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MIGRANTS AS METAPHORS OF HYBRIDITY IN RUSHDIE'S WORK AND THEIR RELEVANCE IN MODERN TIMES

Introduction

Analyzing the characters that inhabit the universe of Salman Rushdie's fiction, one figure holds the central position and it is the character of a migrant. We can thus recognize the archetypal model of the 20th and 21st century embedded in Rushdie himself who has experienced a lifetime of migrancy across three continents and his "archive of displacement" represented in his essays and novels whose characters are uprooted migrants in search for identity in a new postcolonial reality. Their destinies are marked by rootlessness, exile, displacement, imaginary homelands, frontiers, translation, unbelonging, metamorphoses, multiple rooting, cosmopolitanism and fragmentation. Can Europe in the aftermath of this newest great shift of people be perceived as the new Diasporas whose voices will never be the same anymore? Is it too early to claim that newcomers' vision of our old European places, time and identity will affect perception of ourselves? And vice versa?

Migration offers us one of the richest metaphors of our age. The very word metaphor, with its roots in the Greek word for bearing across, describes a sort of migration, the migration of ideas into images. Migrants – borne across humans – are metaphorical beings in their very essence; and migration, seen as metaphor, is everywhere around us².

This paper is aimed at delineating Rushdie's migrant characters in relation to their identity. The first part will therefore deal with the importance of migration and migrant experience in the modern world. Rushdie's essays will be the starting point since Rushdie emphasizes the relevance of this topic and migrant writers and their preoccupations in both fictional and non-fictional output.

¹ **Ivana Kardum Goleš** – Polytechnic of Šibenik, University of Zadar.

² S. Rushdie: *Imaginary homelands: essays and criticism 1981-1991*, London 1991, p. 278.

The Age of Migration

We live in “The Age of Migration”³. The fluid environment that surrounds us contributes so that “...migrancy becomes the name for the condition of human beings *as such*, a name for how we exist and understand ourselves in the twenty-first century”⁴. In 1992, the estimated total number of migrants was 100 million people⁵. Today, 24 years later the numbers are skyrocketing. Much academic interest has been devoted to the research of human migrations in the last hundred years by various sciences such as geography, sociology, anthropology, history, statistics, economy and, finally, literary criticism. Although literary theory is not focused on immediate analysis of migrations, there are numerous literary works by migrant writers who give a splendid insight into the very process of migration and experience characterized more by *movement* than *place*. These works are focused on issues of place perception, environment symbolism, feelings of dislocation and transformation, the lost and newly found communities, exploitation, homesickness, idea of return, family relations and self-realization. Migrant writers often came from former colonies and testified about meeting points of different cultures and possible outcomes. Migration can be understood as the question of displacement and possible alienation from old norms and new context, simultaneously, the change or movement which celebrates differences as the inspirational aspect of the present. Due to multiple perception of reality migrants confirm that each truth is relative and transitory. Migrants as postcolonial subjects exist outside of national borders while at the same time are culturally and politically implicit by the myths of national origin. We can say that they are constantly faced with a problem of contextualization being both placed and displaced in history and identity context of the old and new homeland.

Migrant experience and exile have become the defining characteristic of the last two centuries and George Lamming also claims that “exile is a universal figure”⁶ despite the fact that there is considerable difference between diasporas and they need to be contextualized. Migration implies displacement and rupture that affects a person's identity. Being “somewhere else”, a migrant should create

³ R. King, J. Connell, P. White (et al.), *Writing Across Worlds – literature and migration*, London 1995, p. 1; taken from S. Castels, M.J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, London 1993.

⁴ A. Smith, *Migrancy, hybridity, and postcolonial literary studies*, in: N. Lazarus, *The Cambridge companion to postcolonial literary studies*, Cambridge 2004, p. 247.

⁵ A. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora – Contesting identities*, London 1996, p. 178.

