



POLITICAL ARTS URBANIZATION: A MALAYSIAN CASE STUDY



Sandra Smeltzer<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Information and Media Studies, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada

ABSTRACT

*This article explores politically oriented artistic production in Kuala Lumpur (KL), the capital city of Malaysia. Over the last several years, KL has become home to an expanding network of individuals who employ art as a vehicle to directly and indirectly challenge the country's socio-political status quo and its ruling regime. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with a range of political artists living and working in the city, we find an aggregation of individuals generating similar but differentiated products with the overarching goal of advancing a more equitable, tolerant, and democratic society. We thus consider if this urban-based network represents an alternative way to mobilize the concept of a 'cluster' beyond mainstream academic and political narratives that emphasize the economic benefits accruing from developing a 'creative' class and workforce. We find that the process is not entirely different from what one might expect from traditional deployments of the concept of a cluster, but the objectives are different – rather than being principally geared towards financial gain, these individuals are primarily concerned with political objectives. We question, however, if this political arts urbanization can indeed be described as a 'cluster' given that, for a number of logistical and political reasons, the artists and their work are spread out over a sprawling capital city.*

© 2017 AESS Publications. All Rights Reserved.

**Keywords:** Political arts urbanization, Malaysia, Clustering, Creative class

Received: 1 April 2016/ Revised: 18 June 2016/ Accepted: 30 August 2016/ Published: 23 September 2016

Contribution/ Originality

This article offers new insight into how political arts clustering in Kuala Lumpur challenges the socio-political status quo of Malaysia. The manuscript is also original in its use of extensive use of interviews conducted with a range of politically oriented Malaysian art producers.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article, we focus attention on a wide range of artistic production taking place in Malaysia's capital city, Kuala Lumpur (KL). We contend that KL is home to an expanding network of politically oriented artists who directly and indirectly challenge Malaysia's status quo and its ruling regime. While specific examples of political art may have limited influence in the country, en masse they contribute to the forging of a self-reflexive and critical – though not necessarily organized or unified – aggregation of individuals who hold oppositional political and social affiliations. Our objective is to gain greater insight into how these KL-based politically oriented artists view the

potential of art to engender “a testing or rethinking of fundamental assumptions” (Kelaher, 2012) and how such a *détournement can help foment progressive politics in the country*.

A relatively robust body of academic literature has examined Malaysia’s artistic roots, particularly in relation to specific ethnic groups (see (Piyadasa, 1993; Abdullah, 2011)). Other literature engages with certain genres of art that contest various aspects of the domestic socio-political status quo. Examples include, but are not limited to, film (e.g. (Khoo, 2006; 2010; 2014; Baumgärtel, 2011; Lee, 2011; Prasad and Ahmad, 2013; Saw, 2013)) performing arts and musical theatre (e.g. (Pillai, 2010; Tan, 2010; Chiat and Ying, 2012; Philip, 2012; Rajendran, 2012)) visual art (e.g. (Hooker, 2013)) and cartoons (e.g.,(Mahamood, 2003; Lent, 2003; 2004; Soon, 2011)). Drawing on specific case studies, this critical work demonstrates that, despite attempts by the Malaysian government to control how, where, with whom, and about what citizens express political opinions, over the last several years there has been a notable increase in the amount of publically available political art in the country.

Yet, little academic attention has been directed towards understanding the ways in which Malaysia’s urban artistic nodes interact with each other to advance overarching political goals that supersede their particularities. To this end, we have chosen to examine whether KL’s political arts scene fits a clustering framework. By looking at the concentration of individuals and groups generating similar but differentiated political art products, we consider if what we find in KL represents an alternative way to mobilize the concept of clustering beyond mainstream academic and political narratives that emphasize the economic benefits accruing from developing a ‘creative’ class and workforce.

On the one hand, the KL-based aggregation of political artists constitutes a cluster inasmuch as individuals and groups located within the city’s ecosystem formally and informally work together and rely on each other (to varying degrees) to produce and disseminate myriad products. They may differ in the specific form of their art (e.g. writing and acting in plays, facilitating art exhibits, producing films), the target of their political expression (e.g. electoral reform, LGBT rights, government corruption), and/or the execution of their message (e.g. overtly politically contentious versus subtler challenges to the political status quo); however, the shared goal is to foment a more equitable, tolerant, and democratic society in Malaysia. In other words, through physical proximity to, and support of, each other, artists gain greater political efficacy through their strength in numbers. On the other hand, KL’s political arts scene does not fit typical deployments of a creative cluster: citizens do not necessarily draw on information and communication technologies (ICTs) for their success, nor do they have financial remuneration as their only, or often their foremost, priority. While they may operate in some ways that mirror the functioning of monetized clusters, the end goal is, for the most part, political in nature. Moreover, their production and dissemination is spread out over a wider terrain in the city than we would normally expect from a self-contained ‘cluster’.

The discussion that follows on this topic is informed by semi-structured interviews conducted in-person in 2010 and 2012, and via Skype in 2014 and 2015, with 27 Malaysians involved in various forms of political resistance through the vehicle of art. These individuals were drawn from the following categories: playwright, actor, gallery owner, gallery director, filmmaker, painter, cartoonist, and graffiti artist. Interviewees also included three Malaysian academics, two arts-based non-governmental organization (NGO) administrators based in KL who also described themselves as part-time political artists, and two members of a local freedom of expression NGO. We asked this convenience sample of individuals to discuss in a self-reflective manner their chosen form(s) of artistic production. We explored why they do what they do, and what they hope will be the short- and long-term socio-political impact of their endeavours and that of their peers. Heeding the advice of Comunian (2011) these interviews afforded insight at the level of the individual; a more intimate and nuanced micro-level analysis usually absent in clustering literature, which tends instead to focus attention at a structural, macro-level.

