

Literature as a tool of national education: Rahman Shaari's insights into Malaysian national identity

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ABSTRACT

Literature always played an important role in shaping societies, cultures, and nations. As a powerful tool for the transmission of ideas, values, and experiences, literature can serve as an educational medium, particularly for fostering national consciousness. Therefore, this study aims to identify, evaluate, and understands the role of literature as a tool of national education in raising national consciousness and shaping national identity. This qualitative study employs content analysis and library research methods based on Lukacs' theory of realism, to examine Rahman Shaari's perspectives on national identity in his novels *Pernikahan di Lubuk Hantu*, *Semoga Molek*, and *Cengkaman Hasrat*. The findings show that Rahman Shaari's works truly emphasize efforts to educate society towards preserving and promoting Malaysian National Identity. His discourse on elevating Bahasa Melayu and preserving Malaysia's cultural heritage underscores his commitment to national identity. The study concludes that Rahman Shaari's portrayal of national identity is aligns with the realities of Malaysian society and Lukacs' aesthetic principles, positively impacting and demonstrating the role of literature as an effective tool for national education. Subsequently, this study could serve as a resource for future studies specifically on how literature worldwide influences national identity across diverse societies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Literature always played an important role in shaping societies, cultures, and nations [1]. As a powerful tool for the transmission of ideas, values, and experiences, literature transcends the boundaries of entertainment, becoming a medium of education, particularly in the context of national consciousness [2], [3]. Literature does not merely reflect the world, but it has the capacity to educate readers about their identity, history, cultures and their role in society. In the realm of national education, literary works offer a unique and potent method for instilling a sense of belonging and unity among citizens [2]. By portraying diverse aspects of life, literature not only documents the sociocultural landscape of a nation but also fosters a deep connection between individuals and their collective national identity. In the context of Malaysia, where multiculturalism forms the fabric of the nation's identity, literature serves as a critical platform for cultivating understanding and pride in the country's heritage.

Rahman Shaari, honored with Malaysia's highest literary honor, the National Laureate (*Sasterawan Negara*) award, has made enduring contributions to Malaysian literature. Rahman Shaari is formally recognized for his outstanding literary achievements, with his novels, poetry, and critical essays serving as

powerful reflections of the diverse experiences and aspirations of the Malaysian people [4]. His works are instrumental in the national educational endeavor, skillfully capturing the complexities of Malaysian society while offering profound insights into the country's identity. His writing delves deeply into themes of identity, tradition, and the challenges of modernity, making his work a rich source for understanding Malaysia's evolving national consciousness.

Malaysia's national identity is a multifaceted construct, influenced by the country's diverse population that includes Malays, Chinese, Indians, and numerous indigenous communities [5]. This diversity is further influenced by the nation's colonial history and its journey towards independence. The quest for a cohesive national identity is a central theme in Malaysian socio-political discourse, with literature playing a crucial role in this ongoing dialogue. Rahman Shaari's works contribute to this dialogue by articulating the unique confluence of influences that define Malaysian identity. His works reflect the blend of tradition and modernity, illustrating how Malaysia's rich heritage coexists with modern aspirations. In collections like *Mufarakah*, *Melati dan Bahang*, and *Takungan Hajat*, Rahman Shaari explores themes of national pride, cultural memory, and social justice, offering insights into Malaysian collective consciousness.

A significant aspect of Rahman Shaari's work is his exploration of language as a vessel of national identity. In a country where Bahasa Melayu, Chinese dialects, Tamil, and indigenous languages coexist, the choice of language in literature becomes a powerful statement [5], [6]. Rahman Shaari's use of Bahasa Melayu elevates the national language and connects various ethnic narratives, fostering a sense of unity and shared identity. His works often intertwines classical Malay literary traditions with contemporary issues, thereby preserving the cultural legacy while engaging with the present. Works like *Suluh Peraba* and *Tirai Tokoh* exemplify this blending of old and new, creating a distinctly Malaysian tapestry. Rahman Shaari's works also address Malaysia's socio-political landscape, critiquing social inequalities and advocating for justice and equality. Through his evocative storytelling, Rahman Shaari highlights the struggles and aspirations of ordinary Malaysians, contributing to a more inclusive national narrative. This engagement with social issues is evident in later works such as *Pernikahan di Lubuk Hantu*, *Semoga Molek*, and *Cengkaman Hasrat*, underscoring literature's role as a catalyst for societal reflection and change.

