Chapter 6:  
*Gold Rain and Hailstones*

Introduction

*Gold Rain and Hailstones,* by Jit Murad, is a play that explores issues of identity, home and belonging through the lives of a group of four young adults who have returned to Malaysia after studying in the United States. The play revolves around a character named Amy whose return home is motivated by the fact that her much-beloved father--Bapak--has suffered a stroke. In the process of acclimatising to Malaysia and developing a deeper understanding of herself, Amy also has recourse to the experiences of her three friends--Man, Nina and Jay--who have also returned from the U.S. and whose own narratives reflect on Amy's homecoming. However, in this chapter, I will be following the example of the text by focusing primarily on Amy's character in order to discuss the issues of identity that arise for her when she returns to Malaysia.

Through a combination of dialogue with her friends, flashbacks and reflective monologues, the play uncovers a wide range of opinions, experiences and perspectives among urban, middle- and upper-class Malays whose questions about identity are approached in very different ways. For Amy, the process of returning home teaches her that attempting to understand people and places with strictly defined approaches or expectations is a recipe for failure. Largely as a result of the conversations she has with her friends, she eventually comes to recognize and appreciate not only the significant difficulties inherent in the experience of returning home, but also the importance of fluidity, change and acceptance in the way she seeks to understand herself, other people and Malaysia.
A community of returnees

In *Gold Rain and Hailstones*, all of the play's main characters are "returnees" and, as such, form a community of young adults who face similar issues about themselves and their place in Malaysian society. This is a unique aspect of the narrative because, unlike the other texts that have been discussed, Amy's questions of identity are negotiated in relation to and in dialogue with other individuals who have had similar experiences and can therefore engage with her about the difficulties she is facing. As a result, her uncertainty about identity is not purely an "individual task" (Baumann 19), but one that resonates and is shared with other people in the community of which she is a part.\(^{48}\) In this regard, the play represents the sense of a community of people who see questions of identity as a social and communal issue, as well as also reflecting the changing demographics of contemporary Malaysian--or, more specifically, Kuala Lumpur--middle- and upper-class society. In this community, the current generation of 20- and 30-somethings frequently relate to each other largely on the basis of what is perceived as the shared experience of negotiating their "returns home" after studying overseas, often bridging differences of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

As a framework, one of the important things to note is that, between the four characters, relationships are confined to those between cousins and friends. Nina and Man are cousins, Jay is gay and any potential for romance between Amy and Man was destroyed by a disastrous teen-age date. As such, there are no potential husband/wife relationships between any of them. Hence, the ways in which these four characters relate to one another is less strictly defined and more fluid than might be possible with, for example, relationships between immediate family members where roles are more strictly delineated. In particular, the absence of potential spousal relationships is significant because, as the play makes apparent, such relationships are an enormous focal point for nearly all social relations and expectations, whether between family members or friends.

\(^{48}\) The importance of a communal dimension to the issue of identity and homecoming was discussed in the Introduction.
Thus, the playwright's choice allows his characters more space to explore identity than would be possible in relationships that would be more circumscribed and restrictive.

The play also gives great attention to the discourse and ideology employed by its characters that struggle to make sense of their identity. By articulating--especially with more than one voice--the difficulties associated with returning home, the characters create a much different sense of how identity is negotiated than is presented in the other texts that have been discussed. Also, by drawing on certain theoretical frameworks in order to understand this experience, and by utilising an academic vocabulary developed specifically in order to address such issues, the characters literally give voice to their questions and experience. In part, this serves to lend a significant air of legitimacy to these issues and to the contemporary perspectives offered by the characters, rather than leaving them confined to the private space of individual minds.