## 2. CLUSTERING FRAMEWORKS

Drawing on the pioneering work of Porter (2000) a handful of key attributes usually describe clusters. This first is geographical propinquity. While Porter argues that there is no set size for a cluster's boundaries, the nodes are generally located within the same physical area because, despite 'end of geography' predictions, physical connections remain personally and professionally important (Mosco, 2004). Second, clusters are composed of different nodes of actors bonded by linkages that are made up of shared but differentiated productive activities (Van Heur, 2010). This is because, as Porter contends, competition plays an important role in improving members' performance and thus the overall quality of the cluster. At the same time, however, he is clear to point out that it is in the members' best interest to not only compete, but also be willing to cooperate when and where advantageous. Chang (2014) aptly describes this mixture of cooperation and competition as "co-opetition". Third, in a more traditional approach, it is usually assumed that clusters are best created in a top-down manner through government direction, policy support, and financial assistance. Fourth, clusters must be fluid and flexible to meet the shifting demands of a given audience which, for a conventional understanding of clusters, would constitute the marketplace.

It is not difficult to see the appeal of this clustering model to many policy makers who, under the logic of capitalism, envision a version of culture that is economically productive. Clustering is therefore taken and applied to a wide range of sectors, most notably high-tech, creative industries. The accompanying discourse emphasizes the value of creative workers and the economic benefits accruing from having an ICT-oriented labour force capable of competing in a globalized economy (Kong, 2009). Put another way, these clusters are focused almost exclusively on leveraging ICTs to generate products for the marketplace, and are directed ever more to generating a creative class in post-industrial cities à la Richard Florida's urban renewal stratagem (Garnham, 2005; Bagwell, 2008; Evans, 2009; Flew and Cunningham, 2010). In line with Florida (2002; 2012) academic literature principally targets metropolises as clustering would presumably take advantage of a large city's economies of scale, including its extensive infrastructure and facilities, its concentration of firms and companies, as well as the sheer number of people living, producing, and consuming in one geographical locale. As well, much of this literature is North American and/or European in its focus (see, as examples, (Florida, 2002; 2012; Chapple *et al.*, 2010; Currid and Williams, 2010; Markusen and Gadwa, 2010; Ryberg *et al.*, 2013; Grodach *et al.*, 2014).

The key point here is that mainstream approaches to clustering are strongly biased towards "the role of culture in economic life" and the "commodification of cultural practices" (Van Heur, 2010). Echoing the long-standing concerns of the Frankfurt School, media studies scholar (Garnham, 2005) has been an especially strong voice in deriding the fact that "the arts and media" are increasingly and systematically viewed in "economic terms". The shift in focus from 'cultural' to 'creative' industries in most academic, policy, and private sector discourse has only served to further this economic bias, signalling a "growing interest in culture as a source of economic value-adding" (Garnham, 2005; Freedman, 2008; Flew and Cunningham, 2010).

Our aim here is not to wade into the debate regarding the efficacy or value of creative clusters. Notwithstanding wide-ranging and valid critiques of Florida's work (see, for example, (Markusen, 2006; Peck, 2009; Krätke, 2010; Kotkin, 2013)) creative clusters have played a valuable economic function in many urban centres around the world. Nor do we suggest that there is no role for the state in helping to foster, build, and support clusters (from the outset and/or after a cluster has developed organically). Rather, our contention is that mainstream narratives fixate almost exclusively on Florida's prescriptive version of profit-oriented, high-tech, top-down creative clusters. As a result, the value of clusters geared principally towards the public good, rather than towards profit, is underappreciated. We contend that more attention needs to be paid specifically to the importance of artist-centred clusters that have as their foremost priority the public interest, however that may be defined by the artists themselves. This does not, of course, ipso facto preclude market considerations. Many of the KL-based individuals interviewed during this research, for example, engage in politically oriented artistic production that also serves as their full-time employment or as supplementary income. Indeed, there are innumerable motivations driving citizens' engagement with political art,

which means that it cannot simply be viewed as “just another service industry” (Chapain and De Propriis, 2009; Mommaas, 2009; Comunian *et al.*, 2010; Léger, 2010).

In the following section we begin with a brief contextual description of the Malaysian socio-political landscape, followed by an overview of the political arts scene in KL. We then turn to examine whether and how this concentration of artists might fit a clustering framework and the ways in which we can gauge its effectiveness in achieving self-identified objectives.

### 3. LOCAL LANDSCAPE & GOVERNMENT CONTROL MECHANISMS

Located in Southeast Asia, Malaysia is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic country of almost 30 million citizens, including over 1.7 million citizens who call KL home (Government of Malaysia, 2015). Comprised of 13 parties, the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN, National Front) coalition is headed by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and includes the Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu from Sarawak (PBB), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). With BN and its leader, Prime Minister Najib Rajak, at the helm, Malaysia is governed as a semi-authoritarian state that actively tries to stymie challenges to its control and to the status quo through myriad laws, intimidation techniques, corruption, and rent-seeking activities (Case, 2013; Liow, 2013; Noor, 2013). Although the government wants Malaysia to become fully ‘developed’ by the year 2020, attention is focused squarely on economic rather than political development or civil liberties. As Baumgärtel (2012) summarizes, “[t]he government tries to turn the country into a first world country without wanting to pay the price for this type of modernization: an opening-up of the country and a democracy that does not arbitrarily privilege the Malay ethnic majority over others and that allows for freedom of expression and other civil rights”.

Citizens who resist or oppose the ruling regime, its laws, programs, and policies can be described as engaging in politically contentious activities inasmuch as they “directly and explicitly challenge the authority of elites in setting the national agenda and in forging consensus” (George, 2006). George (2006) differentiates these types of endeavours from those geared towards addressing topics not normally broached in mainstream media or public forums, such as race, religion, and sexual orientation; what our interviewees for this research overwhelmingly referred to as ‘social’ issues. While this latter set of activities may contest what is generally considered to be Malaysia’s moral and socio-cultural status quo, they are not specifically designed to challenge the government. Not surprisingly, the government discourages artistic activities that fall into either of these two categories. As Manan (2010a) describes, with tongue firmly in cheek, Malaysians “are constantly reminded to exercise caution and self-censorship... or to tiptoe around the thorny hibiscus tree as unbridled freedom of expression can tear the very fabric of our young, fragile multi-racial country with its inherent cultural and religious differences and sensitivities”.