⁶ G. Lamming, *The Occasion for Speaking*, from B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, London 2004, p. 12.

identity which depends on different cultural systems. This space “in between” has shifting borders and is of extreme importance for migrants. Marginalization and being different are characteristic for migrant condition. Rushdie, being Indian, Pakistani, British, all of that (or nothing), wants to incorporate his migrant voice into (un)official history. Andrew Smith explains that migration charm stems from the fact that the act of storytelling and journey are mixed together⁷. The idea of a closed national culture cannot be sustained and migration confirms that never more forcefully than today. In his words “...as people move, the cultural centre also moves, not in any specific direction, but in a diffusing, outward spread”⁸. In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha also analyses migrants and calls them “borderline community” and they demonstrate how cultures are not fixed but divided and contradictory. A migrant writer brings new ways of progress by overcoming dichotomies and oppositions in favour of hybridity and difference and “...it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate *the differences between them* into a kind of solidarity”⁹.

In the western literary circles multicultural or “translated” writing¹⁰ is considered to be one of the oppositional, anti-authoritative textual strategies with novel writing being especially important for its polyphony plurality and the best expression of Bakhtin dialogue. Following the Rushdie case with fatwa being pronounced, migrant writing has been experiencing a great deal of attention from western critics and has been analysed from democratic principles of multiculturalism and heterogeneity that invite integration and internationalism (cosmopolitanism). In this context, migrant literature is looking for audience and although it carries all the appeal of the exotic, magic and the Other, it still uses aesthetics close to European or American culture. However, Rushdie has claimed repeatedly that “out-of country” writing offers more interpretative possibilities and views that national writing exclusively.

Hybridity of migrant art means liberation of voices, polyphony, and questioning of authority. Because of their position inside and outside of society, migrants refuse to be labelled as the Other, they are neither completely objective nor subjective. This must not be seen as a defect; on the contrary, it emerges as expansion of cultural and aesthetic experience. Instead of binary

⁷ A. Smith, *Migrancy, hybridity and ...*, op. cit., p. 242.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 245.

⁹ H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture: Collected Essays*, London 1984, p. 170.

¹⁰ S. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: essays and criticism 1981-1991*, London 1991, p. 17.

oppositions migrant literature creates dynamic interaction of styles, voices, stories and in this way resists purist aspirations inherited from the past.

Migrant experience in literature

Rushdie is aware of a complexity when faced with showing migrant experience. His works analyse normative construction of home and exile, individual and national identity, history and fiction, fantasy and reality. In *Imaginary Homelands* he states:

A full migrant suffers, traditionally, a triple disruption: he loves his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behaviour and codes are very unlike, and sometimes even offensive to, his own. And this is what makes migrants such important figures: because roots, language and social norms have been three of the most important parts of the definition of what it is to be a human being. The migrant, denied all three, is obliged to find new ways of describing himself, new ways of being human¹¹.

What concerns Rushdie is not only migration in terms of geographical distance covered but psychological, cultural and identity changes that occur in the process of migration. He likes to say that he possesses “double vision” because he is simultaneously inside and outside of the two worlds and his vision is plural, partial and enables him to move perspective freely. He claims that he belongs to the English past, the history of immigrant Britain with Swift, Conrad and Marx being as much his literary forebears as Tagore or Ram Mohan Roy.

One of Rushdie’s greatest focuses is the question of place and migration and their influence on identity formation. In one interview he admitted that three places claimed him: India where he was born, Pakistan where his family lives and England. Rushdie believes that this is not the classical identity crisis when you do not know where you come from; the problem is that you come from too many places. Multiple rooting leads to multiple identities. This condition, although problematic, can be an advantage:

It may be argued that the past is a country, from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. (...) This may enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal.¹²

¹¹ Ibidem, pp. 277-278.

¹² Ibidem, p. 280.

Rushdie becomes an example of a cosmopolitan writer. He cannot be certain WHERE home is. Migration is not an interval between two points but a way of existing – “migrancy”¹³. A migrant is at the same time inside and outside of the situation and place where he lives, longing to go back but conscious that it is impossible because past is not only a different country but a different time. To cross a border does not mean to be physically in a new country because a migrant lives on the border that goes through his or her languages, cultures and experiences. Displacement and loss of solid ground, conflicts that arise from self-realization encourage migrant writers to embrace writing and its creative impulse where some old dogmas are reflected in completely new ways.