Unlike, for instance, the characters in Gopal Barathams' stories, the characters in *Gold Rain and Hailstones* do not usually experience or conceive of their identity as static or pre-defined but instead as a "production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 1999: 299). The characters also break down notions of hierarchical binaries by historicizing and relativising the influences that shape them, thereby giving voice to a contemporary, postcolonial consciousness. For instance, this is apparent in a scene in which Amy and her friend Jay are reflecting on their own attraction to and reverence for white men and how these views were conditioned by the way in which they were raised:

Amy: But, you know, myths go beyond romance and aesthetics, White Males represent Power - political, economic - sexual....
Jay: And what a drag when you get a total bottom....
Amy: As a kid I'd hear Bapak say things like: "The Number Two gave a speech today - fine man, speaks like an Englishman" or "He runs a tight ship, handles his staff like an Englishman."
Jay: My father was terrified of them. He'd say things like: "Eh takut. Nanti mengamuk orang putih gila tun."
Amy: Today's Englishmen seem a pretty demoralised lot but to Bapak's generation they had qualities to be copied, worshipped almost. I got the sense that it was important to be acknowledged by them, if not
socially accepted. (Thinks) What should we call that? The Fielding Syndrome? Where does that leave the generation that follows?

Jay: Oh no.
Amy: What?
Jay: Here we go - Post-Colonial angst, right? You know what I mean! Where are we? Where are we going? Why are we? Who are we? Hello, we are we, just be lah! (33-4)\(^49\)

Here, even though Jay dismisses Amy's questions and concerns, the very terms of the conversation call into question notions of racial and cultural superiority. As a result, it is obvious that both she and Jay are aware of the constructed nature of what are often perceived as given truths about the way things "are", as well as the fact that they are willing to challenge these inherited "truths". The remainder of their conversation, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, proceeds to further demonstrate the centrality of these views in making sense of identity, and are complemented by the perspectives and opinions expressed in the course of discussions that also take place with the other characters.

Amy

The audience is first introduced to Amy by her friend Man, who begins by informing us, "So Aminah is finally coming home. We call her Amy - of course! She'd never agree to being called Minah. She was Mat-Sallehified even before she went to the States" (1). From this introduction, as well as a telephone conversation between Man's and Nina's mothers in which the two women discuss Amy's unconventional choices and personality traits, we get a clear picture of the reputation that precedes her on her trip home. Just as importantly, however, we also begin to form a sense of the society that will be greeting her. Man's own prejudices--not only about Amy, but also about women in general--establish the particular social expectations and sexist views that characterise the larger community. He explains:

\(^{49}\) All subsequent references to Gold Rain and Hailstones by Jit Murad are from the 1993 version of the unpublished manuscript and will be referred to by page number.
She was precocious. Started with Enid Blyton like most of us but by nine or ten she was already on Penguins. A lot of abstract ideas floating around in a young head. Always questioning, always wanting to do things differently. Those are good qualities, mind you, but in a young girl it looks awkward and arrogant, you know?

Also, she had a lot of boyfriends. Hanging out with musicians, UM students older than she was. I'm sure it was all very, you know, intellectual, but it led to Amy acquiring a bit of a reputation. A reputation that fairly or unfairly has persisted over the years. (1)

Man also voices the commonly held view that Amy's lack of direction in her studies reflects a general confusion (and implied weakness) that characterises her personality.

Not sure of what she was or wanted. I supposed when she got to the States doing all those specialty courses, she must have felt like she finally belonged. What did she study? Hah! What DIDN'T she? Ten years - she did Anthropologylah, Creative Writingslah, African American studies - can you imagine? She's going to come back and find herself completely irrelevant. (4-5)

This passage also conveys the view that Amy's lack of singular focus that was viable in a U.S. environment has no relevance in a Malaysian context. In fact, Man identifies the very question of Amy's "relevance" which gradually begins to develop in her own mind when she is confronted with the challenges of her home context. Specifically, when she attempts to bring into a Malaysian context her views about women, race and religion, among other issues, she finds that people respond to her only with confusion, anger or irritation rather than engaging with her on the terms she expects them to.

Contrary to Man's assumptions about Amy's experience in the U.S., however, we quickly learn from Amy herself that she hardly felt that she "finally belonged" when she was overseas. In the scene entitled "Transit", she reflects on the increasing difficulties she faced in the U.S. and the relief she feels at being summoned home. Her master's thesis--ironically titled *The Societal Dilemma of the Expanding Self: The Literary Myth of Consciousness Growth*--"was just NOT happening" (8), and she was increasingly frustrated with her four year on-and-off relationship with a married man. In line with the mentality expressed by Man in the earlier scene that she does not fit the expected script for Malaysian students who go overseas to study, Amy says:
I have memories of my friends too, of course, dear simple people who flew in and out of America to pick up their degrees and are now probably hopelessly contented.

