

## A Psychogeographical Tracing of Place Attachment in Selected Poems of Kuala Lumpur

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### ABSTRACT

*Individuals may imbue a location with profound significance. We pay attention to locations in literature because they are dense with importance. Kuala Lumpur as a location offers insights and several levels of relevance to individuals seeking to understand and examine their surroundings. The establishment of a connection between the person and the region results in authentic and significant experiences and interpretations, which are portrayed in poetry as information and knowledge about the environment for readers to read and be inspired by. The objective of this article is to investigate how different Malaysian poets depict Kuala Lumpur as a place in selected poems from Malchin Testament: Malaysian Poems (2017). While the location remains constant, the findings and knowledge gained via human observation and experience alter, especially over time. This may be seen through the lens of psychogeography, which is concerned with how an individual interacts with and observes a place, as well as how this affects his or her perception of the environment via the use of ideas and behaviour. The chosen poems about Kuala Lumpur were written by a variety of poets throughout the city's evolution from a township to the bustling metropolis it is today. These poems address a variety of features that contribute to the city's development, including people, history, architecture, and other traits that, in the poets' opinion, define the city. The poets' affinities are shown via their attention on important and compelling issues that characterise Kuala Lumpur. Thus, by concentrating our attention on Kuala Lumpur as a city, we may get a deeper understanding of the link between the individual and the environment. This will foster a stronger feeling of connection between the person and the city, an experience that is beyond the human eye's capability to perceive.*

*Keywords: psychogeography; meaning, place; attachment; Kuala Lumpur; Malaysian poetry*

### INTRODUCTION

Kuala Lumpur enchants people in many ways. As Sardar (2000, p. 46) puts it, "Kuala Lumpur has encapsulated all the threads that make up Malay life and Malaysian history and represents, more than any other location in Malaysia, all the repercussions, ramifications, paradoxes, and conundrums of a modern nation." It is a concrete jungle, although there are "folds of dense jungle... a broad expanse where buildings nestle amid trees and, far out on the western horizon, the city's skyscrapers rise like towering trees, breaking the canopy forest's line" (Sardar, 2000, p. 7). According to travel guides such as *The Lonely Planet* and *Berlitz Guidebook Kuala Lumpur* (p. 11), the city is "proudly progressive and cosmopolitan, with aspirations to reach 'world-class

metropolis' status." With its luxurious façade and multi-ethnic educated populace, Kuala Lumpur as a destination inspires writers to use the city as the scene for their different descriptions. *Malchin Testament: Malaysian Poems* is one such collection, which notably highlights Kuala Lumpur as a city of contradictions. The viewpoints of early and modern Malaysian poets are diverse, as Kuala Lumpur becomes the city's uniting aspect, despite the fact that the discrepancy between wealth and poverty continues to be a cause of dispute.

The title of the collection, *Malchin Testament*, is derived from a poem by Salleh ben Joned that was initially published in 1987 as "Malchin Monologue" (Vethamani, 2017). While Salleh ben Joned's poem mocks the ways in which Malaysians abuse the English language to the point of deformity, Vethamani's anthology of Malaysian poetry celebrates six decades of Malaysian poets writing in a variety of English dialects, mostly standard, and their attempt to trace the evolution of six decades whose use of the English language ranges from standard English to its Malaysian variety. As Vethamani (2017) explains, the anthology contains poems from various decades and eras of time, beginning with the earliest Malaysian poets writing in English in the 1950s and 1960s, including poets such as Ee Tiang Hong, Wang Gungwu, Wong Phui Nam, Muhammad Haji Salleh, Omar Mohd Noor, and Ghulam Sarwar Yousof, and concluding with the current emergence of a new generation of writers. This book provides as an indication and confirmation of Malaysian English Literature's dynamic environment. Additionally, *Malchin Testament: Malaysian Poems* has some poems that take place in and around Kuala Lumpur. When combined, Kuala Lumpur poetry reflects and represents the city, from its birth to its current state.

By selecting poems that include allusions to Kuala Lumpur, we can analyse and comprehend the city's visual quality. To notice and grasp Kuala Lumpur and its surroundings, poets must form a bond with the environment to think and behave accordingly. Thus, these poems from various eras provide a snapshot of Kuala Lumpur at various points in time, illustrating how the place is defined and interpreted by the minds and actions of various individuals during that period, thereby mapping a larger and more collective image of Kuala Lumpur over time.