In migration, above all topics, the levels of ambivalence, of plurality, of shifting identities and interpretations are perhaps greater than in many other aspects of life. The relationship between people and their contextual societies and places are intimate ones which are transformed by movement. Adjustment processes may never be fully completed: indeed, since we all continually refine our self-identities throughout our life-course it may be more truthful to say that migration intervenes in that process of renegotiating as a lasting force, rather than as a single event¹⁴.

Migration is a condition that surpasses nationalistic myths which Rushdie considers too confining since “to be a migrant is, perhaps, to be the only species of human being free of the shackles of nationalism (to say nothing of its ugly sister, patriotism)”¹⁵. He was sometimes criticised for his emphasis on rootlessness but he roots himself more in ideas and memories rather than places and feels that migrants, due to loss of familiar place, have to make a new imaginative relationship with the world.

Migrant identities in Rushdie's novels

Flapping Eagle in *Grimus* is a character that represents birth of a study on migrant identity and exile he is forced into, a long line of characters that go into this exile voluntarily or are forced to do so. His experience is of a person who “Stripped of his past, forsaking the language of his ancestors for the language of the archipelagos of the world, forsaking the ways of his ancestors for those of the places he drifted to”¹⁶ is pushed into bridging different worlds. Saleem,

¹³ R. King, J. Connell, P. White (et al.), *Writing Across Worlds – literature and migration*, London 1995, Preface XV.

¹⁴ P. White, *Geography, literature and migration*, from R. King, J. Connell, P. White (et al.)..., op.cit., p. 15.

¹⁵ S. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: essays and criticism 1981-1991*, London 1991, p. 124.

¹⁶ S. Rushdie, *Grimus*, New York 2003, p. 36.

Saladin, Moor, Ormus Cama, Shalimar continue the line of yet other hybrid characters who go into exile, change their gravitational centre and build international ideas lured by the shining lights of the West while at the same time linked with the “lost body of the native land”¹⁷.

Rushdie professes the need for anti-essentialist ideas of subjects who have multiple identity positions: “And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallow of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well.”¹⁸ Migrant is an archetypal figure.

That position is very sensitive because it implies separation and creation of one's own history at the crossroad of more cultures and migrants who come to countries of great political distinction make that position even more troublesome because it includes not only the question of belonging but very strong ideas of racism and discrimination. Rushdie's characters suffer from changes, translations, migration and discontinuity of identities. Furthermore, they are perceived through the natives' eyes and “They describe ...That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct”¹⁹. Displacement and migration lead to fragmented vision, identity and memories. Migrants are stripped of history and they leave the past behind but not entirely. They have to create new connections in place, time, history and society²⁰. Furthermore, they cannot have the feelings of continuity and belonging but they need to “translate” themselves into something completely different and accept the fact that they inhabit two worlds. Newness in the world comes from fusions, translations, conjoining. So, if we accept the fact that migrants will alter their own world and perspectives by coming to us, we have to be honest and admit that migrants are not simply transformed by their act; they transform their/our new/old world and “...out of such hybridization (that) newness can emerge”²¹.

Rushdie is sceptical when it comes to forced separation from the new environment and return to homeland without realizing that such experience enriched a person. It is futile to be worried that the Other will enter your life and disrupt the purity of existence. According to him, it will be the sign of xenophobia that

¹⁷ M. Dash, *In Search of the Lost Body – Redefining the Subject in Caribbean Literature*, from B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, London 2004, p. 332.

¹⁸ S. Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, London 1981, p. 11-12.

¹⁹ S. Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, London 1988, p. 168.

²⁰ S. Rushdie, *Shame*, London 1983, p. 64.

²¹ S. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands...*, op.cit., p. 210.

needs to be overcome by eclecticism because "...to experience any form of migration is to get a lesson in the importance of tolerating others' points of view"²². Spivak is especially straightforward when it comes to a senseless search for the roots and pastoral beauty of the past²³. Paul Gilroy in his influential book *The Black Atlantic* replaces the security of roots for the changeability of cultural routes²⁴.