I couldn't let them know that MY life had come unravelled. I mean, on top of everything else, my Visa was about to expire.

I was walking around, at the laundromat, at Walgreens, muttering to myself:

"Stupid, you should have...
Why did you wait to?...
You should have told him..."

I was losing it - a Malaysian bag lady in San Francisco. But too proud to throw in the towel.

Then I got a phone call. It's Bapak. He's had a stroke. A major one this time. He's sort of in and out of consciousness. I really can't imagine...

This is really sick but as much as I was upset about Bapak, I was also relieved. I can go home. I have an excuse to go home. (10)

Here Amy reflects a very common American notion—especially apparent in its literature—that returning home signals "defeat, frustration, the giving up of freedom" and that "at best it is a disappointment" (Stout 66). However, it is also clear that Amy's stubbornness and insistence on acting, thinking and living as she wants to, without conforming to social pressures, is an additional aspect of why she feels she must succeed in doing things that are not part of the expected social script. To a large extent, it is the fact that she is "too proud to throw in the towel" which, when she is back at home, begins to prompt the question of her relevance in a Malaysian context. Her mode of thinking, opinions, discourse, language and even style of dressing are all thoroughly rooted in a U.S. context, and, only in the final scenes of the play is she at all able or willing to adapt herself to the society to which she has returned. Instead, similar to the stubbornness exhibited with regard to remaining in San Francisco, she more often seems to assume that, through the strength of her own confidence and convictions, she can re-enter Malaysian society after ten years and be "at home" on her own terms.

However, even on her airplane journey back to Kuala Lumpur, Amy begins to get a hint of the difficulties she will encounter on home soil. Reflecting on her own Americanised perspective, she comments: "My first stab of Culture Shock was delivered by the MAS stewardesses. They were these slender lotus blossoms shimmying up and down the aisles dispensing hot towels and gracious smiles. Happy fantasy slaves" (11).
Even more shocking than the "slender lotus blossoms", however, is Amy's seat-mate who, due largely to the clothes Amy is wearing, mistakes her for a man. Nudging her, he comments: "Now you guys are lucky to have babes like that growin' at home" (11). Amy says: "That was when I screamed" (11). At this point, the experience of the vast difference between, as she says in a later scene, "how we think we are and how we are perceived" (53) overwhelms her. However, it is not a simple binary of how the Malaysian stewardesses view themselves in contrast to how the are perceived by this American man, but the dynamics are significantly complicated by additional factors. For instance, Amy also sees the stewardesses from a westernised perspective, though on some level, she recognizes that, as a Malaysian woman, she "should" identify with them. Yet, in contrast to their appearance, she herself feels "truly grotesque": "I had been drinking so steadily, I was in a perpetual state of being both hungover and drunk. And my sinuses were acting up. And my period was making me bloated" (11). In addition, her seatmate perceives her as Malaysian, but male, complicating further the already enormous gap between how she thinks she is and how she is perceived by others, a difficulty which she also encounters once she arrives in Malaysia.

In this scene, we also learn that contrary to Man's assumptions, Amy has not been able to fit into American expectations or into academic discourses that she might have imagined could be a viable alternative to those of her Malaysian context. In particular, this scene addresses one of Amy's central concerns--sexism--and demonstrates that both American and Malaysian versions of gender prejudice are deeply troubling to her. This is apparent later in the play when she and Man go to see a movie entitled Hati Wanita because Amy thinks "it'd be interesting to see how women here see themselves" (51), but she and Man end up leaving mid-way through the movie because it is so bad. Afterwards, Amy struggles to make sense of the absence of accurate representations--including her own--of women, especially Malay women. She recalls:

One time I wrote a short story about a young village girl who escapes an arranged marriage by pretending to be possessed. That's how Clark noticed me in class. He said that my piece was 'redolent of spice and sweat; heavy with tropical colours, mysticism and female anima.' It was a
sham. The colours came from postcards, the exoticism from Maugham. It was Amy Tan in a sarung. It was beyond derivative - it was delusional; secondhand orientalism. But I can't believe that the truth is Hati Wanita either. (58)

In this passage it is obvious that Amy has not only acquired a western, orientalist and sexist perspective but, more importantly, she is very aware of this prejudice and is currently seeking to reform it. However, as can be observed, for example, in her derisive and patronising comments to Nina about her choice to wear a tudung, it is apparent that she continues to stubbornly cling to many of her stereotypical views and also to the belief that her perceptions are accurate and justified.