Various government officials, along with members of Malaysia’s Special Branch intelligence agency, are regularly spotted at politically oriented arts-based events, exhibits, and screenings. At The Annexe, a community-focused, alternative arts space located in downtown KL, for instance, “[a]udiences are often swelled by plain-clothes police. The gallery director Pang Khee Teik, also an outspoken gay activist, receives frequent ‘friendly’ calls from security authorities ‘to see how things are going’” (Friel, 2011a). This type of censorship by surveillance is not without effect. Numerous interviewees commented that, despite an apparent growing interest in political art, many Malaysians do not get involved for fear of government reprisal. As one NGO representative interviewee lamented, “intimidation is everywhere in this city... in this country”. A single instance of censorship by the authorities against an artist or an organization may not appear to represent a major threat to freedom of expression in the country, but can be read as symptomatic of a climate of intolerance promoted by the authorities. Here, a subset of variables affects whether and to what extent a given artistic production, its dissemination, and/or consumption is met with disapproval by authorities. These include: the chosen method and location of dissemination (e.g. an art exhibit in a high-traffic public locale), content (e.g. material that directly challenges the government’s authority), and target audience (e.g. a demographic beyond the ‘usual suspects’ of KL’s politically oriented civil society).

The government has also tried to control citizens' online activities through problematic amendments to Malaysia's 1950 *Evidence Act* and has retaliated against on the ground actions as evidenced by, for example, its forceful response to the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections, more commonly known as Bersih (or 'clean' in Malay). Various laws, especially its recent heavy-handed use of the Sedition Act combined with high profile arrests (e.g. of political leader Anwar Ibrahim), are wielded by the authorities as fear-inducing reminders of the consequences of dissent. As a result, all of our interviewees thought that citizens who consciously choose to produce and disseminate politically oriented art are generally aware of how far they can push the proverbial envelope. However, one interviewee described the government backlash experienced by staff and volunteers at her arts-based organization as sometimes "ad hoc and unpredictable". Although she and her colleagues are experienced in navigating the local political terrain and that, ultimately, "it's okay to speak if you aren't really jeopardizing anyone's position", she said that the constant threat of *potential* retaliation limits how critical and how public many individuals are willing to be in their art.

To offer a particularly telling example that demonstrates how the terrain can shift unexpectedly, in July 2013, the Malaysian Human Rights Organization Pusat KOMAS screened the documentary film *No Fire Zone*, which chronicles "war crimes committed at the end of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009" (*No Fire Zone*, 2015). KOMAS scheduled the screening in conjunction with the KL & Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall Civil Rights Committee. Approximately 30 government agents, including members of the police, immigration officials, and the Minister of Home Affairs, came to the event, during which three KOMAS representatives were detained and subsequently arrested. The organizers, who are seasoned artist-activists, had not expected this inexplicably harsh response from the government (HRW, 2013).

### 3.1. Government Narratives about Creative and Artistic Expression

To help justify its use of heavy-handed measures to control how citizens express themselves, the government actively promotes narratives about what it considers to be appropriate forms of creative and artistic expression. The first narrative revolves around the economic benefits expected to accrue from developing domestic high-tech creative clusters. Through a top-down approach, the government has tried to create its own version of Asia's Silicon Valley, beginning with the establishment of the lacklustre Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in the mid- to late-1990s under then Prime Minister Mahathir. Similar special economic zones have expanded to additional parts of the country, along with the establishment of post-secondary institutions dedicated to supplying a high-tech workforce for the fledgling creative sector. Under current Prime Minister Najib, the key objective of what is now MSC Malaysia, is to leverage "animation, games and visual effects" technologies (GoM, 2009) to "catalyse the development of the Creative Multimedia industry in Malaysia" (MSC Malaysia, 2011).

The second government narrative revolves around the cultural benefits afforded by sanctioned forms of traditional art. Under the government's authority, the arts are expected to promote a positive image of multiculturalism, diversity, and national unity (Hoffstaedter, 2014). Approved artistic fare is available for public consumption via a range of venues in KL including, but not limited to, the Palace of Culture/Arts (*Istana Budaya*), the National Visual Arts Gallery (*Balai Seni Visual Negara*), the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (*Dewan Filharmonik*), and the National Museum of Malaysia (*Muzium Negara*). The government has also commissioned diverse modes of public art to boost Malaysia's "economic prowess by reflecting the country as innovative, safe and stable for investment" (Mustafa *et al.*, 2012).

Corporate venues also dot the capital in key locales (e.g. the Petronas Gallery/*Galeri Petronas* and the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia/*Muzium Kesenian Islam Malaysia*), exhibiting art considered appropriate by the government. Additionally, numerous smaller commercial venues operate throughout the city, displaying and selling art that, while not connected to or endorsed directly by the government, are principally non-contentious. Some notable examples (at the time of writing) include the Wei-Ling Gallery and Wei-Ling Contemporary, Richard Koh Fine Art, Galeri

Chandan, the rather touristy Central Market, the arts collective, Valentine Willie Fine Art gallery, and the House of Matahati. Two of our interviewees also noted that the government supports apolitical art via other avenues, such as providing tax cuts for companies that purchase domestic art and through organizing arts-based events like the 1Malaysia Contemporary Art Tourism Festival. Commonly referred to as 1MCAT, the festival was launched to engage young, contemporary artists to bolster Malaysia's tourism industry and attract international art collectors. Singaporean art critic and curator Yap (2008) has pointed out, however, that interests may be at odds, as contemporary art produced by a younger generation can take a critical stance towards politics and social issues which collides with Malaysia's officially sanctioned self-image.

These two narratives about 'appropriate' creative and artistic expression reveal some of the political and economic pressures exerted on citizens to produce and consume art within a capitalist system and according to the government's parameters of what is acceptable for maintaining domestic harmony and unity. However, as Yap's observations indicate, there are always cracks in the system and, despite the government intimidation techniques and control mechanisms described above, KL offers a salient case study of a group of individuals who have chosen to use art as a vehicle for engendering progressive change in their communities.

#### 4. ALTERNATIVE/RESISTANT ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

From our interviews, there was quite strong agreement across the board that both the production and consumption of politically oriented art has been on the rise in the country over the last several years. In particular, interviewees commented on the surge in activity following the 2008 federal election's 'political tsunami', in which the opposition parties comprising the People's Pact/People's Alliance (*Pakatan Rakyat*) fared better than expected in the polls. While artistic resistance has a long history in the country (see (Tan, 1992; Mandal, 2003)) in the election's aftermath, Malaysia's contemporary arts scene emerged as an especially robust location for political commentary and critique. As Krich (2009) argues, "contemporary art...finally entered the complex fray of Malaysian politics, after decades of staying largely on safe and highly personal territory". In the same vein, Subramaniam (2012) contends that while "political contestation and conflict have never been far from the surface", the large-scale demonstrations taking place in the country suggested a growing resistance to the ruling regime.