This study analyzes three novels by National Laureate Rahman Shaari to identify, evaluate, and understand the role of literature as a tool of national education in raising national consciousness and shaping Malaysian national identity. Through his insightful portrayal of Malaysian society, Rahman Shaari's works invite critical engagement with the challenges and aspirations of the Malaysian people, serving as a medium that bridges personal experiences and collective understanding. Unlike previous studies that focus primarily on literature's role in cultural or linguistic development, this research uniquely situates literature within the framework of national education, emphasizing its capacity to transmit values, national ideals, and collective memory. By applying Lukács' theory of realism, the study bridges literary criticism with educational discourse, offering a comprehensive interdisciplinary perspective that remains underexplored in Malaysian scholarship. Ultimately, this paper highlights literature not merely as a reflection of society but as an active participant in the formation and reinforcement of national identity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of national identity is intricately woven into the fabric of literary works, serving as a mirror reflecting the cultural, social, and historical dimensions of a nation. The correspondence analyzed in Rodríguez [7] highlights the pivotal role that letters, and personal writings in shaping Cuban national identity. Discussions among writers, intellectuals, and patriots with José Manuel Carbonell y Rivero focus on literary disputes, poetry recitals, and the founding of the Cuban Academy of Language, showcasing how these exchanges contributed to the Cuba's cultural and historical narrative. The letters from figures like Carlos Loveira and Juan Manuel Planas underscore the historical significance of national figures and events, reinforcing a shared identity and heritage within Cuban society. Similarly, Sărăcuț [8] examines Romanian children's literature, where the concept of homeland is a central theme. Authors like Ana Niculina Ursuleanu and Radu Flora depict the idea of an eternal Romanian homeland that transcends national borders and fostering a sense of unity among Romanian-speaking communities. The settings of landscape, family, and school in these works symbolize national identity, highlighting the role of nostalgia and irony in conveying a sense of belonging and cultural continuity.

The changing dynamics of Nepali nationalism are vividly portrayed in contemporary fiction, as analyzed by Sharma [9]. Novels like *Karnali Blues* by Buddhisagar Chapain and *The Wayward Daughter* by Shradha Ghale highlight the rise of regional and ethnocultural identities in Nepal. These works critique traditional narratives centered on monarchy, Hinduism, and the Nepali language, instead focusing on the diverse experiences and struggles of marginalized communities. This literary shift reflects societal changes and the pursuit of a more inclusive national identity that acknowledges the multiplicity of voices within the nation.

Mammadova [10] explores the formation of national identity among Indian and Azerbaijani Muslims through the works of Ali Bey Huseynzade and Muhammad Iqbal. Both authors promoted Islamic revival and independence, integrating Western scientific achievements into their vision for a strong national identity. Their works underscore the interplay between religious and secular ideas in shaping the national consciousness. This blend of cultural revival and modernity demonstrates how literature can express and solidify national identity amidst the challenges of colonialism and modernization.

Sultangaliyeva *et al.* [11] examines contemporary Kazakh prose as a hybrid literary form that merges global postmodern trends with Kazakh folklore to address national identity and sociopolitical instability. Through the works of young Kazakh authors, the study highlights how literature functions as a tool to express universal values, social issues, and mythopoetic elements, portraying the nation's transitional period and cultural resilience. The integration of gothic and mystical motifs with local traditions reflects the complexity of Kazakhstan's national code in a globalized literary context. Ojebode [12] analyzes *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Adichie to explore the intersection of military masculinity, mental health, and national identity in Nigeria. The character Eugene embodies a militarized form of masculinity shaped by sociopolitical and religious pressures, with his bipolar disorder symbolizing broader national traumas. Adichie's portrayal serves as a critique of authoritarianism and colonial legacies, using literature to deconstruct stereotypes and provoke reflection on national and personal identity within postcolonial Nigerian society.

In the context of Malaysia's national identity, Muhammad [13] reintroduces the overlooked literary contributions of Tengku Mariam, a palace poetess whose manuscripts reveal intricate themes of culture, history, and politics. Through textual analysis of manuscripts housed in the Terengganu State Museum, her study underscores how Tengku Mariam's works reflect the intellectual and cultural consciousness of the Malay aristocracy, highlighting women's literary agency in shaping early Malay identity. The concept of Malay self-identity is further explored by Yusoff and Raihanah [14] through an ecocritical approach to Che Husna Azhari's *The Rambutan Orchard* to explore Kelantanese Malay identity and its deep connection to the environment. Their analysis shows that the orchard serves as a symbol of rootedness, nostalgia, and cultural belonging, reflecting the narrator's search for identity through place and memory.

Dinar [15] examines A. Samad Said's *Salina* as a postcolonial narrative reflecting Malaya's transition from colonization to independence. The study argues that the novel reconstructs national consciousness through the recollection of colonial trauma, portraying how historical memory and social transformation intertwine within Malaysian identity. Hussain *et al.* [16] expand the discussion by reviewing nature and landscape imagery in classical and modern Malay literature. They demonstrate that natural elements in Malay texts represent moral, spiritual, and communal values, functioning as cultural symbols that sustain Malay identity and continuity across generations.