Amy's Americanised and/or westernised point of view, which, we learn, comes largely from her father's influence, repeatedly surfaces throughout the course of the play. However, one of the most telling passages with regard to the way she views her home is in the scene entitled "On the Street Where You Live" when she takes a taxi to visit her friend Jay and converses with the driver. In this scene, we observe that neither she nor the taxi driver knows their way around the city, due to the enormous changes that have taken place in the ten years she has been away. In a conversation full of ironic and humorous misunderstandings and assumptions, Amy indicates the extent to which her reference points are in distinct contrast to the driver's.

Taxi driver: Hello Miss. I hope you know the way ah?
Amy: No, I don't know the way. All I have is the address. Here, Number Forty Eight, Block Nine C, Monte Carlo Villas. You don't know where?
Taxi driver: Exactly where I'm not sure. But somewhere herelah. New area. Last time rubber estate. I think the place around here. See there is the nice Villas.
Amy: You think so? They look kinda like project housing to me.
Taxi driver: No, the name. See?
Amy: Oh I see. Nice Villas. And over there is St. Tropez Villas. (Chuckles) Yes, I guess Monte Carlo should be around here. (25)

As the conversation proceeds, Amy and the taxi driver repeatedly misunderstand and misread each other. The driver's hint that he would appreciate a tip alerts Amy to the fact

50 A "tudung" is a head covering worn by some Muslim women.
that he thinks she is a foreigner and, when she challenges him to articulate what he means when he tells her that her "style is like the foreign girl", he replies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taxi driver:</th>
<th>Ya ya! Like foreign girl style. You study oversea isn't it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy:</td>
<td>I did, yes. I was in the States for ten years. I've been back for little over a week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi driver:</td>
<td>Where you study? London? Germany?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy:</td>
<td>No, in the States. Uh... in America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi driver:</td>
<td>Ah, that's why. You got the America style. Long time ah?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy:</td>
<td>Yes. (Pause) KL looks so different now. The development, the buildings - incredible changes. Like these condos for example. Rows and rows of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi driver:</td>
<td>Yalah. You all oversea [sic] live like this style. Come back also want to live like this style isn't it? We all the lockles don't want the condo house because we don't understand this style. The new fashion in KL all for the foreigner and the lockle study oversea. Ah here - the Money Kwailo Villa. I think so you can find the house very easy now. (25-6)</td>
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</tbody>
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This scene with the taxi driver demonstrates the very different perspectives that the local KL residents and the overseas-educated returnees have about themselves and each other and also suggests the enormous impact, both geographically and culturally, that the overseas-educated population has had on the city as a whole. In addition, this conversation brings to the fore the terms of the discourse that each character uses to negotiate identity. For instance, the driver poses "lockle" (local) in contrast to "oversea" and "foreign", and "style" is repeatedly used to articulate difference between the "lockle" and the "oversea". However, the style of the newly built condominiums is read very differently by the two characters. For Amy, what looks like "project housing"--i.e. cheap and low-class--is seen by the taxi driver as a physical representation of "foreign" desires which he does not understand. In particular, these desires are associated both with material wealth as well as with race, as is apparent when he announces: "Ah here - the Money Kwailo Villa."51 Also, his mispronunciation of "Monte Carlo" signals a type of view the "lockles" have of Amy as being more "white" and westernised than "Malay" or Malaysian. This is a view that Amy constantly resists, but, as subsequent scenes indicate, she is forced to ultimately reconcile with.

51 "Kwailo" refers to a white person.
In the next scene entitled "The Grass is Greener," Amy is again challenged by other views of her, but this time, the opinions—as well as direct criticisms—expressed come from her friend Jay. More so than Nina or Man, Jay is the person that Amy most trusts and whom she looks to for understanding and sympathy. However, only a few minutes into their conversation in his apartment, Amy is confronted yet again with direct challenges to how she conceives of others and herself, as well as how others think of her. For instance, when Jay says, "Hello what you think ah? Think we so kampung izzit?", Amy asks, "What's with the patois?" (27) However, Jay fires back, "Patois!? Get a load of Connie Chung here! I've re-discovered my roots, gnarled and twisted though they may be. And besides people here get irritated when you start twangling and slanging away. Unless you're on radio. So you might want to lose that accent eventually" (27). Though Amy is unoffended by Jay's response, the stage is set for what becomes the focal point of their conversation—a heated argument about belonging, identity and exclusion in which Amy's stubborn attachment to her "mat-sallehified" perspective is challenged by Jay.