Given the outcome of Malaysia's 2013 general elections, which saw the ruling coalition lose the popular vote for the first time since the country's independence, it would appear that more and more citizens do in fact want a change in how the country is governed. In addition to the record number of citizens who have taken to public locales for rallies in support of Bersih, the January 2013 *KL112 People's Awakening Rally (Himpunan Kebangkitan Rakyat)* and the post-2013 general election demonstrations drew tens of thousands of citizens to public locales. The majority of our interviewees maintained that political art is playing an increasingly important role in actuating these corporeal activities. They described their work as bringing to light issues in new and provocative ways, allowing fellow citizens to engage with socio-political subject matter in a personal and/or shared manner. To this end, they viewed their art as multiplying the "worlds at our disposal" (Deleuze, 2000) which encourages a questioning of naturalized narratives in society. According to a gallery director with whom we spoke, art is capable, more so than other forms of political texts, to complicate its own terms of expression and to be self-reflective. It accepts that it does not have all the answers; instead, he argued, it seeks to challenge dominant practices and norms and "incite dialogue", which is a different aim from "imposing or convincing opponents of a single way of thinking and living". As Pang Khee Teik synopsis, "The state uses culture as a weapon... We are using culture to empower the people. One of the roles of the arts is to voice the conscience of the people" (Friel, 2011b).

Based on our interviews as a representative sample, it is clear, however, that KL's concentration of politically oriented artists is neither homogenous nor consistent; its aims are never singular. Although they are driven by a common desire to advance the public good, the specific choices these individuals make are informed by their personal histories, their experiences, and their habitus in Malaysian society (see (Lee et al., 2010)). They are thus no different

from activists around the world whose “statuses, skills and social connections all shape their possibilities for protest and this is reflected in their different ways of doing so” (Crossley, 2002). As one visual artist commented in our interview, “I think we all just want to make this place...a better place” even if not everyone with whom he interacts agrees on what exactly ‘better’ means or the specific steps to achieve it. Drawing on how our interviewees described themselves and their peers, we now turn to discuss some of the key characteristics KL’s political artists share in common, followed by the ways in which they differ from each other.

## 5. COMMUNAL AND PARTICULARIZED ATTRIBUTES AND GOALS

### 5.1. Shared Attributes and Goals

First, with the exception of one interviewee, none of the individuals with whom we spoke thought his/her own production, facilitation, dissemination, and/or consumption of art would make a discernible difference in changing Malaysia’s socio-political landscape but, as noted above, all thought that en masse art had the power to generate progressive politics in the country. Through making their art available to a wider Malaysian audience, they highlighted the importance of opening up lines of communication about sensitive issues and taboo subjects.

Second, with the exception of two individuals, our interviewees said they gained significant personal fulfilment from being part of an interesting, vibrant network of politically minded people who appreciate the value of art. Unprompted, many noted that they gained greater motivation to continue their work knowing that others also engaged in artistic production geared towards progressive political ends; a sense of community that is especially important given that sustainability can be difficult in a politically fraught environment. Over and over again they emphasized the importance of strength in numbers – knowing that other individuals were willing to support them in the event that the authorities intimidated, harassed, fined, or detained them was considered invaluable. As one filmmaker commented, he has experienced first-hand that “friends and colleagues in our world have my back”, which is what has made it possible for him to continue making his art.

Third, although the composition of the local arts scene cuts across the country’s ethnic, religious, and gender demographics, a number of interviewees noted that it is less diverse in terms of class. Many pointed out that if financial remuneration is not the foremost priority, artists are not as likely to belong to a lower socio-economic class as participation often necessitates the availability of unpaid time. Even if making money is higher up the priority scale, it is difficult to be financially successful as an artist, especially a politically charged one under a semi-authoritarian regime.

### 5.2. How They Differ

First, we found fairly significant diversity in terms of how overtly critical KL’s artists are in their work, and the object/subject of their critique(s). Some individuals choose to be very public in their resistance. One actor, for instance, argued quite strongly in our interview that being public with one’s art “is absolutely essential if the culture of Malaysia is going to change enough”. Others, however, prefer to operate more under the radar of the authorities for strategic reasons or safety concerns. As a different interviewee acknowledged, “I want to do more with what I do [her art]... but I have a family... I sometimes have to be careful”. Some individuals also choose to cross sensitive political lines, while others prefer a more nuanced approach to their politics. Concomitantly, as noted above, some take aim at various ‘social’ or ‘taboo’ issues in the country (e.g. hosting an event for the annual sexuality rights festival, *Seksualiti Merdeka*), while others are predominantly concerned with politically contentious activities that target the government, its laws, programs, and policies (e.g. hosting an event in support of Bersih). This diversity mirrors how Weiss (2003b) describes the multi-pronged approach employed by Malaysia’s heterogeneous civil society to foment greater democracy in the country (see also (Lee *et al.*, 2010; Smeltzer, 2012)).

Second, some individuals describe themselves as artists first and activists second, while others emphasize the politics underpinning their artistic production. Most of the individuals with whom we spoke fall into the latter

category, highlighting their political message over the medium. This is not to suggest that they did not take pride in the artistic quality or creativity of their production; rather, they viewed their art as a vehicle to attract public attention and deliver politically charged commentary. According to one budding filmmaker, the majority of his peers write, produce, direct, and/or act in films “to make activism cool for the youth”.

Third, some individuals concentrate their efforts on one artistic medium, while others engage in myriad forms of artistic production in conjunction with a range of other parties. In one interview we found a potent example of such cross-fertilization. An employee at a KL-based NGO explained that through her work in support of women’s rights she became aware of how existing representations of violence against Muslim women are often unsympathetic. Consequently, the art she produces in her spare time is geared towards raising awareness about this issue, spanning a number of different artistic genres with the explicit goal of reaching as wide an audience as possible. Another particularly noteworthy example is Fahmi Reza, a boundary-pushing documentary filmmaker, artist, blogger, illustrator, author, and speaker. Educated in the United States, when Fahmi returned to Malaysia he produced his first major project – a film about the country’s independence, which won the 2007 Freedom Film Festival competition. He then went on to produce other politically charged films, launched a lecture series about student activism, and became a popular blogger, all the while facing significant government censorship. Today, Fahmi continues to be a well-known activist in KL who embodies the ways in which artistic resistance operates as a networked constellation of actors, organizations, and media forms.