By examining the Kuala Lumpur poems through the perspective of psychogeography, this article attempts to comprehend the link between individuals and location, and how they serve as reference points that form and define their experiences. Guy Debord (2008) created the term "psychogeography" to advocate for an imaginative approach to urban exploration in order to better understand its architecture and landscapes. He was influenced by the concept of the flâneur — an urban traveller — popularised by French nineteenth-century poet and writer Charles Baudelaire. According to Coverley (2006, p. 13), psychogeography is the "point where psychology and geography intersect," as people search for new ways to understand their urban environment. The Kuala Lumpur poems depict "wandering" poets seeking meaning via immersion in the city's landscape and allowing themselves to be drawn in by all Kuala Lumpur has to offer.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of people and location in Malaysian literature has grown in popularity. Ruzy and Fatin (2016) provide insight into urban life in Kuala Lumpur via their psychogeographic study of Nassury Ibrahim's works in *Ruang Kota*. His poetry in *Ruang Kota* dates from the 1980s to the early 2000s but was mostly produced in the 1990s. Claiming to be a member of the city's third class, most of his poems depict the life of the urban poor, the group of urban inhabitants most touched by Kuala Lumpur's rapid growth. Apart from that, he focuses on environmental and

spiritual issues that are crucial for ensuring that the city's affluent lifestyle does not poison the mind and soul. Even the book's cover art displays the author's perspective on the urban poor. The image of Kuala Lumpur is inverted underneath the image of the slums, hinting that the two pictures are related by their resemblance. This translates as poverty and urbanity.

In another research titled "The Visible Flâneuse in Chan Ling Yap's *Where the Sunrise is Red*," Nurul and Arbaayah (2021) employed psychogeography to analyse May, the female protagonist, in a few locales, including Kuala Lumpur. According to Nurul and Arbaayah, Kuala Lumpur is condensed into local markets, where aromas entice the main character farther into the crowded street, which offers home items familiar to women in her position and age. May blends into the throng yet maintains her separation from the street shoppers and market mob. She is a flâneuse, a member of the crowd who establishes an unofficial connection with it for her home interests. Yap's heroine is both physically and metaphorically connected to the public space, and her foray into it restores her identity and offers a sense of belonging.

Mohd Fadhli et al. (2021) demonstrated how Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf, a flâneuse who travels the world, uses her ambient space to concentrate on and understand signals that aid in her own growth. Her trips are a meaningful appraisal of each locale visited, as each location represents a lesson that she chooses to emphasise during her voyage and as a guide for her readers. Additionally, the poem has helped travellers like her to comprehend more than the naked eye can see, particularly as a Muslim female traveller who may face certain cultural expectations such as limited mobility and thought. Nor Faridah has not only captured the essence of each location but has also incorporated her voice and perspective into the journey, making it an authentic and empowering step for other female travellers to explore and challenge their own perspectives and interpretations of space and place through the lens of wanderers, regardless of their religious or cultural differences.

Mohd Fadhli et al. (2022) emphasised in another essay, "Psychogeographical Experience Between the Self and the Place," that people have varied degrees of awareness of the places in which they live. Individuals congregate and create friendships in places with a high sensory quotient. Additionally, their sense of fulfilment, attachment, and commitment to the community are regarded to contribute to the sense of place. Thus, a situation in which individuals comprehend symbolic meanings, form connections with their surroundings, and express high degrees of happiness with their experience may suggest a strong sense of place.

The literature review demonstrates the significance of psychogeography as an analytical tool. Any place in literary works has a variety of connotations for various readers. As Lynch (1960, p. 3) rightly says, "there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear, a setting or a view to be explored ... Every citizen has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings." As a metropolis, Kuala Lumpur is continually evolving, for better or worse, for a multitude of reasons. Taking this context into account, we use the notion of psychogeography to explain the poets' experiences as they rebuild Kuala Lumpur as a city from their unique vantage points. While some may consider the city to be Malaysia's capital, these poets go beyond aesthetic considerations to demonstrate how places have a profound effect on everything, even themselves, as proven by their descriptions of the city.