In conclusion, literary works serve as a powerful medium in shaping national identity, making them a potent tool in national education. Through the portrayal of historical, cultural, and social dimensions, literature acts as a vehicle for preserving heritage, fostering unity, and promoting national consciousness. The works analyzed demonstrate how literature serves as an enduring force for cultural preservation and societal cohesion, underscoring its essential role in educating national values and ensuring the continuity of cultural heritage across generations.

3. METHOD

National identity is a fundamental aspect of societal cohesion, reflecting shared values, traditions, and historical experiences. Understanding the realities related to national identity is vital for fostering unity, pride, and a sense of belonging within communities, as well as for preserving the cultural heritage of a nation. This study employs Lukacs' theory of realism as the guiding framework to enable a comprehensive analysis of national identity in Rahman Shaari's literary works. Specifically, this study applies the principles of realism criticism outlined by Lukacs in his seminal works: *The Theory of the Novel* [17], *Marxism and Human Liberation* [18], *Studies in European Realism* [19], and *History and Class Consciousness* [20]. By using these principles, the study aims to identify, evaluate, and understand the nuanced ways in which national identity is constructed and represented in Rahman Shaari's works. The detailed descriptions of Lukacs' principles, which form the foundation of this analysis, are presented in Figure 1. This approach not only provides a robust theoretical basis but also situates the analysis within the broader discourse on realism and national identity, contributing to both fields.

In terms of study design, this study adopts a qualitative research design, employing content analysis to examine three novels by Rahman Shaari: *Pernikahan di Lubuk Hantu* [21], *Semoga Molek* [22] and *Cengkaman Hasrat* [23]. According to Creswell and Creswell [24], qualitative research is particularly well-suited for exploring complex phenomena within their natural settings, allowing for an in-depth examination of meanings, experiences, and perspectives. By utilizing content analysis, this study aims to uncover Rahman Shaari's narratives on national identity and Malaysia's aspirations systematically, aligning

with Creswell's emphasis on qualitative methods for rich exploration. Additionally, Krippendorff [25] highlights content analysis as a systematic approach for analyzing communication and textual data, making it suitable for uncovering themes and patterns within literary works. Furthermore, the study incorporates library research methods to examine the influence and relationship of Rahman Shaari's perspectives in fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of national identity among Malaysians, as this method according to Aguinis [26] offers a comprehensive approach to accessing and analyzing existing literature, thereby strengthening the study's contextual understanding and theoretical foundation. In line with the study aims, the following methods of content analysis and library research were conducted and are explained in Figure 2.