The argument that eventually ensues is foreshadowed by a conversation in which Jay tells Amy that people have claimed that her father rose to power because of his "ilmu," but that he is still clinging to life because he cannot pass it onto the next generation. Amy is dismayed at the suggestions of "gender specificity" and the impossibility of inheriting her father's "ilmu" because she is female, and yet, she is not even aware of what "ilmu" means. Rather than listening to Jay's explanation, in which he tries to suggest a historicized and also potentially progressive framework for explaining the issue at hand, Amy only focuses on the fact that she is being excluded from something because of her gender, and is both "fascinated" and "horrified" at the same time.

Jay: Do you know what they're saying about your father?
Amy: What's that?
Jay: Well, rumour has it that he rose to his position of prominence because of his ilmu.
Amy: His what?
Jay: Ilmu.
Amy: (Genuine confusion) What's that? Like Ilmu Alam?
Jay: (Laughing) It means knowledge, yes, but also supernatural powers.
Amy: You've got to be shittin' me.
Jay: No, no. Sumpah 'Mee, this is what they say. And he hasn't been able to return to his maker because his ilmu needs to be passed on, and you don't qualify.

Amy: (Fascinated, horrified) Because I'm a woman?

Jay: Something like that. But women have ilmu too. Ilmu is very gender specific, that's all.

Amy: What's his ilmu? Is it like, seeing through walls or what?

Jay: Now, now don't be glib. Our people believe this, or used to. Ilmu gives you power over people, an air of authority. Which sounds like plain old charisma to me.

Amy: And he can't pass it on to me.

Jay: Now why would you need any more charisma? (28)

In part, what this scene indicates is that, in her concern about herself and her own identity, Amy is unable to recognize, much less begin to comprehend, something that falls outside her frame of understanding. Instead, she approaches the unknown with a rock-solid set of expectations and insists that the unfamiliar should somehow fit into her internalized—and largely academic—theories of oppression and exclusion.52

The conflict that soon ensues is prompted by Jay's impatient response to some of Amy's questions regarding their inherited sense that white culture is superior to their own. Impatient and perhaps slightly dismissive, Jay raises the question of postcolonialism and the ways in which its discourse has affected him.

Jay: Here we go - Post-Colonial angst, right? You know what I mean! Where are we? Where are we going? Why are we? Who are we? - Hello, we are we, just be lah!

Amy: Whoa! You think these concerns are imaginary?

Jay: Not imaginary, but, tsk, everybody feels this way at one time or anotherlah. Everybody! You think a hundred years ago people didn't stop to think, "The world is changing, my father was like this; now I'm like this; what's next?" Except then they had to pick up the cangkul and go work in the padi fields. Now we've got the vocabulary, and the time, to moan and blame that in the end that's all we're about. We become Angst personified. Bo-Ring. Look at me, Amy, do you think I've got the time to worry about identity, acceptance? (34)

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52 Edward Said's book Orientalism (New York: Vintage, 1979) is a seminal text expressing what is now a common criticism concerning the way in which western discourses, academic disciplines, theoretical frameworks and approaches to "the Orient" have repeatedly represented Asian people, cultures and societies through very biased, western-centred perspectives. A particularly important dimension of these perspectives is that they have frequently been presented as thoroughly objective and truthful, thus hindering an engagement with criticisms or counter-discourses which have sought to challenge them. Amy's character and the views she espouses are good examples of the power wielded by western, academic discourse, even among non-western individuals.
Even in this short speech, Jay already introduces certain discursive terms and concepts that are central to his and Amy's discussion, including naming the issues as "identity" and "acceptance." In addition, his argument focuses on both a historical and a class-based criticism of Amy's "post-colonial angst" which situates their dilemmas and difficulties within a broader framework. Jay also calls into question Amy's self-centred perspective by arguing that her difficulties are essentially no different from anyone else's--only that now she has "the vocabulary, and the time, to moan and blame"--thereby placing some of the responsibility for the "angst" Amy feels on herself.