## PLACE AND PEOPLE

In the context of a person's identity, place identity is a microstructure that is made up of information and sentiments that are acquired via daily interactions with physical environments. This implies that the interaction of individuals and their environment may result in the production of both mental and physical states (Gieseeking et al., 2014). Giuliani (2016) further qualifies that people have an emotional connection to one or more locations, whether positive or bad. This category includes experiences related with a former place, future depictions of a site, and locales that are scale constrained. Thus, it is generally seen that individuals who are drawn to a region absorb a great deal from their surroundings, which ultimately affects and shapes their own perspectives via a process known as self-discovery. David and Wilson (1999) refer to the link between people and place as a dialectical internalisation of one's surroundings and an externalisation of oneself, which together generate Being. Additionally, they examined the crucial issues raised by this process, which entails the identification of one's history and identity. According to them, a location's history is crucial for imparting meaning to individuals, supporting them in developing and defining (or redefining) their identities as they travel and explore the region. Because of this sort of experience, 'individuals will transcend and reinvent themselves as they negotiate their situated existence within their surroundings' (163). Following this train of thought, in their poems about Kuala Lumpur, these poets rediscover the locations through the prism of that era's history (immediate space) and, in the process, find themselves. As a consequence of their reaction to and engagement with the city, their sense of place, self, and identity are shaped.

With rapid expansion and modernization occurring in the city, there is a significant probability that residents' connection to their locality and the depth of what the place means to them would decrease. This entails the building of skyscrapers to replace older conventional residences or even community parks that were on the same land before. Some of the memories of street food have been replaced by shopping malls with worldwide influences on menus and local delicacies, something locals crave for in the way of old Kuala Lumpur. The city's image and meaning create a deep tie with its residents, producing a sense of place. Tuan (1977, p. 56) describes the place as thus:

People demonstrate their sense of place when they apply their moral and aesthetic discernment to sites and locations. However, other than the all-important eye, the world is known through the senses of hearing, smell, taste, and touch. These senses, unlike the visual, require close contact and long association with the environment.

The passage above defines the location as characterised by what it can be in terms of physical and material qualities. However, we suggest that location may also be defined using all of an individual's senses. These poets observe and travel across Kuala Lumpur's urban scene, gaining first-hand knowledge of how and what the city has to offer. Across their wanderings and walks through the city, these poets employ their creative interpretations to get a better understanding of and critical engagement with the environment. As Rose and Samuels (cited in Benzon et al., 2021) argue, urban wanderers might be thought of as a living research instrument, alert to their surroundings and on the lookout for clues to the location's significance. Thus, the poems picturing Kuala Lumpur that were utilised in this research will establish the authors' link to the city.

### KUALA LUMPUR AS A PLACE

Kuala Lumpur, as Malaysia's capital city, is well-known for its long history of development—from small tin mining operations along Sungai Kelang to a skyscraper-filled metropolis home to millions of people from many ethnic groups. These rapid changes showed a developed and contemporary city that had significantly improved its physical infrastructure, residential neighbourhoods, and other areas (Nor Hanisah et al., 2009). However, the intensification of urbanisation inside Kuala Lumpur has created new issues for city residents.

Kuala Lumpur, a former colonial metropolis, struggled for independence and sought to develop its own identity and social representation for a multi-ethnic community. Kuala Lumpur's early years were spent distancing itself from the coloniser's shadow, which had served as its principal source of identity. The West influenced significant physical and spatial changes, which had an implicit social and psychological effect on city dwellers. This allows city people to explore, seek out, and travel areas to redefine and construct their own perspectives and interpretations of themselves and their environment. The present city of Kuala Lumpur is seen as a by-product of the previous years, which saw the emergence of complex meanings associated with physical, technological, and social change. It is considered as teeming with information and layers of tales that are just ready to be shared with everyone interested in knowing more about it. This is reflected in Kuala Lumpur's growth as a mature city, as seen by its architectural setting, economic success, and multi-ethnic population's social behaviour. Several of the poems examined demonstrate a range of viewpoints on how the poets perceive the city via their observations, involvements, relationships, and interpretations of the city, all of which may have influenced their way of thinking.