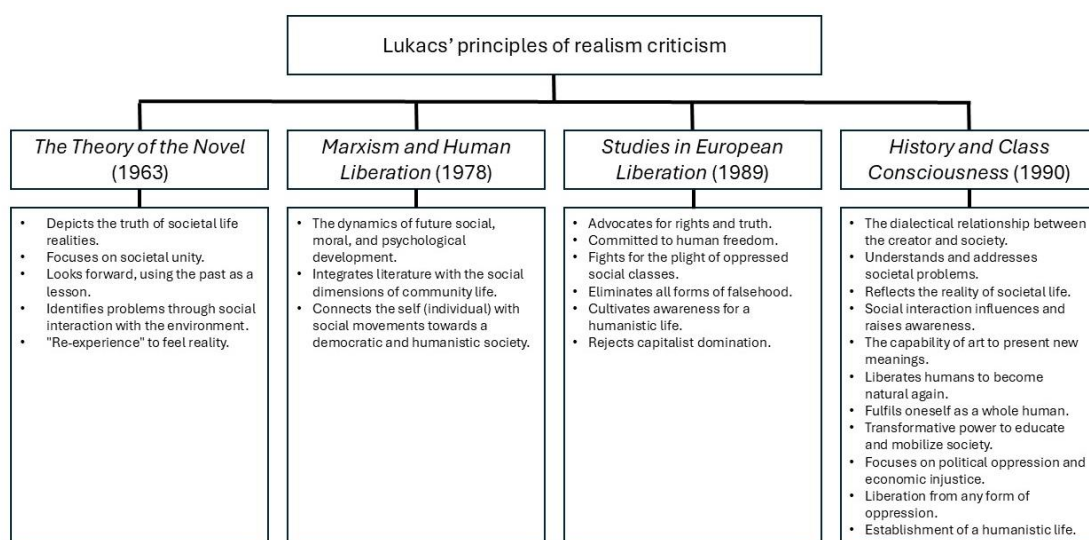


Figure 1. Lukacs' principles of realism criticism

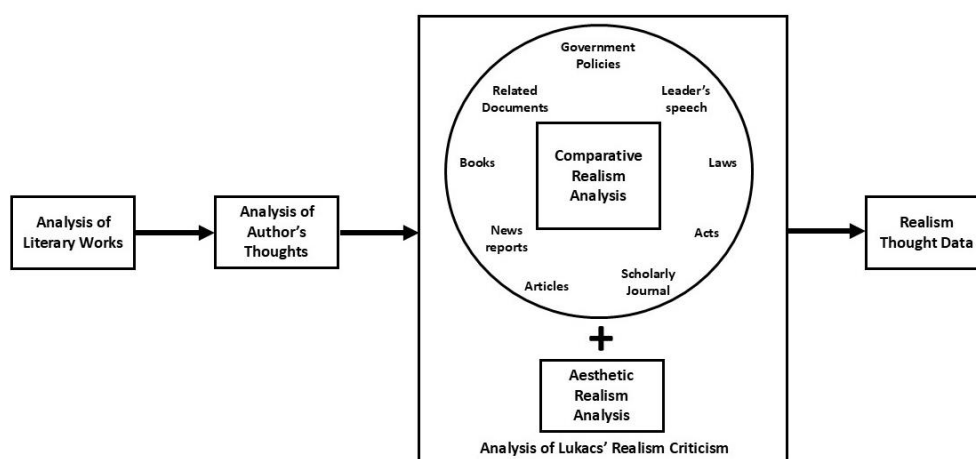


Figure 2. Flow diagram of the proposed method of analysis (Adapted from the original works: Subet and Jamin [4])

The detailed description of the methods of analysis employed in this study is outlined as follows:

3.1. Analysis of literary works

The analysis of literary works aims to collect thought data from the novels under study. Content analysis methods are employed, involving intensive and meticulous reading to identify the realism concepts presented by Rahman Shaari. The focus of this analysis includes depictions of societal realities related to the theme of national identity in Malaysian society. The obtained data is recorded as raw data for further analysis.

3.2. Analysis of author's thought

The raw data from the initial analysis is evaluated for its relevance and impact on the theme of national identity in Malaysian society. Data that does not address or influence the theme of national identity is excluded. Only data that significantly impacts the theme of national identity is accepted as the author's thought data for subsequent analysis.

3.3. Analysis of Lukacs' realism criticism

The analysis of Lukacs' realism criticism aims to assess the thought data identified in the preceding stages. Aligned with the study's objectives to systematically identify, evaluate, and understand Rahman Shaari's portrayals of national identity and Malaysia's aspirations, this analysis comprises two phases: comparative realism analysis and realism aesthetics analysis. The comparative realism analysis evaluates the correlation between thought data and societal realities. This method employs library research, comparing the author's insights with evidence of realism from various sources such as government policies, laws, acts, speeches by leaders, scholarly journals, articles, news reports, books, and related documents, see Figure 1. The alignment of the author's thought data with evidence of realism validates its reflection of societal realities.

The aesthetics realism analysis determines the societal impact of thought data based on Lukacs' realism principles, see Figure 1. It evaluates how well thought data aligns with these principles and its influence on societal dynamics. Only thought data meeting Lukacs' realism criteria and demonstrating significant societal impact is accepted as realism thought data.

3.4. Realism thought data

The realism thought data accepted constitutes the final findings of the study. This data is presented descriptively, outlining its coverage of national identity themes, alignment with societal realities, and impact on societal life, particularly in shaping and articulating national identity. This presentation can further serve as evidence of the significant role of literature and the National Laureate in shaping and preserving national identity.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lukacs posits that realist literature is intrinsically linked to every aspect of life. Within this study, realism serves as a mechanism for embedding national identity by encapsulating the core values and aspirations of a society. The examination of Rahman Shaari's works highlights their significant role in fostering national consciousness within Malaysian society. Through his exploration of cultural heritage, Rahman Shaari's writings not only contribute to preserving Malaysia's national identity but also actively engage readers in reflecting on and embracing their cultural roots.

In the novel *Pernikahan di Lubuk Hantu*, Rahman Shaari discusses the theme of national identity through the perspective of the Bahasa Melayu as the national language, which embodies the national identity of Malaysian society and the nation. Rahman Shaari's perspective aligns with the reality stipulated in Article 152 of the *Perlembagaan Persekutuan*, Malaysia's highest law, which unequivocally declares Bahasa Melayu as the national language of Malaysia [27]. From the aesthetic realism perspective, Rahman Shaari vividly portrays the intertwining elements of literature with dimensions of societal life, akin to Lukacs' emphasis. In his exploration of Bahasa Melayu as a national identity that should be dignified, Rahman Shaari critiques the societal attitude that often questions the economic value of Bahasa Melayu, suggesting a lack of appreciation among Malaysians for their own language. Rahman Shaari's critique is exemplified in the following excerpt:

"Apa-apa pun yang kita cintai, kita akan perjuangkan secara bersungguh-sungguh. Kita tak begitu mempertanyakan alasannya. Sekarang, besar jumlah orang bertanya, termasuklah orang Melayu sendiri: Adakah Bahasa Melayu yang kini dinamakan Bahasa Malaysia itu ada nilai ekonomi? Soalan itu sendiri menunjukkan ketiadaan kecintaan. Jika anda ada isteri yang anda cintai, adakah anda akan mempertanyakan nilai ekonomi isteri anda itu? Jangan fikirkan nilai ekonomi, jangan. Gunakanlah Bahasa Malaysia dengan sebaik-baiknya, sepertimana anda gunakan apa-apa yang anda cintai." Kapten Abeh membuka mata, luas, ditumpukannya ke baris keempat." (Pernikahan di Lubuk Hantu, 94 [21])

"Whatever we love, we will fight for earnestly. We do not question the reason too much. Now, many people are asking, including the Malays themselves: Does the Malay language, now called Bahasa Malaysia, have economic value? The question itself shows a lack of love. If you have a wife whom you love, would you question her economic value? Do not think of the economic value, do not. Use Bahasa Malaysia to the best of your ability, just as you use anything you love." Captain Abeh opened his eyes wide, fixing them on the fourth row." (Pernikahan di Lubuk Hantu, 94 [21])

The paragraph above is the original data/text of the works studied in Malay, while the paragraph below is the translation into English. The following data will be presented in a similar manner.

Rahman Shaari's critique in the excerpt underscores the lack of appreciation and affection for Bahasa Melayu among Malaysians. This critique highlights a reality of national issue that profoundly affects both the society and the country. For instance, Albury [28] reveals that many Malaysians, including Malay speakers themselves, prefer using foreign languages, particularly English, especially in education, economic and cultural domains, as they regard English as facilitating expedited learning and providing greater cognitive ease than Malay. Similarly, Othman *et al.* [29] asserts that Malaysians still do not prioritize the use of Bahasa Melayu in daily affairs, education or official communication. The perspectives of Albury [28] and Othman *et al.* [29] provide clear evidence that Rahman Shaari's critique is highly significant in addressing the reality of the appreciation of the Bahasa Melayu as Malaysia's national identity. From a realist standpoint, this critique effectively reflects the true and dynamic reality of societal life as posited by Lukacs. It also serves as a transformative force, raising awareness and mobilizing society to overcome these issues as outlined by Lukacs. Moreover, as a realist work, this novel is not confined to serving merely as a medium for criticism. It also plays a crucial role in encouraging society to continuously appreciate and uphold the Bahasa Melayu as a national identity. Based on the realism principle that literary works can present new meanings to societal life, Rahman Shaari endeavors to instill a sense of love for the Bahasa Melayu among the populace. By emphasizing the aspect of national identity as the face of a country, Rahman Shaari employs a reverse psychology approach by highlighting the consequences of neglecting elements of national identity. This approach is evident in the following excerpt:

"Seorang dari kalangan hadirin, bercakap dengan gaya mantap. Dia, William Chan namanya, mungkin ahli persatuan yang aktif, malah mungkin juga pejuang Bahasa Malaysia. Dia juga mungkin editor akhbar. Kata William, pengetepian bahasa dan budaya akan menyebabkan negara hanya ada rupa tiada wajah, ada wajah tiada jiwa. Oleh itu, pejuang bahasa hendaklah sentiasa berjuang untuk mengembalikan dan mengekalkan wajah dan jiwa negara." (Pernikahan di Lubuk Hantu, 99 [21])

"A member of the audience spoke with a steady demeanor. His name was William Chan, perhaps an active association member, and possibly even a champion of Bahasa Malaysia. He might also be a newspaper editor. William said, the neglect of language and culture will result in a nation that has form but no face, a face but no soul. Therefore, language advocates must always strive to restore and preserve the nation's face and soul." (Pernikahan di Lubuk Hantu, 99 [21])

Rahman Shaari, through this excerpt, clearly articulates the profound impact on the country if elements such as language, including culture, which are the pillars of national identity, continue to be neglected by society. From a realist perspective, Sallabank and King [30] contends that the survival of a language depends on the community's ongoing efforts to value, revitalize and preserve its dignity. Beyond being a mere linguistic issue, it embodies a broader social movement that brings advantages to both individuals and society as a whole. These benefits include connecting with ancestors, preserving the past and cultural heritage, fostering community building, and driving social change [30]. In this context, based on the reality that Bahasa Melayu serves not only as a means of communication but also as a reflection of identity, a medium for unity, and a symbol of national pride for a sovereign state [31], Rahman Shaari's plea is significantly impactful in fostering national awareness among the populace. From the aesthetic standpoint of realism, Rahman Shaari's thoughts are identified to have played a substantial role in influencing and fostering awareness as suggested by Lukacs, particularly concerning efforts to preserve, sustain, and dignify the elements that constitute the face and soul of the nation. Rahman Shaari's ideas also align with the principles of future dynamics as proposed by Lukacs, especially in the context of the future of the Bahasa Melayu as the national identity of a sovereign Malaysia. Ultimately, it can be inferred that the novel *Pernikahan di Lubuk Hantu* offers a comprehensive discourse on national identity that can be leveraged by Malaysian society towards making Malaysia a dignified and identity-conscious nation.