In this response to Amy's difficulties, Jay utilises contemporary terms and concepts that can be useful for understanding the dilemmas at hand, but he also simultaneously scrutinises their effectiveness and practicality. In this way, he reflects a particular kind of academic background, not only through the discourse with which he is familiar, but also in his willingness to criticise its usefulness and the way in which Amy employs it. What his criticisms in part highlight is that not all contemporary academic theories about identity or about postcolonialism are necessarily practical or helpful in all situations and can in fact be an impediment to "just being". In particular, being aware of social and historical forces without also being aware of one's own position and active participation in a specific situation is a self-defeating and "Bo-Ring" way to live.

In contrast to Amy's way of responding to injustices, oppression and the weight of history, Jay instead proposes his own version of how to cope with such challenges:

Girlfriend, I will never be welcomed onboard. I'm here so that when the straight boys get tired of fighting among themselves they can kick me around for a change.
I guess I'm luckier than you because I never expected to find a home when I got back. But you know, I love travelling. . . . I love that wherever I am, people recognize me as being an outsider in their midst. They smile and are curious about this visitor. Visitors are allowed to be different. So the only time I'm at home is as a tourist. (35)

Although Jay refers to himself as a tourist in his description of himself, he more accurately fits what Baumann refers to as a "vagabond" in his theories about postmodern travellers. According to Baumann, a "tourist" is someone who finds the world "infinitely
gentle, obedient to [his] wishes and whims, ready to oblige” (29) and who is protected by
the “safety package” (30) of having a definite home to return to. In contrast the
"vagabond"--like Jay--is someone who is "pushed from behind by hopes frustrated, and
pulled forward by hopes untested" (28) and who assumes this role "not because of the
reluctance or difficulty of settling down, but because of the scarcity of settled places"
(29). For Jay, who recognizes he "will never be welcomed onboard" and yet is committed
to finding a way to live life in a way that does not deny the very real challenges of the
particular contexts he is a part of, including a Malaysian one, not being "at home"
anywhere is the strategy he chooses to employ. Amy, however, is horrified by such a
prospect, and responds by asking Jay: "How can you say that? Don't you feel any
responsibility for others? You want to be a tourist all your life? That's pretty shallow,
Jay" (35), a reply which initiates a heated shouting match between the two of them that is
similar in theme and tone to the arguments Amy also has with Nina and Man.

Throughout the play, there is a series of conflicts between Amy and her friends in
which they argue about identity and what constitutes “belonging”. The climax of these
conflicts occurs at the end of the play when Amy and Man meet to see a movie and have a
drink. While they are having a conversation with each other, Amy begins to pontificate
about what she thinks is "the difference between how we think we are and how we are
PERCEIVED . . . the synthesis [of which] constitutes Identity" (53). Quite quickly, Man
loses interest in what she is saying and, between snatches of Amy's speechifying,
addresses the audience with his thoughts about his own sense of responsibility to himself
and to others. As she rambles on about "isolation or hedonism . . . the Marxist model . . .
the proto-Malays . . . the Igorot . . . the Toradja . . . the Dayak . . ." (54), without warning,
she suddenly interrupts herself.

Amy: Look at me: I can't stop talking. Who am I trying to kid? I feel
none of it.
Man: What?
Amy: Excuse me?
Man: You feel none of what?
Amy: (Embarrassed) Did I say that out loud?
Man: (snidely) Don't you always?
Amy: (sadly) I'm pretty ridiculous, aren't I?
At this point in the play, we observe that Amy, for the first time, is not completely confident about who she is, what she thinks and what she is saying. As a result, it immediately becomes possible for the audience, as well as for Man, to be sympathetic towards her. In addition, the conversation which ensues is one of the most honest of the whole play and the only one where there is a sense that Amy is actually listening to someone else, looking to them for insight or understanding, and not being completely convinced that it is she who knows everything and that it is the others who need to be enlightened. Because of this shift that she makes in opening herself to the possibility of not knowing everything, Amy begins to incorporate important ideas and insights offered by Man into her own perceptions in a way which accurately and appropriately connects her academic knowledge to the lived experience and history of which she is part. This is surprising not only because of the tremendous resistance Amy had towards other views about her, but also because Man suddenly reveals himself to be very knowledgeable about ethnic identity. In earlier scenes he shows himself to be extremely sexist, but here he appears extremely well-versed in the history of Malays and the construction of ethnic identity and is able to convincingly communicate these ideas to Amy.