The poets chosen demonstrate a breadth of experience. Ee Tiang Hong, born in 1933, represents Malaysia's early generation of Anglophone poets. As a seventh generation Baba, his sense of personal identity was inextricably linked to Malacca, even when he relocated to Kuala Lumpur and fled to Australia in 1975 as a political refugee (Haskell, 2008). He was compelled to flee the nation owing to threats and conditions impairing his liberty and integrity. Ee explained that “Malaysian writers have chosen to protest by leaving the country, preferring the uncertainties of exile to the certainties of being humiliated, overtly or in many subtle ways” (Ee, as cited by Cheng, 2018). In *Malchin Testament: Malaysian Poems*, two of Ee's poems were included. The poem “Kuala Lumpur” (originally published in 1967) depicts the early presentation of the city while the second poem *Kuala Lumpur, May 1969* (originally published in 1985) was written about Kuala Lumpur during the incident of the 1969 racial riot. The second poet is Chin Woon Ping whose poem “Lorong Sarawak, Kuala Lumpur, 1969” (originally published in 1993) reveals the emotional aspects of the 1969 racial riots incident. The third poet is Fan Yew Teng, born in 1942 who was a former Member of Parliament (MP) of Malaysia whose poem “Kuala Lumpur! Kuala Lumpur!” (originally published in 1999) highlights different aspects of the city from Yew's perspective. The fourth poet is Priya Kulasagar, a freelance writer, who wrote the poem “Kay Elle” (originally published in 2007) which refers to the urban pronunciation of KL, takes on a modern approach on observing and understanding Kuala Lumpur from the eyes of a younger generation that lives in the city. The other two poems selected for this study do not use the city as part of the title, however, pays tribute to the places in Kuala Lumpur; “Tasik Permaisuri” (n.d) and “Bak Kut Teh at Pudu Market” (n.d.) written by C. P. Hew and “Still Brickfields” (2016) written by Malachi Edwin Vethamani. C. P. Hew's poems veer away from the city's structural and architectural characteristics, focusing instead on the city's natural and green aspects.



## PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

When people write poetry about a city, they establish a connection with the locale, which results in a sense of attachment. This connection is evident in their mental representations, behaviours, and judgements. Furthermore, these connections are formed in several ways. As with individual city inhabitants, the poet is used as a research tool or a record collector who investigates and comprehends the surrounding surroundings. Various people may travel and explore in distinctive ways, with differing degrees of privilege and access across cities, resulting in a range of distinct experiences. As a result, the idea of psychogeography is critical for this application, as it depends on strolling to understand location and emotion. In the parlance of psychogeography, this act of wandering is called *dérive* or "drift." The Kuala Lumpur poems, we contend, show the poets as urban wanderers who have absorbed some features of the urban landscape with certain objectives in mind. The *dérive* is critical to psychogeography; it provides a more direct connection between walkers and the city. Therefore, we will demonstrate the relationship between the notions of place and people to focus on a concrete analysis which considers location that acts as an anchor for a person's beliefs and behaviour in connection to their surroundings.

Coverley (2006) emphasises the relevance of psychogeography in establishing an understanding of people's emotional and psychological attachments to places, especially those with abundant topographic and geographical landscapes that contribute to people's affective attachments. By reading these poems through the lens of psychogeography, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the attachment between place and people, which transcends the aesthetic and essentialism of the space and delves deeper into other significant connections, such as how the place is filled with rich emotional representations from memories and other forms of values that can connect with the inhabitants.

Along with psychogeography, place attachment is a vital component of this study because it builds a link between the place and the individual's feelings, perspectives, and behaviours in response to the place's exploration and discovery. As a result of their exposure to the region, these poets acquired a love for their surroundings and the city's architecture, enabling them to write creative works specifically about Kuala Lumpur. Place attachment is an emotional link formed between a person and a physical spatial setting because of the significance associated with the place as a setting for experience. Thus, the experience and connection formed by the residents of a place comprise a range of ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours, as well as emotions prompted by the attachment to the location.



FIGURE 1. The relationship between psychogeography and place attachment

The key components focus on how the poets, as individuals and residents of the city, perceive and respond to the site via their actions, therefore establishing a more established relationship with Kuala Lumpur. They thrive as an investigation of space and the rich history of Kuala Lumpur because of their adventures and discoveries of the city. The poets' way of thinking, as conveyed via their interpretations of their surroundings and activities, transcends traditional perceptions of the place and raises questions about Kuala Lumpur as something more than a physical location. This framework illustrates the psychogeographical process through which an individual forms a personal connection with Kuala Lumpur based on their own perspectives and behaviours. This provides a comprehensive overview of Kuala Lumpur as an urban metropolis spanning several generations and historical eras.