Turning to the novel *Semoga Molek*, Rahman Shaari's exploration of the theme of national identity also addresses the preservation and elevation of the Bahasa Melayu as a core component of Malaysian identity. Rahman Shaari underscores the collective responsibility of Malaysians to uphold the Bahasa Melayu, positioning it as a crucial element of the nation's cultural and social fabric. As a realist work that employs the principle of social interaction with the community as suggested by Lukacs, this novel argues that the lack of confidence among Malaysians, particularly the Malays, in their language undermines its status. Rahman Shaari offers a pointed critique of the language advocates within Malaysian society, portraying them as ineffective and confused in their efforts to promote the Bahasa Melayu. This criticism is vividly illustrated in the following excerpt:

“Betul. Di sana sini timbul kekeliruan. Pejuang Bahasa Melayu memang mengada-ngada. Bermerah mata, tapi kosong. Kau fikir, dalam hal begini siapakah yang bersalah?” Azizul ingin tahu. “Tak ada sesiapa yang bersalah. Orang Melayu sendiri tak yakin terhadap keupayaan Bahasa Melayu, orang bukan Melayu lebih-lebih lagilah,” Zakri memberi pandangan. (Semoga Molek, 67-68 [22])

“True. Confusion arises everywhere. The champions of the Malay language are indeed being fussy. Their eyes are red, but they are empty. Do you think, in such matters, who is to blame?” Azizul wanted to know. “No one is to blame. The Malays themselves do not have confidence in the capabilities of the Malay language, let alone the non-Malays,” Zakri offered his view. (Semoga Molek, 67-68 [22])

Rahman Shaari, in this excerpt, critically examines the perceived inadequacy of support for the Bahasa Melayu among both Malays and non-Malays. His work, which adheres to Lukacs' conception of reflecting societal reality, delves into this issue by pinpointing its root cause: the Malay community's own lack of confidence in their language. In reality, Fital *et al.* [32] reveals that people in this country, including Malays themselves, lack confidence in the capability of the Malay language, particularly in a globalized world. They are more inclined to use English in discussions with peers and often tend to mix Malay and English. This situation is a problem that needs to be addressed to preserve Malaysia's national identity. Malaysian, in reality should proudly use the Malay language not only as a daily spoken language, but also as the main language of education, a symbol of citizenship, and as a national identity of Malaysia [6]. These perspectives underscore Rahman Shaari's realistic portrayal and highlight the relevance of his insights. Consequently, it behooves intellectuals and society at large to heed these insights and catalyze change to honor and uphold the cultural heritage defining our national identity. From an aesthetic realism perspective, Rahman Shaari's ideas align with Lukacs' principle as a transformative force capable of prompting societal introspection and action to address prevailing socio-linguistic challenges.

Further exploration into specific literary techniques employed by Rahman Shaari could elucidate how his narrative techniques amplify these critiques and contribute to broader discussions on language policy and cultural identity in Malaysia. In addition, to establish the novel *Semoga Molek* as a complete realist work that offers a dialectical relationship between the work, the creator, and society as proposed by Lukacs, Rahman Shaari, in the context of preserving and dignifying the Bahasa Melayu as a national identity, also focuses on elevating the Bahasa Melayu to compete with other languages, particularly English, as the language of knowledge. To achieve this aspiration, Rahman Shaari consistently centers this issue in his novel. Following his critical stance towards the attitude of Malaysians, especially the Malays themselves, who question the efficacy of the Bahasa Melayu, Rahman Shaari is identified as continually emphasizing similar aspects, stressing the importance of respecting the Bahasa Melayu. Meanwhile, as a realist work grounded in the principles of humanist life and the principles of self-fulfillment as a complete human being as advocated by Lukacs, Rahman Shaari does not place obstacles on society's learning or mastery of other languages. Instead, he encourages the learning of other languages while simultaneously insisting that the Bahasa Melayu be respected and elevated to stand on par with other languages globally. This thought is evident in the following excerpt:

“Dalam majalah Mastika tahun 1950, aku tak ingat bulannya, datuk kau mengatakan orang lain tidak akan menghormati Bahasa Melayu jika orang Melayu sendiri tidak menghormatinya. Dia juga berpendapat Bahasa Melayu mesti diusahakan agar sama tinggi dengan Bahasa Inggeris. Namun dia melihat, pelajar-pelajar ketika itu tidak menghormati Bahasa Melayu. Masalah Bahasa Melayu ialah masalah rasa hormat. Datuk kau tidak bersikap anti Bahasa Inggeris. Dia hanya mahu Bahasa Melayu ditingkatkan. Aku kira, datuk kau lebih maju daripada beberapa orang yang mengaku pejuang Bahasa Melayu sekarang,” Azizul menatap mata Zakri. (Semoga Molek, 86 [22])

