests, the East is not a passive people; this short story also illustrates this. The characters, Senior and Junior, representing the East, perform several acts of resistance. For example, every time D'Mello comes, Senior chooses to remain silent, even though he can speak English as well as D'Mello, or, as Rushdie said in the story, that Senior secretly takes pride in his prowess in what he called "the world's No. 1 tongue." Senior's silence is not due to his submission to D'Mello, but rather a form of resistance. Not only is silence, but Senior also turns the resistance into action. He spoke up about how D'Mello needs to go back to Mumbai.

> One day, when D'Mello was speaking of Mumbai and its people with his habitual, gesticulating fervor, Senior, breaking his rule of silence, snapped at him in English, "Why your body doesn't return there only since your head has already gone?" But D'Mello shook his head sadly. He no longer had a foothold in his city of origin. Only in his dreams and conversations was it still his home. "I will die here," he answered Senior. "*In the South*, among sour fruits like you" (Rushdie, 2009).

This quote not only shows resistance from the East, as Senior's words drove D'Mello back to his place of origin, but also illustrates how D'Mello became a hybrid character due to his migration. In postcolonial theory, migration often produces a condition of displacement, where the subject no longer entirely belongs to either their place of origin or their place of residence. His body remains in the South, but his emotional and psychological split, illustrating the in in-betweenness or liminality. This condition shows how migrants can lose the stable identity where home becomes an imagined space rather than a lived reality.

The interaction between Senior and D'Mello also involves how Senior does mimicry and Senior's ambivalence. Using English to talk to D'Mello is a mimicry act that Senior did as a weapon since D'Mello always uses English to show his linguistic privilege, aspiration, and alignment with colonial modernity. Senior turns the colonial language into a weapon, exposing D'Mello's detachment from his homeland and questioning his claim of belonging. The use of English by Senior is a tool of verbal aggression and symbolic resistance. At the same time, the moment still reveals ambivalence because Senior, even though he resists D'Mello, must rely on English, the colonial language.

Ambivalence arises from both love and hatred for something (Bhabha, 1994). This is illustrated by Senior's hatred of D'Mello as a representation of the West. However, Senior also mimics external appearances, such as values, norms, and even dress codes. Senior's ambivalence is demonstrated in his hatred of Western things, yet he still imitates Western styles by wearing Western clothing and using a walking stick. The quote above explains that Senior imitates something he has read or a song he has heard. This is illustrated in the following quote:

> Senior liked to go to the post office in the guise of a European gentleman, wearing a suit and hat and twirling a silver-handled walking stick, like that Beau-somebody of Piccadilly of whom he had read, or the man in the old song he liked, who walked along the Bois de Boulogne with an independent air, the Man That Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo (Rushdie, 2009).

The ambivalence of Senior makes him as a hybrid. Unlike D'Mello, he does not embrace it, but he cannot escape it. He occupies the in-between space. As Bhaba's hybridity theory suggests, hybridity is the result of negotiations in a third space that treats both flanking cultures as equals. According to Bhabha, by exploring the third space, "we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the other of our selves" (Bhabha, 1994). By blurring the boundaries between "us" and "them," the relationship between the two cultures can proceed side by side.

The idea of third space, in-betweenness, liminality, and hybridity is well described in the story. Senior, as a hybrid character, has his own perspective on the concept of the border. As the stereotypes of places and people, southerners are described as warm, slow, and sensual, while northerners are like the cold fish. The depictions are just like the stereotypes of East and West, how Southerners are described as an exotic place, like Eastern representations. Meanwhile, the depiction of northern people who represent the West is depicted as cold fish, which resembles the view of eastern people towards stiff Westerners.

The depiction of North and South doesn't explicitly name the cities; North is Mumbai, and South is the city they currently inhabit. Judging by the story about the tsunami, Rushdie may have been inspired by the 2004 tsunami, which struck Southeast Asia and affected one of India's cities, Tamil

Nadu, in southern India. Geographically, Mumbai is located in the center of India, but from the perspective of Tamil Nadu, Mumbai is located in the north of it.