Fourth, knowledge of the local socio-political landscape is sometimes necessary in order to decode ‘correctly’ the message encoded by an individual/group in his/her/their art. As a salient case in point, political cartoonist Zulkiflee Anwar Haque, or Zunar as he is more commonly known, creates politically contentious art for both domestic and international audiences that addresses a wide spectrum of issues, including the “Malaysian judiciary system, human rights, corruption, money politics, freedom of speech, education, religion, ethnicity, and many others” (Soon, 2011). His cartoons oscillate between obvious messages that someone not familiar with domestic politics would understand, to cartoons requiring more intimate knowledge of the country’s political actors and current issues.

Building on the above series of similarities and differences within KL’s political arts scene, we now explore in more detail whether and in what ways it corresponds with, or breaks away from, key characteristics of a traditional cluster as originally outlined by Porter.

## 6. DOES KL FIT THE MOULD OF A CLUSTER

### 6.1. Geographical Concentration

In KL, we see clustering activity by virtue of the fact that many political artists are physically located in the same general area, often using the same spaces to produce and exhibit their products. Some notable venues include, but certainly are not limited to, The Instant Café; The Annexe Gallery, the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall; various smaller sites in Bangsar, such as Silverfish bookstore; MAP@Publika; the Five Arts Centre; and the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (known colloquially as KLPac), which often includes a mix of mainstream and critical exhibits and events. Therefore, as would be expected from a cluster, when such “artists agglomerate, spaces of community and socialization emerge providing opportunities for exchange, outreach and creative inspiration” (Chang, 2014).

We must, however, question whether, despite Porter’s contention that there is no set size or limit to the boundaries of a cluster, we can refer to it as a cluster only by virtue of the fact that its members live and work in the country’s capital. While one can find small pockets of more concentrated politically oriented artistic activity – e.g., in adjacent Petaling Jaya, the neighbourhood of Bangsar, and downtown near the Central Market – there are no particularly noteworthy geographically bound areas specifically dedicated to this kind of production and consumption. Three reasons for this emerged directly from our interviews. First, political art has grown organically in bits and pieces over the years rather than as a planned space/place. Second, individuals and groups create and exhibit



their work in spaces they can afford to rent, buy, lease, or borrow, which means that such places are scattered around the city according to availability. One of the benefits of this decentralization is that artists and their work are woven into a greater number of neighbourhoods, giving a wider range of citizens easier physical access to an event or exhibit. At the same time, numerous interviewees commented that they usually have to engage in savvy marketing if they want others to know where to find them, and often must travel to different parts of the city to jointly produce or experience art. Third, it is doubtful the government would allow political artists to actually cluster in one specific location as this would likely be viewed as tacit approval of their activities and serve to facilitate their further growth.

Moreover, even though KL's political artists appear to be growing in number, they still remain a relatively limited group of individuals consuming each other's work. Consequently, they are faced with the very real issue of whether their artistic production preaches to the converted. To attract a wider audience, to circumvent government controls, and to overcome geographical limitations, some of the individuals with whom we spoke have employed various forms of social media to disseminate their art (e.g. through YouTube videos of plays, Facebook photos of art exhibits). While these social media tools are useful for advertising, distributing, and discussing political material, they arguably do not have the same emotional impact as an embodied experience. As Bal and Hernandez-Navarro contend,

Art is the tool that makes the political spaces, the platforms for such resistances, visible and hence, enables the spectator to experience and participate in the tensions of a non-consensual society... materiality makes art tangible, and thus brings it closer to the social agents that interact with it. The resulting proximity encourages participation; no art can exist without its audience; therefore, art is by definition performative (2011).

It would seem, then, that KL's political arts scene loosely fits the geographical criteria of a cluster. Yet, we are inclined to see it more as a flexible network of individuals and groups living and working in the same general locale. In this sense, it seems to correspond better with a politically oriented version of "arts urbanization" which, drawing on his case study of Singapore's Little India Arts Belt, Chang defines as "the process in which arts and culture come to occupy urban spaces, creating their own socio-spatial dynamics within cities and urban quarters" (2014).

## 6.2. Competition and Cooperation

Although our interviewees share in the common goal of making Malaysia a 'better place', they and their peers also often compete for audiences for both financial and non-financial reasons. 'Competition' can thus be thought of in terms of the way in which, instead of only money, individuals and groups contest their specific perspectives, aims, messages, and chosen methods of dissemination. As one NGO representative commented with bemusement, "we all think we know best what needs to be done". However, through our research it became clear that individuals and groups also *cooperate* by attending each other's activities, mentoring new artists, sharing resources, and promoting each other's work in their respective online and offline circles. The Annexe Gallery, for instance, provides a physical space for others to exhibit their work, to congregate, and to build community, even if not everyone in that community agrees with each other on particular issues or the best approach to cultivate political change. In the same spirit, KOMAS has offered free stalls for other artists to sell, exhibit, and promote their material during its annual Freedom Film Fest in KL; and Art For Grabs, a regular KL-based collaborative art bazaar and festival, features a wide range of political and apolitical content for attendees to experience and/or purchase.

Interviewees highlighted repeatedly two key reasons why they and their peers engage in cooperative endeavours, which echoes comments made above. First, they gain personal fulfilment from being part of a network of artists with similar political orientations. Second, they value the strength in numbers afforded from their cooperation, which helps to ensure each other's safety in the face of a government keen to limit and control unsanctioned political activities. Suppression, indictment, and detainment are usually met with swift (if not always successful) response from other political artists, and from associated human rights organizations, sympathetic lawyers, and some opposition politicians. We find a good example of cooperation in the case of cartoonist Zunar. As a result of his politically charged work, Zunar has been harassed by the police, arrested under the country's Sedition Act, and his books have

been confiscated and banned for being “a ‘threat to national security’” (Soon, 2011; Tapsell, 2013; Zunar, 2015). As a particularly well-known case in point, in 2010, the government banned Zunar’s book, *Cartoon-O-Phobia*, and arrested him just hours before his book launch was set to take place at the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall in KL. However, the launch went ahead with hundreds of people in attendance even though neither Zunar nor his books could be physically present. This kind of censorship has only served to boost Zunar’s popularity, drawing greater attention to his cartoons and the criticisms contained within them. It has not though kept him safe from the government’s ire. More recently, Zunar was arrested for sedition after taking to Twitter to criticize the politically motivated ruling of Anwar Ibrahim’s sodomy case (The Guardian, 2015; Zunar, 2015).