“In the Mastika magazine from 1950, I do not remember the month, your grandfather said that others would not respect the Malay language if the Malays themselves did not respect it. He also believed that the Malay language must be elevated to be on par with English. However, he observed that students at that time did not respect the Malay language. The issue with the Malay language is a matter of respect. Your grandfather was not against the English language. He merely wanted the Malay language to be elevated. I think your grandfather was more progressive than some who now claim to be champions of the Malay language,” Azizul gazed into Zakri's eyes. (Semoga Molek, 86 [22])

Rahman Shaari through the excerpt explicitly criticizes the attitudes of the Malay society, particularly the student of the 1950s, who are portrayed as undervaluing Bahasa Melayu and instead taking pride in English.

From Lukacs' perspective, this criticism aligns clearly with the principles of realism by using the past as a lesson for contemporary society. By recalling the adverse experiences or realities of the past, Rahman Shaari's thought process also appears to incorporate the dynamic principles of the future as advocated by Lukacs, particularly regarding the development of the Bahasa Melayu as a national identity of Malaysia. In reality, the 1950s indeed witnessed segments of the Malay community, especially the elite educated under the British system, who regarded English as having higher value, particularly in administration, education, and the economy [33]. Meanwhile, in today's context, is still occurring and can be demonstrated through the findings of Othman *et al.* [34], which show that Malaysian society prefers to use English as the main medium of communication and also perceives Bahasa Melayu as having low commercial value, particularly in employment sectors involving private companies. Othman's *et al.* [34] account underscores the reality that society then held English in high esteem, leading to a diminishing love and respect for the Bahasa Melayu. These identified realities, evidenced by realism, clearly substantiate Rahman Shaari's criticism as rooted in actual events. Consequently, Rahman Shaari proposed efforts to elevate the status of the Bahasa Melayu to be on par with English and other world languages. This proposal is identified in reality as supporting the provision in the Perlembagaan Persekutuan, which stipulates that the Bahasa Melayu should be given equal status with English ten years after Malaysia's independence [34]. From the perspective of aesthetic realism, this proposal demonstrates that the works offers a complete dialectical relationship, wherein the works is not only influenced by its environment but also influences its environment as theorized by Lukacs. In essence, the novel *Semoga Molek* can be concluded as an advocacy to urge society to continue respecting and elevating the Bahasa Melayu as a national identity symbolizing a sovereign Malaysia.

Shifting to the novel *Cengkaman Hasrat*, Rahman Shaari delves into issues of national identity by discussing Malaysia's independence, which he argues remains incomplete. As a realist work that applies the principle of the relationship between individuals and social movements towards a humanistic society as proposed by Lukacs, Rahman Shaari aims to draw society's attention to their contributions or efforts to make independence more meaningful. Through an intellectual perspective, Rahman Shaari highlights that many aspects still require society's attention in fulfilling the achieved independence. This perspective is evident in the following excerpt:

"Tadi ada baris 'bermenung di langit tinggi'. Siapakah yang bermenung tu?" Seseorang bertanya kepada seseorang yang di kanannya. Rayini Mendengarnya.

"Pada fahaman saya, penyair bermaksud mengatakan, apabila ditinjau melalui pandangan tinggi, iaitu pemikiran intelektual, kemerdekaan negara kita belum diisi dengan sempurna," jawab seseorang. (Cengkaman Hasrat, 7 [23])

"Earlier, there was a line, 'pondering in the high sky'. Who is pondering there?" someone asked the person to his right. Rayini overheard the question.

"In my understanding," answered the person, "the poet means to say that when viewed from a lofty perspective, that is, through intellectual thought, our nation's independence has not yet been fully realized." (Cengkaman Hasrat, 7 [23])

Rahman Shaari, through the excerpt, clearly aims to highlight the profound significance of national independence. By employing dialogue as a narrative device, the novel effectively prompts readers to contemplate and reflect on this critical issue, embodying the characteristics of realism as expounded by Lukacs. Furthermore, these ideas are identified as manifesting literature's capacity to introduce new meanings into societal life as articulated by Lukacs. Rahman Shaari's thoughts, urging society to assess the meaning of national independence from an 'intellectual thought' perspective as stated in the excerpt, demonstrate his effort to introduce new meanings to societal life. In reality, this approach has resonated notably with leaders and government officials, including Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who advocates that *"...to transform Malaysia into a great nation, education was an important asset that needs to be stressed to produce a generation of experts in various fields"* [35]. The cultivation of expertise among Malaysian society as proposed is viewed as a fulfillment of independence, steering Malaysia not only towards greatness but also towards a respected and identifiable nation.