For one, Man historicizes "Malayness" by taking it beyond the frame of nationalism and instead considering it from a diasporic perspective. That is, rather than associating "race" with "nation",\(^53\) he indicates that the two kinds of identity do not always or necessarily overlap, highlighting the fact that there are non-Malays who are Malaysians, as well as ethnic Malays who are not Malaysian. Also, by calling attention to the fact that he and Amy are drinking beer--when, as Muslims, they are supposed to abstain from alcohol completely--he seems to call into question the significance of both their religious and racial identity.\(^54\) Through this perspective, Man focuses on the fluid

\(^53\) This association between race and nation is further strengthened by the Bahasa Malaysia word "bangsa", a term that connotes a sense of both national and racial identity.

\(^54\) Malaysian syariah (Islamic) law requires all ethnic Malays to be Muslim. Though technically there are options for claiming apostasy status, the legal and social impediments make this option practically
nature of identity and reflects the view that identification is never complete, but always “in process” (Hall 1998: 2). In addition, this scene highlights the performative nature of identity, as well as the "gap" that exists between feeling and acting out who one "is", again focusing mainly on ethnic identity:

Amy: . . . You know how to be Malay.
Man: I know how to speak Bahasa. And I pray in Arabic. And I've switched from agriculture to commerce. And I have a cellular phone! I'm a Melayu Baru.55 (They laugh) Amy, who were the Malays who prayed at the ancient temples in Lembah Bujang? Who were the Malays who married into Peranakan families? Serani families? And lost their race to conversion? What about the Malays in Sri Lanka, in the Maldives, in South Africa - and all the others you were saying, the Batak and Dayaks and whatever...
Amy: Toradjans and Igorots.
Man: Uh-huh. Do you think they'd think that I know how to be Malay better than they do? (laughing) As we sit here, in the Coliseum having a couple of Anchors.
Amy: Um. What are you saying?
Man: (shrugging) Maybe I feel none of it.
Amy: (relaxed, as with an old friend - finally) You know what Man. I remember what my mother was saying.
Man: About what?
Amy: Before I left for the States, she told me that her mother warned her: Hujan Emas diNegeri Orang . . .
Man: Hujan Batu diNegeri Sendiri.
A&M: Lebih Baik Negeri Sendiri.56 (54-5)

This conversation makes obvious the fact that contemporary concepts of "Malayness" are defined primarily by external markers that are read as collectively signalling a particular ethnic identity. Man's comments, as well as Amy's contributions, also clarify the historical context of "Malayness" in which the idea of the "Melayu Baru" challenges the idea of ethnic identities as being fixed or stable.

The proverb from which the title of the play is taken also serves an important purpose in this scene for signalling the changes in Amy's consciousness. Earlier in the play, en route to Malaysia, she had also recalled that her mother had told her this proverb

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55 "Melayu Baru" means "New Malay" and refers to the contemporary generation of ethnic Malays.
56 "Between gold rain in another country and hailstones in your own, the hailstones in your own are preferable."
as a piece of advice. However, in this earlier scene, Amy comments, "And damn if I know what the hell that [proverb] means!" (9), whereas, in this conversation with Man, she draws on this memory as a way in which to understand the difficulties she is going through. In the spirit of looking at identity from a historical point of view, she suddenly sees a connection between the proverb and her experience of returning home, rather than assuming that her difficulties are unique only in her particular circumstances. It is also significant that one of the few ideas that gets through to her and changes the way she perceives and approaches her home context is an ancient, Malay proverb--one passed down from mother to daughter--and not a contemporary, western theory.