Psychogeography has always been a theory, but it is also a practice that entails spatial and temporal exploration. Those who subscribe to this philosophy, whether intentionally or inadvertently, adopt a certain kind of critically aware movement that attempts to attune to its surroundings, clarifying their atmospheres and meanings. They produce a map of a redefined location based on subjective, emotional, and speculative data via their observations of streets, parks, people, and structures. While intentional observation may cause these wanderers to overlook desirable aspects of the city, the psychogeographic approach enables more meaningful observations as the poets interact with and interpret their surroundings to the point where their perspective on the city shifts and they discover a more refined and critical way of depicting Kuala Lumpur.

### URBAN SETTING AS ATTACHMENT TO PLACE

The selected poems focus on the structures and architectural environment of Kuala Lumpur, even though the observations and documenting (of the poetry) took place over a period of time. Thus, the architectural setting contradicts the importance of the built environment in eliciting and shaping the occupants' feelings and perspectives. Observing the towers and buildings that surround the city contributes to the development of a sense of pride for the location and to the strengthening of the

location's and individual's identity as a citizen of Kuala Lumpur. Continuous references to Kuala Lumpur's urbanisation are evident in the poems through the usage of phrases like as 'multi-storied flats', 'new bungalows', 'concrete things', 'cars and buildings' ("Kuala Lumpur"), 'skyscrapers', 'flyovers', 'toll plazas', 'tree-lined malls', 'flashy shopping complexes', 'traffic congestions', 'tall buildings' ("Kuala Lumpur! Kuala Lumpur!"), 'Starbucks', 'consumer-complexes', 'motorcycle', 'corporate junkies', and 'city' ("Kay Elle"). These keywords, which reflect the business and vibrant setting of urbanised Kuala Lumpur in the earlier poem published in 1967 to the current one published in 2007, are constantly evolving and growing, indicating a growth for the place and for the people as more opportunities and contributions become available in the city.

This is supported by McNeill's (2005) findings, which analyse the urban environment and built environment as a repositioning strategy for Kuala Lumpur to be recognised as a global economic city, facilitating the development of a new city centre and high-technology corridor of new towns as part of Tun Mahathir's (then-Prime Minister of Malaysia) attempt to portray Malaysia as a modern city. Each poem portrays the core symbolism that gives the city its value, as well as the feeling of pride and love that these poets feel when they identify with the site.

Ee Tiang Hong's "Kuala Lumpur" highlights the city's urbanisation and modernization as it moves from its natural environment to a more created and solid shape. The poem Kuala Lumpur begins with the line "raise up your eyes to the new scenery," (p. 47) implying that the city is embarking on a new path toward economic expansion and modernisation. Ee also describes the growth of urbanisation in Kuala Lumpur as "at the end of a terrace/the shophouses, the multi-storied flats/new bungalows in bold colours/ thrive like anthills."/ (p. 47). The vibrant hues, reminiscent of anthills, seem gaudy. "The pioneers" are unconcerned with the area's greenery, chopping down trees and torching the *lalang*. Instead of pride for economic growth, Ee shows his concern for irreparable harm to Kuala Lumpur's green heritage. He pokes fun at the transformation of Kuala Lumpur into a 'business paradise.' He demolishes the notion that growth, peace, and prosperity can be ensured by ignoring sustainable development. His poetry is prophetic; for many, twenty-first-century Kuala Lumpur has devolved into a nightmare metropolis, often overwhelmed by flash floods and gridlock.

Fan's use of the exclamation marks in his title "Kuala Lumpur! Kuala Lumpur!" is telling, especially when he narrates the jarring contrast between Kuala Lumpur's physical transformation versus its corporeality. Behind its 'flashy shopping complexes' (p. 67), Kuala Lumpur is a picture of contrast:

are you a city of  
hope or despair  
joy or frustration  
warmth or loneliness  
love of hate  
plenty or poverty  
ordained heaven or manmade hell  
strength or weakness  
firmness or caprice  
the aged of youth  
angels or devils  
floods and draught  
shit or gold  
farts or perfumes  
glory or shame  
hills or valleys



vibrance or imitation  
deserts or springs  
truth or lies  
colours or blandness  
sages or fools  
light or shadows  
bigotry or tolerance  
thinkers or robots  
courage or cowardice  
dissidents or sycophants  
care or selfishness  
independents or suckers  
pageantry or burlesque  
strife or peace  
clarity or haze?