These geographical boundaries represent physical locations, but the terms South and North in this work have more meaning. They can symbolize stereotypes that exist in society. Stereotypes are concepts with blurred boundaries. Bhabha proposed the concept of liminality, relating stereotypes to liminal reality, where Western perspectives are unstable towards the East, leading them to continually recreate the East or repeat it out of uncertainty. This concept of liminality is depicted in Salman Rushdie's short story *In the South* at the beginning of the story when Senior and Junior are talking about the concept of north and south, which is the setting in the story that represents the West and East, as in the following quote:

> "In the first place," Senior said, "the south is a fiction, existing only because men have agreed to call it that. Suppose men had imagined the earth the other way up! We would be the northerners then. The universe does not understand up and down; neither does a dog. To a dog, there is no north or south. In this regard, the points of the compass are like money, which has value only because men say that it does. And in the second place you're not that warm a character, and a woman would laugh to hear you call yourself sensual. But you are slow—that is beyond a doubt." (Rushdie, 2009).

In this quote, Rushdie offers a perspective on the concept of North and South, which represent the West and the East as societal constructs. He even argues that this constructed stereotype is not entirely accurate, stating that if the perspective is reversed, the stereotype can be changed. The blurring of the boundaries between the west and the east also influences the view of north and south in this story. Rushdie wrote about Senior's views on the city of Mumbai, which was previously seen as a representation of the West, but he changed his views, as in the following quote:

> Perhaps he had simply gone home, at last, to his storied city of Mumbai, on the country's other coast, that city which was neither of the north nor of the south but a frontierville, the greatest, most wondrous, and most dreadful of all such places, the megalopolis of the borderlands, the place of in-between (Rushdie, 2009).

This quote demonstrates how the character Senior negotiates the hybridity. Senior becomes a third space that shifts his perspective on the stereotypical boundaries of East and West. He sees the two cultures as equal. Mumbai becomes a hybrid space, just like the symbol of the character that is originally from that place, D'Mello. The senior's perspective on this place is certainly influenced by the cultural blending factors that occur in him. As a character depicted as having moved from place to place, Senior has been exposed to many cultures. Migration provides a space for cultural fusion within the migrating subject. This cultural fusion impacts the creation of a new identity within the migrant. This identity is hybrid and exists in a third space. Liminality often occurs through the perspective of a migrant. The boundaries of identity within oneself become blurred and become a factor in the formation of this new identity.

From the story *In the South* by Salman Rushdie, there is a reflection of a society that has never migrated, which sees other places as utopias. There are also the results of this migration, represented by the characters in the story. For example, the characters D'Mello and Senior are depicted as hybrid figures. D'Mello, with his loss of identity, displacement, non-belonging, and internalized exile, can be one of the results of migration. The other effect is the dystopia that happened to Senior as he sees the bitter truth of other places that people see as utopias. Those alternatives are the results of the cultural fusion that occurs in migration.

CONCLUSION

Migration is a social phenomenon that has occurred in the era of globalization. This phenomenon has developed rapidly from the colonial era to the present day. India, as a country that has experienced migration since colonial times, can serve as a reference in studying this phenomenon. Many people are drawn to migration without understanding the consequences, seeing other places as utopias. Therefore, just as literature is a reflection of society, research into the phenomenon of migration is deemed necessary. Migrant literature can be a resource in studying this topic. One literary work that addresses

the topic of migration is Salman Rushdie's *In the South*. This work by a migrant writer from India offers a representation of migrants and the impact of migration on identity formation.

The study's results reveal that the characters in the story exist in an in-between space where identities are fluid, unstable, and continually reconstructed through cultural blending in new environments. The cultural blending that occurs during the migration process causes several impacts on the identities of these characters, all of which lead to the formation of a new identity. The hybrid characters in the story emerge as a source of tension, highlighting the complexities of migrant experience. Three main characters represent the identity issues and challenges faced by migrants. Senior, a migrant who returns to his hometown, faces a dystopia in other places. Junior, a resident who has never migrated and views another place, in this case Mumbai, as a utopia. Meanwhile, D'Mello represents a migrant who lives in nostalgia and romanticizes his hometown. Hybrid identities are also found in the characters of Senior and D'Mello, both former migrants. The cultural blending that occurs during the migration process causes several impacts on the identities of these characters, all of which lead to one result: the formation of a new identity.

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Author contributions

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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