Although myths of roots can be contested, they are always implicitly written in the text. For a migrant it means that we cannot erase the national question. We have to analyse this issue even deeper because migrants suffer from displacement and discontinuity. In Rushdie's novels they escape any characterization and are located in imaginary but also in real references, inside and outside of national borders, in the past and present and they change categories of space and time. In his own words:

I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change²⁵.

Rushdie's novels testify how spaces of different cultures are mixed, layered and displaced in the perpetual state of hybridity. He celebrates hybridity, mixing, transformation, newness and change as the only safe thing to do. If we fail to do so, we will be like border guards and will serve the borders meticulously.

Conclusion

Migrant experience shows us that conventional ideas of "belonging" and "home" cannot be understood as the absolute truth because they depend on a specific existence "in place" and being rooted in a particular community or geographical location. Models of belonging are not appropriate any longer in the world, where migrant experience irreversibly alters the way in which individuals build their connection to a place. New identities take into account a position which is "in-between", in time and space. As Rushdie himself has asserted many times, the position of a migrant is displaced and as such is precious because it allows reality to be perceived in the broken mirror and this

²² Ibidem, p. 280.

²³ G.C. Spivak, S. Harasym, *The Postcolonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, New York-London 1990, p. 93.

²⁴ taken from J. Kuortti, N. Jopi, *Reconstructing Hybridity. Post-Colonial Studies in Transition*, New York 2007.

²⁵ S. Rushdie, *Shame*, London 1983, pp. 91-92.

partial and plural vision only confirms how all representations of the world, our identities, time and space are all incomplete and hybrid.

MIGRANCI JAKO METAFORY HYBRYDOWOŚCI W DZIELACH RUSHDIE'EGO I ICH ZWIĄZEK Z CZASAMI NAJNOWSZYMI

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest wskazanie zjawisk migracji i przesiedleńców w literaturze oraz ich analiza jako najbardziej wymownych metafor naszych czasach. Mówiąc słowami Salmana Rushdiego – migranci charakteryzują się hybrydowością swojej tożsamości, która nigdy nie jest raz na zawsze ustalona, ale pozostaje wieloraka, złożona i zmienna. Migrantów nie można nigdy pojmować w prostej opozycji – jako Innych zamieszkujących ten świat. Ponadto, umieszczając migrantów w konkretnym czasie i miejscu możemy dojść do wniosku, że obie te kategorie stają się hybrydami pomiędzy rzeczywistościami, fikcją, wysiedleniem i innymi kulturami. Migranci są zawsze „gdzie indziej“, ale ich tożsamości i czas są również „przemieszczzone“. Migracyjność w dwudziestym pierwszym wieku stała się sposobem naszego istnienia i samorozumienia. Dlatego główny nacisk w niniejszym tekście położono na zagadnienia wygnania, rozdrobnienia, nieciągłości tożsamości, roli korzeni i nacjonalistycznych mitów, rasizmu, kosmopolityzmu, translacji i historii.

Słowa kluczowe

hybrydowość, Inny, przemieszczanie się, kultura, nieciągłość, nowość

Abstract

This paper is aimed at indicating and analyzing migration and migrants in literature as the richest metaphors of our age. In Salman Rushdie's words, migrants are characterised by their hybridity in the context of identity which is never fixed but multiple, complex and changeable. They can never be understood in the simple opposition as the Other that inhabits the world. Moreover, by placing migrants in a specific time and space we can conclude that both categories become hybrid between realities, fiction, displacement and different cultures. Migrants are always "somewhere else" but their identities and time are also "dislocated". Migrancy in the twenty-first century has become the way we exist and understand ourselves. Therefore the main emphasis in this paper will be focused on the issues of exile, fragmentation, discontinuity of identities, roles of roots and nationalistic myths, racism, cosmopolitanism, translation and history.

Key words

hybridity, the Other, dislocation, culture, discontinuity, newness

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