In sum, although our interviewees and their peers may compete for audiences, the prominence of a specific message or approach, they also cooperate to try and achieve a shared political objective that supersedes their particularities. It is therefore a good example of how, according to Porter (2000) “in a cluster, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts”.

### 6.3. Top-Down Development

Given that this aggregation of political artists continues to emerge organically from the bottom-up, it does not fit mainstream clustering depictions, which typically focus on how best to design and construct clusters in a top-down manner (e.g. the MSC Malaysia initiative). Regardless of how economically profitable these artists might be to a local community, as discussed above, the government would not financially or politically support activities operating outside of sanctioned artistic expression, especially if the content challenges the government and its ordinances. In fact, the more successful the artists are in reaching a sizeable and diverse audience, the greater the likelihood the government will actively work to foreclose their broader influence. While this constellation of artists may therefore not adhere to mainstream descriptions of cluster development it is, however, in keeping with a growing corpus of research examining clusters that are established at a grassroots level and that develop separately from state policy directives (see, for example (Chapain and De Propriis, 2009)). This literature recognizes that a one-size-fits-all blueprint does not reflect the immense diversity of clusters operating around the world, which are always informed by “particular geographies, histories and politics of cities and their communities” (Chang, 2014).

### 6.4. Flexibility

Many of the individuals we interviewed for this research told us that in order to successfully produce and disseminate their work they must often be flexible in order to respond to domestic political events. They may, for example, want to address an issue that suddenly becomes a hot topic in the press or quickly respond to shifting government attempts to restrict how and where they exhibit their art. If one of their goals is to increase ticket sales or sell physical products, similar to a monetizable cluster, they must also be flexible in order to react to market demands.

In sum, in like manner to typical deployments of a cluster, what we see in KL is a clustering of individuals and groups sharing resources and benefitting from geographical propinquity to achieve similar but differentiated objectives. They benefit from networking and linking up with other citizens who also view artistic production as essential to advancing progressive politics. Thus, similar to the ways in which firms located in creative clusters produce different but complimentary products for the marketplace – so as not to encroach on each other’s niche products while still benefitting from working in the same geographical area – KL’s aggregation of politically oriented artists offers myriad products for citizens to experience and, in some cases, purchase. In other words, the process is not all that different from what we might expect from the kind of cluster that dominates mainstream academic, media, and policy literature, but the objectives of the cluster are different. Rather than being principally geared towards financial gain, they are primarily concerned with political objectives. We hesitate though in categorically referring to this network as a ‘cluster’ primarily because the physical concentration of actors remains spread out over a sprawling

city for a number of logistical and political reasons. Consequently, we are, once again, more inclined to refer to what we see happening in KL as political form of arts urbanization.

## 7. GAUGING EFFICACY OF KL'S POLITICAL ARTS URBANIZATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

For typical clusters, success can be measured according to financial viability in a competitive marketplace. Without being able to similarly quantify the success of KL's political arts urbanization, it is difficult to know to its impact beyond the personal fulfilment experienced by the artists themselves. As McCarthy (2004) contend, we cannot expect a methodology to precisely determine the benefits accruing from artistic production. Despite efforts by arts advocates around the world to demonstrate the 'value' of investing in the arts (usually as a means of securing public funding), evidence is necessarily subjective (McCarthy, 2004).

For our KL case study, how then can we gauge the capacity of artists to foster critical political formation that can interrogate and respond to the interests of the state? The answer does not come easily. Part of the difficulty is that we simply cannot know what the Malaysian landscape would look like if such politically oriented artistic production did *not* exist. Nor is it easy to demonstrate a direct correlation between a specific artistic activity and a change in one of the government's programs or policies. Moreover, the advantages associated with the diversity in KL's political arts urbanization (e.g. in terms of form, content, target issues), may also be a limitation. Although all of our interviewees voiced a strong desire to make their country more equitable, tolerant, and democratic, without a concentrated effort to change something specific, their work may be too fragmented to achieve the kind of transformation they seek.

One means of gauging the political impact of these artists' activities is to follow the form and extent of retaliation by the government they generate. In response to an expanded sphere of resistance, it is clear from the examples given throughout this article that many individuals and groups have been at the receiving end of escalating censorship backlash from the authorities. This suggests that political artists are making a difference, even if only on a somewhat limited scale, for if they were not, the government would be unconcerned with their activities. Therefore, notwithstanding potential impediments to its efficacy, we contend that the kind of artistic production discussed in this article does indeed have an important role to play in pushing the envelope of what is politically acceptable in the country. While discrete forms of production may not be overly influential, together they provide space for public discussion about sensitive issues and encourage audiences to enact their own "resistances against the status quo" (Bal and Hernández-Navarro, 2011). To conclude, the research presented here offers insight into how a representative sample of politically oriented artists view the value of their individual and collective endeavours, revealing a fairly strong belief in the political power of art. Our respondents' opinions must, however, be tempered with the recognition that they are likely positively skewed as they presumably want to view their accomplishments as helping to effectuate positive change. As a painter/graffiti artist asked rhetorically in our interview: "If we didn't see what we do as important, why would we do it?" Future long-term research would thus benefit from the incorporation of ethnographic research from the consumption side of the equation to gain greater insight into how citizens experiencing political art view the impact of the work and of their participation. Hopefully, this KL case study also serves to help shift some of the focus away from the North American and European context, and towards dedicating more critical attention to politically charged artistic activities in other locales.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

## REFERENCES

- Abdullah, S., 2011. Thematic approaches in Malaysian art since the 1990s. *Jati*, 16: 97-113.
- Bagwell, S., 2008. Creative clusters and city growth. *Creative Industries Journal*, 1(1): 31-46.