The final scene of the play, which takes place the day of Bapak's funeral, further develops the ideas Amy previously discusses with her friends, particularly in her conversations with Jay and Man. For one, the presence of history is given physical form in that Amy's mother hallucinates that Bapak is following Amy everywhere: "The older Bapak, reading out my letters, the proud father who carried me home from hospital, the young Bapak that courted her [Amy's mother] with sonnets and pantuns, even the boy who made fish traps and fed his family during the war" (61-2). Also, Amy chooses to give away her father's possessions in a gesture that clarifies her own perspective on the role of history--particularly her own history--in the context of the present. "I started giving out some of Bapak's things. He has to be everywhere, not in a box or a bonfire. I gave 'em to people I last saw as kids. Now they are people who, I totally trust, will bear no ill-will towards the memory of Bapak and his generation. I won't let him be written out. He was neither traitor nor aberration. He lived" (62). Besides conveying the idea that "no ill-will" should be felt about the past, including her father's generation that was so heavily influenced by British colonialism, Amy also seems to accept his--as well as her own--identity. These are identities that are a combination of forces, both colonial and postcolonial, Malay and white, Malaysian and American, as well as influences that cannot be categorised or placed on either side of a binary. Instead, the lived reality of, for instance, having "Sunshine Bakery white bread, spread with Planta and sprinkled with
serundung" (9) for breakfast makes a person neither "traitor" nor "aberration" to any community or identity.

This final scene also provides an opportunity for Amy to sum up what her recent experiences have taught her about herself, identity in general and the significance of the difficulties she has been encountering.

The more you define yourself, the less space you have to live. If we hide or run away, how are people going to know that different things are born here and grow here, and eventually, room must be made? Being a clumsy mutant here is more significant than being merely an exotic hybrid somewhere else. (cheerful?) But Man's right. It's not always about me. Home is hailstones, for everyone everywhere. We choose the weather when we choose our place, and we don't acclimatize by staying in. (62)

Here, Amy touches on a number of very important issues, beginning with the idea that defining oneself is an action that is restrictive rather than liberating. With the knowledge of the conversations she has had with her friends still resonating in the reader's memory, the need to define woman, Muslim women, Malay women, Melayu Barus, Malays in general and anything or anyone else is deemed unnecessary and even unhelpful to the process of learning how to live in the "in-between spaces" of contemporary society. In this concluding passage, Amy also argues that "room must be made for difference", especially those differences that strict definitions of identity, whether personal or communal, make impossible. Instead, she proposes a notion of "difference" that is not restrictive, exclusionary or threatening, but that is a natural part of human existence. Perhaps most significant of all, Amy again returns to the proverb about gold rain and hailstones and, in this instance, uses it as a way to claim her own role within her home context. Rather than looking to sources other than herself for causing the "hailstones", she recognizes that her difficult and painful experiences are also the result of her own choices--including the choice to return home--and that such difficulties simply come with the territory of being in a home space.
Conclusion

*Gold Rain and Hailstones* presents a unique approach to questions of identity and the difficulties of returning to a Malaysian home context. Unlike the other texts discussed, in which uncertainty about identity is almost exclusively a private and individual affair, this narrative takes these issues into a more communal space in which the issues are discussed within a larger community. In part, this shift reflects the fact that, unlike in previous decades, more and more Malaysians and Singaporeans of all races are travelling and being educated overseas, particularly those of the urban middle and upper classes and, as a result, communities of "returnees"--such as that formed by Amy, Jay, Man and Nina--have become a reality in Malaysian society.

What *Gold Rain and Hailstones* presents, particularly in its exploration of Amy's return experience, is a way of existing in "in-between spaces" and addressing conflicts of identity through dialogue with other individuals. As a result, the particular issues at hand, as well as the revelations and conclusions reached, are arrived at collectively instead of individually. This dimension of the return experience is one that enables a less isolated and more sensitive understanding of identity simply because of the presence of different perspectives. The verbalized conversations--a unique and defining aspect of drama--are also very effective in that they undercut any sense of a seamlessness about what the experience of returning, or of negotiating identity, is about. As soon as one character proposes an answer or resolution to a particular question, another character interjects with an opposing viewpoint or qualification, thus creating a sense that identity is indeed always "in-process" (Hall 1996: 2). As a result of this kind of dialogue, however, Amy is able to come to reach conclusions that more fully incorporate a range of perspectives and opinions, rather than requiring a rejection of certain identities in an attempt to retain others. This approach, coupled with an especially historicized angle and a contemporary vocabulary, enables "room to be made" for the different identities and experiences that are born and grown in home spaces.