(pp. 68-69)

In the 1990s, Ee's fear about unsustainable growth became a reality. Kuala Lumpur evolved at a breakneck pace, but as Fan's duality demonstrates, economic prosperity must coexist with spiritual growth. When current development is made at the price of future generations, this is referred to as unsustainable growth. For instance, poor planning and environmental degradation caused by resource extraction result in waste and pollution that wreak havoc on ecosystems. Such tactics are not long-term viable. Kuala Lumpur is densely populated with people seeking better living, yet they are met with demands for waste management, transportation, urban sprawl, fresh air supply, clean drinking water supply, and access to green space. As shown in Fan's poetry, Kuala Lumpur exhibits many characteristics of an unsustainable metropolitan environment. The infrastructure in and around Kuala Lumpur has deteriorated dramatically since the 1990s, when the economy began to expand. Increased population has resulted in increased energy consumption, congestion, and a decline in the quality of life for those who have migrated to the "promised land," but when despair, isolation, capriciousness, narcissism, and burlesque reign, Kuala Lumpur transforms into both a 'Babylonian lump' and a 'Philistinian mud' (p.69).

Using questions and dichotomies, Fan delicately probes and offers to the reader sharp contrasts of Kuala Lumpur throughout the poem. Rather than providing his discoveries and interpretations of the area, Fan emphasises the location's adaptability and subjectivity in terms of connection and meaning in Kuala Lumpur depending on an individual's perspective. As Ee defined the creation of the place during his time as swift and rapid, Fan replicates this rapid movement in a more nuanced and subjective manner in this poem, which deals with defining and criticising the city's qualities. Although the city is lauded for its modernism, and the poet's affinity to the city is evident in the lines "O I love Chow Kit Road/ Sungei Besi, Sentul, Dato Keramat/ and all your other parts", Fan continues to struggle to define Kuala Lumpur as a meaningful location for him. Priya's poem "Kay Elle" focuses on the influence of modernity and urbanity on people's lives. As depicted in 2007, the city adopts a materialistic depiction of Kuala Lumpur, emphasising an economy-driven backdrop. Through her poem, which is based on her observations of the contemporary Kuala Lumpur at the time, she portrays a city that has been significantly impacted and influenced by post-modernisation of its development:

Kuala Lumpur

Where we live with our consumer-complexes and road rage  
Bursting with the seams with smog and Starbucks,  
Where the godless masses search for spirituality  
In neon lit temples of chrome and plastic

Where we walk too fast to live  
Live too long to feel alive

(“Kay Elle”, p. 128)

The lines above indicate the region in which the bulk of people spend their time in coffee shops and entertainment venues in search of enjoyment and stress alleviation. Smog is a word that refers to air pollution, which occurs often in urban areas and is visible as smoke from vehicles, industry, cigarettes, and other sources of combustion. Priya's finding is consistent with Kuala Lumpur's modern reality as a newly developed metropolis. Smog is also seen adversely because of air pollution. This discovery, however, indicates a positive gesture since it reveals that the poet, as a city resident, is concerned and is emphasising the city's concerns and problems as a lesson for future measures to be taken or as a reminder to the public to overcome and care for the city. While the early phases emphasised the area's greenery and natural setting, current Kuala Lumpur is more focused on the fast lane of frenzied living. Residents of this modern city are deemed godless and seek spiritual emancipation in an unconventional manner by attending neon-lit temples regularly. She portrays contemporary individuals as lacking in appreciation and compassion. This is because the bulk of them are so focused on work-related objectives that they forget to appreciate their surroundings, while others may have lost touch with the place and life in general. The poem depicts a lack of connection and attachment among the location's people, as individuals are too consumed with living their lives to realise the location's importance and identity:

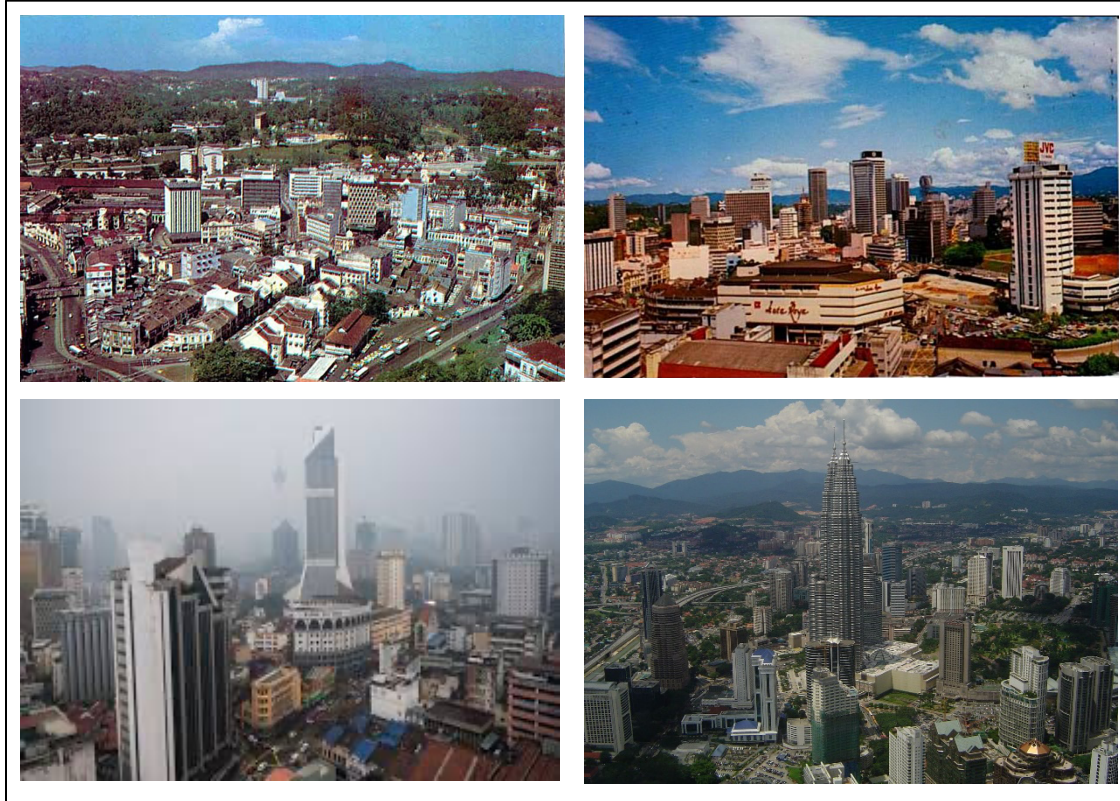
Where we carry a badge spelling out our pride,  
Kay-Elle man, where you from?  
I'm a GM, MD, PHD  
(e)M(p) T(y)

(“Kay Elle”, p. 128)

The location's ridiculousness is highlighted by the people's lack of connection and involvement. Individuals prioritise materialism and successes above honest and sincere representations, rather than creating connection via discourse and attachment. Individuals exhibit their devotion to a place at this level by emphasising their trustworthiness, salutations, and outward characteristics as a symbol of their identity. The last line above shows the place's meaningless and nonsensical conclusion, which created a vacuum in the occupants, driving them away from their homes. They have established a robotic way of life as a slave in their own house. Priya illustrates this with her tedious schedule, which is followed religiously by almost every working person in Kuala Lumpur to the point of being automated so that the city dweller “can do it again/ tomorrow” (p. 128). Therefore, these people lose their connection to their surroundings and lack the will to seek meaning and re-define themselves in life.

As Priya illustrates, people get blinded by a place's lack of purpose, preventing them from thinking and behaving effectively to make the most of the city. This is comprehensible in a developing society, especially one that is urbanised, where materialism and other tangible parts of life are preferred over the traditional and slow-paced way of life that was previously regarded normal during the pre-modern age. The visual representation of Kuala Lumpur in the following

images, which were taken throughout the years when the poems were written, best illustrates the location's growth. While these images are not accurate depictions of each period, the goal is to highlight how the site evolved from one era to the next, as recounted and investigated by each generation's writer.



(source: Google Images)

FIGURE 2. (Clockwise) The urban images of Kuala Lumpur in 1960s, 1980s, 1990s and early 20s as represented in the poems

Another poem that is nostalgic in its articulation of a lost home is Vethamani's "Still Brickfields" where the persona expresses his concern and despair towards the impact of modernisation and urbanisation that has taken over Kuala Lumpur. Brickfields, a place located in the city used to be the persona's familiar place when growing up but the concrete buildings of which he calls 'monsters' have 'devoured my playgrounds and past'. His connection to his past is still strong as it lingers in the lines upon comparing it with the newly construction of the more modern city. The lines below describe the longing of his past setting within the modern Kuala Lumpur:

My childhood church  
No longer stands alone.  
Now surrounded by  
Brothels and massage parlours.