- Bal, M. and M. Hernández-Navarro, 2011. Art and visibility in migratory culture: Conflict, resistance, and agency. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Baumgärtel, T., 2011. Imagined communities, imagined worlds: Independent film from South East Asia in the global mediascape. *Transnational Cinemas*, 2(1): 57-71.
- Baumgärtel, T., 2012. Introduction: Independent cinema in Southeast Asia. In Baumgärtel, T. (Ed). *Southeast Asian independent cinema*. Singapore: NUS Press. pp: 13-19.
- Case, W., 2013. Malaysia in 2012: A non-election year. *Asian Survey*, 53(1): 135-136.
- Chang, T.C., 2014. A historic neighbourhood as arts space: The little India experience. *Geografiska Annaler Series B*: 313-327.
- Chapain, C. and L. De Propriis, 2009. Drivers and processes of creative industries in cities and regions. *Creative Industries Journal*, 2(1): 9–18.
- Chapple, K., S. Jackson and A. Martin, 2010. Concentrating creativity: The planning of formal and informal arts districts. *City, Culture and Society*, 1: 225-234.
- Chiat, L.F. and L.F. Ying, 2012. The contemporary musical theatre in Malaysia. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 2(8): 1339-1358.
- Comunian, R., 2011. Rethinking the creative city: The role of complexity, networks and interactions in the urban creative economy. *Urban Studies*, 48(6): 1157–1179.
- Comunian, R., C. Chapain and N. Clifton, 2010. Location, location, location: Exploring the complex relationship between creative industries and place. *Creative Industries Journal*, 3(1): 5-10.
- Crossley, N., 2002. *Making sense of social movements*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Currid, E. and S. Williams, 2010. Two cities, five industries: Similarities and differences within and between cultural industries in New York and Los Angeles. *Journal of Planning Education and Literature*, 29(3): 322-335.
- Deleuze, G., 2000. *Proust and signs*. Howard, R. (Trans). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Evans, G., 2009. Creative cities, creative spaces and urban policy. *Urban Studies*, 46(5-6): 1003-1040.
- Flew, T. and S. Cunningham, 2010. Creative industries after the first decade of debate. *Information Society*, 26(2): 113–123.
- Florida, R., 2002. *The rise of the creative class. And how it's transforming work, leisure and everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Florida, R., 2012. *The rise of the creative class – revisited*. New York: Basic Books.
- Freedman, D., 2008. *The politics of media policy*. Polity. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Friel, T., 2011a. Theatre in Kuala Lumpur gives Malaysians rare chance to discuss issues. Available from <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/asia-pacific/theatre-in-kuala-lumpur-gives-malaysians-rare-chance-to-discuss-issues?pageCount=4> [Accessed 2 August 2011].
- Friel, T., 2011b. Where art meets dissent. Available from <https://newmatilda.com/2011/08/29/where-art-meets-dissent> [Accessed 29 August 2011].
- Garnham, N., 2005. From cultural to creative industries: An analysis of the implications of the creative industries approach to arts and media policy making in the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 11(1): 15-29.
- George, C., 2006. *Contentious journalism and the internet: Towards democratic discourse in Malaysia and Singapore*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- GoM, 2009. Najib invites international content community to participate in MSC. Office of the Prime Minister 5 October 2009. Available from [http://www.pmo.gov.my/home.php?menu=newslist&news\\_id=564&news\\_cat=13&cl=1&page=1731&sort\\_year=2009&sort\\_month=](http://www.pmo.gov.my/home.php?menu=newslist&news_id=564&news_cat=13&cl=1&page=1731&sort_year=2009&sort_month=) [Accessed 9 January 2015].
- Government of Malaysia, 2015. Economic base and population. Available from [http://www.dbkl.gov.my/pskl2020/english/economic\\_base\\_and\\_population/](http://www.dbkl.gov.my/pskl2020/english/economic_base_and_population/) [Accessed 9 January 2015].
- Grodach, C., E. Currid-Halkett, N. Foster and J. Murdoch, 2014. The location patterns of artistic clusters: A metro- and neighborhood-level analysis. *Urban Studies*, 51(3): 2822-2843.
- Hoffstaedter, G., 2014. *Modern muslim identities: Negotiating religion and ethnicity in Malaysia*.
- Hooker, V., 2013. Mindful of Allah: Islam and the visual arts in Indonesia and Malaysia. *Artlink*, 33(1): 70-73.
- HRW, 2013. Malaysia: Drop charges for film screening. Available from <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/10/20/malaysia-drop-charges-film-screening> [Accessed 13 January 2015].
- Kelaheer, M., 2012. Evaluating community outcomes of participation in community arts: A case for civic dialogue. *Journal of Sociology*, 50: 132-149.