Consequently, Rahman Shaari's ideas also encourage a multifaceted exploration of these themes, encompassing core identity, economic progress, technological advancement, cultural heritage, and infrastructural development. Core identity plays a crucial role in uniting a nation into a cohesive spiritual and sociocultural community. By nurturing individuals' core identity, we strengthen national identity, fostering unity, pride, and excellence [36]. Therefore, Rahman Shaari's presented ideas offer significant impact on the fulfillment of independence and the construction of Malaysia's national identity. Additionally, as a progressive and dynamic realist work, this novel is identified as showcasing continuous thought in debating various societal issues. Building upon the previous discussions on the fulfillment of independence, Rahman Shaari is identified

as continuing his exploration of this issue by addressing the elements of the nation's fulfillment of independence with more specificity and detail. For instance, in the excerpt below, Rahman Shaari discusses the diminishing sense of community spirit, particularly in urban areas, indicating that cultural heritage elements, which are part of Malaysia's national identity, are no longer practiced as they once were:

"Betul kata pak su tu. Mereka tu tersenyum saja, jika bersapa sekadar beri salam. Hubungan dengan kami terlalu formal." Riyana menyampuk percakapan Sulpan. *"Yang di kiri dan yang di kanan tipikal stail jiran bandar baru," kata Pujira. Dia mahu mengkritik segi keburukan sikap begitu, tetapi disimpan dulu.* (Cengkaman Hasrat, 46 [23])

"Uncle is right. They just smile and, if they greet us, it's merely to say hello. Their relationship with us is too formal," Riyana interrupted Sulpan's conversation. *"The ones on the left and right exhibit the typical style of new city neighbors,"* Pujira remarked. She wanted to critique the drawbacks of such attitudes but held back for the moment. (Cengkaman Hasrat, 46 [23])

Rahman Shaari's thought on contemporary societal realities, as presented in the excerpt, indicates the erosion of national identity among Malaysians, who no longer practice the lifestyles of previous generations. Historically, Malaysian society has been characterized by unified neighborly relations and a strong sense of community, evidenced by mutual assistance during events such as weddings or funerals. This practice of mutual assistance is deeply rooted in Malaysian culture, fostering cooperative actions in village and rural life, particularly during significant family and community events [37]. Compared to today's societal realities, modern society, especially in urban areas, has largely moved away from the traditional lifestyle that was once the national identity of earlier Malaysians. For example, Putrajaya, realitically as one of the urban areas, has been identified as facing a low level of social engagement, as it is asserted that residents show little initiative in social participation and in practicing good values, indicating that community resilience is at an unfavorable level [38]. According to Mohamad *et al.* [38], this situation arises due to several factors, such as weak community networks and association, the economic burden on urban residents that forces them to work overtime, and the inefficiency or lack of activity in community governance structures.

Consequently, Rahman Shaari's thoughts are highly relevant as a discourse to raise awareness about these issues, in line with the principles of fostering consciousness towards a humanistic way of life as posited by Lukacs. This humanistic way of life can be translated into harmonious, prosperous, and unified neighborly relations, which indirectly revive the cultural heritage and national identity that should be practiced in this country. Furthermore, in terms of the relationship between contemporary realities and those of past Malaysian societies, this thought supports the principle of restoring society to its natural state, which Lukacs also considered an aesthetic value in literary works. Ultimately, the novel *Cengkaman Hasrat* can be concluded as a narrative that presents discourse on the construction and preservation of national identity, thereby adding meaningful significance to Malaysia's achieved independence.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, the analysis of realism in the three novels studied reveals that Rahman Shaari's works indeed portray the essence of Malaysia through thoughts related to the preservation and elevation of elements that constitute the national identity of Malaysia. For instance, the novel *Pernikahan di Lubuk Hantu* is identified as presenting a comprehensive discourse on the issue of elevating the Bahasa Melayu as the national language to establishing Malaysia as a dignified and identity-rich nation. Meanwhile, the novel *Semoga Molek* advocates for the continued respect and elevation of the Bahasa Melayu as a national identity symbolizing Malaysia's sovereignty. On the other hand, the novel *Cengkaman Hasrat* discusses the preservation and maintenance of national identity elements to make the country's independence more meaningful. From a realism perspective, the analysis reveals that Rahman Shaari's views on national identity closely reflect the realities of Malaysian society, aligning with key elements of realism identified in the study. His ideas are consistent with Lukacs' aesthetic principles, reinforcing the formation and preservation of Malaysian national identity. His works also emphasize literature's educational role in fostering national awareness. Ultimately, the findings of this study can serve as a sample for detailing the role of literature as a tool of national education in raising national consciousness and shaping national identity.

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding this research.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within this article and are also openly accessible at <https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2025-4101-23> and <https://doi.org/10.22452/jomas.vol35no1.6>.




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