"AND THERE I FOUND MYSELF MORE TRULY AND MORE STRANGE":
NARRATIVES OF RETURN IN CONTEMPORARY
MALAYSIAN AND SINGAPOREAN LITERATURE

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Abstract

As our world is growing more mobile and fluid, the figure of the returnee is an increasingly common subject, especially in postcolonial societies. Indeed, returnees form a large, and growing, percentage of the Malaysian and Singaporean populations. This thesis examines six contemporary Malaysian and Singaporean narratives that explore the experience of characters that return to their homes after travelling or living overseas. The texts discussed include one novel, The Return, by K.S. Maniam; four short stories, "Welcome" and "Wedding Night", both by Gopal Baratham, "Return to Malaya" by Lee Kok Liang and "A Dream of China" by Ovidia Yu; and one play, Gold Rain and Hailstones by Jit Murad. The protagonists in these stories trace the modern history of Malaysians and Singaporeans who travel overseas--most frequently to western countries and for the purposes of furthering their education--and then choose to return home.

My discussion looks at the ways in which these protagonists approach questions about identity that arise when they are confronted with the challenges of their home contexts. "Identity" is, for these characters, one of the realms in which they most profoundly experience the difficulties, conflicts and confusion that define their re-entry into home spaces. In attempting to make sense and/or reconcile themselves to these challenges, the characters in these works reach, to varying degrees, an understanding of self and their relationship to their homes.
Abstrak


Watak-watak utama di dalam karya-karya tersebut adalah mereka yang telah hidup di negara barat untuk melanjutkan pelajaran dan seterusnya membuat keputusan untuk kembali ke tanah air. Kajian saya meninjau dilema-dilema yang dihadapi oleh watak-watak ini selepas mereka pulang, khususnya mengenai soalan-soalan budaya dan identiti mereka yang tak tertentu. Mereka terpaksa menghadapi cabaran dan tegangan jiwa yang diakibatkan oleh pemisahan dari tanah air kerana telah menetap di luar negeri untuk jangka masa yang panjang. Setiap watak ini terpaksa berusaha untuk menyesuaikan diri ke dalam konteks tanah air yang telahpun menjadi asing untuk mereka. Dalam menghadapi cabaran tersebut, watak-watak ini akan mencapai fahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai hubungan mereka kepada tanah air.
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