- Khoo, G.C., 2006. Reclaiming adat: Contemporary Malaysia film and literature. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Khoo, G.C., 2010. Through our own eyes: Independent documentary filmmaking in Malaysia. In Seng-Guan, Y. (Ed). Media, culture and society in Malaysia. London: Routledge. pp: 137-159.
- Khoo, G.C., 2014. Syiok Sendiri? Independent filmmaking in Malaysia. In Baltruschat, D. and Erickson, M.P. (Eds). Independent filmmaking around the globe. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kong, L., 2009. Beyond networks and relations: Towards rethinking creative cluster theory. *Creative Economies, Creative Cities: The GeoJournal Library*, 98: 61-75.
- Kotkin, J., 2013. Richard Florida concedes the limits of the creative class. *Daily Beast*. Available from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/03/20/richard-florida-concedes-the-limits-of-the-creative-class.html> [Accessed 19 April 2014].
- Krätke, S., 2010. Creative cities and the rise of the dealer class: A critique of Richard Florida's approach to urban theory. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34(4): 835–853.
- Krich, J., 2009. A matter of expression. *Wall Street Journal*. Available from <https://malaysianart.wordpress.com/2011/01/04/a-matter-of-expression-by-john-krich/> [Accessed 2 October 2009].
- Lee, J., C. Wong, M. Wong and Y. Guan, 2010. Elections, repertoires of contention and habitus in four civil society engagements in Malaysia's 2008 general election. *Social and Movement Studies*, 9(3): 293-309.
- Lee, J.C.H., 2011. Policing sexuality: Sex, society, and the state. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Léger, M.J., 2010. The non productive role of the artist: The creative industries in Canada. *Third Text*, 24(5): 557–570.
- Lent, J., 2003. Cartooning in Malaysia and Singapore: The same, but different. *International Journal of Comic Art*, 5(1): 256–289.
- Lent, J., 2004. *Comic art in Africa, Asia, Australia, and Latin America through 2000: An international bibliography*. Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Liow, J.C., 2013. Malaysia's GE13: A cliff-hanger election. *RSIS Commentaries*, 75. Available from <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/blog/rsis/perspectives-on-contemporary-challenges-in-global-health-research-and-its-governance-by-dr-tikki-pang/> [Accessed 14 April 2013].
- Mahamood, M., 2003. An overview of Malaysian contemporary cartoons. *International Journal of Comic Art*, 5(1): 292–304.
- Manan, S.A., 2010a. Going against the grain: Postcolonial writings and creative performance in Malaysia. *Kunapipi*, 32(1).
- Mandal, S.K., 2003. Creativity in protest: Arts workers and the recasting of politics and society in Indonesia and Malaysia. In Heryanto, A. and Mandal, S.K. (Eds). *Challenging authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia*. New York and London: Routledge Curzon. pp: 178-210.
- Markusen, A., 2006. Urban development and the politics of a creative class: Evidence from a study of artists. *Environment and Planning A*, 38(10): 1921-1940.
- Markusen, A. and A. Gadwa, 2010. Arts and culture in urban or regional planning: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 29: 3379-3391.
- McCarthy, K.F., 2004. Gifts of the muse: Reframing the debate about the benefits of the arts. Santa Monica: RAND Research in the Arts.
- Mommaas, H., 2009. Spaces of culture and economy: Mapping the cultural-creative landscape. In Kong, L., and O'Connor, J. (Eds). *Creative economies, creative cities: Asian–European perspectives*. New York: Springer. pp: 45–59.
- Mosco, V., 2004. *The digital sublime: Myth, power, and cyberspace*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press.
- MSC Malaysia, 2011. MaC3 Co-Pro fund. Available from <http://www.msomalaysia.my/content/mac3-co-pro-fund> [Accessed 15 January 2015].
- Mustafa, M., M. Begum, A. Backer and J. Dollah, 2012. Questioning public art. In Brebbia, C.A. (Ed). *Eco-architecture IV: Harmonisation between architecture and nature*. Southampton, UK: WIT Press. pp: 103-114.
- No Fire Zone, 2015. Available from <http://nofirezone.org/> [Accessed 20 December 2014].
- Noor, F.A., 2013. The Malaysian general elections of 2013: The last attempt at secular-inclusive nation-building. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 32(2): 89-104.
- Peck, J., 2009. The cult of urban creativity. In Keil, R. and Mahon, R (Eds). *Leviathan undone: The political economy of scale*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Philip, S., 2012. Kee Thuan Chye's political plays: An analysis. *Asian Theatre Journal*, 29(2): 357-378.

- Pillai, J., 2010. Teater muda: Social and cultural engagement through the arts. In Loh Kok Wah, F. (Ed). Building bridges, crossing boundaries: Everyday forms of inter ethnic peace building in Malaysia. Malaysia: Vinlin Press. pp: 237–254.
- Piyadasa, R., 1993. Modern Malaysian art, 1945-1991: A historical review. In Turner, C. tradition and change. Australia: University of Queensland Press.
- Porter, M.E., 2000. Location, competition, and economic development: Local clusters in a global economy. *Economic Development Quarterly*, 14: 15-34.
- Prasad, N.Y. and M. Ahmad, 2013. Multiculturalism in Malaysian cinema a case study of Yasmin Ahmad's Films, mass communicator: *International Journal of Communication Studies*, 7(2): 4-11.
- Rajendran, C., 2012. Negotiating difference in Krishen Jit's theatre: Staging identities and contesting boundaries in multicultural Malaysia. *Wacana Seni: Journal of Arts Discourse* 11: 93-125.
- Ryberg, S.R., M. Salling and G. Soltis, 2013. Putting artists on the map: The geography of artists in Cuyahoga county, Ohio. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 35(2): 219-245.
- Saw, T.G., 2013. Film censorship in the Asia-pacific region: Malaysia, Hong Kong and Australia compared. U.K: Routledge.
- Smeltzer, S., 2012. Asking tough questions: The ethics of studying activism in democratically restricted environments. *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest*, 11(2): 255-271.
- Soon, C.Y., 2011. A cartoonist's resistance. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 12(3): 420-429.
- Subramaniam, S., 2012. Assessing political dynamics in contemporary Malaysia: Implications for democratic change. *ASIA Network exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts*, 19(1): 42-52.
- Tan, S.B., 1992. Counterpoints in the performing arts of Malaysia. In Kahn, J.S. and Loh Kok Wah, F. (Eds). *Fragmented\* vision: Culture and politics in contemporary Malaysia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. pp: 282-306.
- Tan, S.B., 2010. Crossing stylistic boundaries and transcending ethnicity through the performing arts. In Loh Kok Wah, F. (Ed). *Building bridges, crossing boundaries: Everyday forms of inter-ethnic peace building in Malaysia*. Malaysia: Vinlin Press. pp: 223–236.
- Tapsell, R., 2013. The media freedom movement in Malaysia and the electoral authoritarian regime. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 43(4): 613-635.
- The Guardian, 2015. Malaysian cartoonist Zunar arrested for criticising Anwar Ibrahim ruling. Available from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/11/malaysian-cartoonist-zunar-arrested-for-criticising-anwar-ibrahim-ruling> [Accessed 11 February 2015].
- Van Heur, B., 2010. Contemporary policy debate: Small cities and the geographical bias of creative industries research and policy. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure & Events*, 2(2): 189-192.
- Weiss, M.L., 2003b. The Malaysian human rights movements. In Weiss, M. and Hassan S. (Eds). *Social movements in Malaysia: From moral communities to NGOs*. London: Routledge. pp: 140-164.
- Yap, J., 2008. The substation in contemporary Singapore. An interview with Audrey Wong and Ho Tzu Nyen. *C Arts. Asian Contemporary Art and Culture*, 2: 88-90.
- Zunar, 2015. Available from [www.zunar.my](http://www.zunar.my) [Accessed 3 February 2015].

*Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author, International Journal of Asian Social Science shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.*