The riverbank is concrete  
The lalang and weeds gone.  
The river wears  
A monsoon drain mask.

There I once caught fish  
And saw floating corpses  
During the May riots  
That undid us

(‘Still Brickfields’, p.330)

The preceding phrases indicate the persona's link to both old and new Kuala Lumpur, enjoying the familiarity of childhood memories and condemning the city's modernity. Vethamani pines for the ancient Brickfields, which promises spiritual fulfilment, cousin play among the commotion of chickens and ducks, and a glimpse of a river brimming with fish. However, development, a race riot, and a flood all conspired to seal their doom. While the persona experiences Brickfield as a visitor, the sounds, smell, and memories of the old Brickfields endure. The poem's last two lines, "This is my Brickfields, never Sentral," express an assertion of devotion to the location, which was formerly called Brickfields before being renamed Sentral. Names do not matter, memories are everlasting.

Despite the desolate descriptions of Kuala Lumpur in the poems above, C.P. Hew's "Tasik Permaisuri" (Permaisuri Lake) stands alone in its admiration of an enclave in the city. The poem captures the essence of nature which has been overlooked by people who are constantly busy with the hectic city life. Hew compares the rapid movement of people in the developing city against the peaceful motion captured at the Tasik Permaisuri. Yew's detailed descriptions of what he sees of the lake is translated in the lines below:

The raintrees remain solid,  
Unperturbed with their large eyes  
As the lake shakes its body in a quivering motion  
Beneath the waters  
In a silent refuge.

The leaves than float away  
As the wind in ripples blows  
And reach of most people  
They move away.

(“Tasik Permaisuri,” p.96)

The detailing of Yew's observation of Tasik Permaisuri indicates a moment of separation of individuals from the cityscape and allows them to become one with nature. Yew's wandering of this side of the city allows us to understand that even in the concrete jungle of Kuala Lumpur, there is still a sanctuary of peace that allows people to retreat from the city life. Furthermore, his understanding of nature and its importance to include in building a connection to Tasik Permaisuri indicates a strong relationship with the place as he selects the details of nature such as 'lotus flower' and 'raintrees', and describes the motion of his surroundings of how the "lake shakes its body", and "as the wind in ripples blow" are apparent that his observation and understanding are more thoughtful and intricate as compared to other inhabitants of the city.

Urban planners and politicians seldom consider the perspectives of literary creators. They may learn a great deal from Ee, Fan, Priya and Vethamani. More initiatives can be used to aid individuals who are just scraping by. The planners should have a blueprint to improve the habitability and conduciveness of their living space. Kuala Lumpur is not a home for Malaysians but is also the rice bowl for migrant workers and expatriates. What programmes may be developed



to promote neighbourly integration? These are some of the problems addressed in Kuala Lumpur poems. These are not made-up problems; they are harsh realities for a sizable proportion of metropolitan dwellers. Any development should consider the happiness of its inhabitants.

### FOOD ATTACHMENT OF A PLACE

Hsu and Scott (2020) assert that eating experiences are related to location attachment. This conclusion is consistent with Loureiro's (2019) earlier observation that place attachment is an emotional connection to a place that may be developed or maintained via memorable experiences and sensory engagement. Food, like various other sorts of connections to a place, has the potential to stimulate and elicit an individual's thoughts and behaviour toward his or her surroundings. Apart from providing a connection to a region, food is also utilised to establish a destination's identity and image. This is because food stimulates an individual's senses of smell, hearing, sight, and touch, allowing them to connect and interact with their surroundings, building a feeling of place.

Norsidah and Khalilah (2015) assert that emotional attachment to a place is impacted by the physical and cultural aspects of the people and the area. Food becomes a signifier of identification with the city in the context of these authors' works about Kuala Lumpur. The poem's cuisine options serve as a metaphor for Kuala Lumpur's structure, which impedes the city's multi-ethnic population — something for which Kuala Lumpur is well-known. Thus, it bears the cultural identity of each ethnic community, most notably the city's three principal races: Malays, Chinese, and Indian. The portrayal of food emphasises the significance of this feature in defining a certain region, as it acts as a type of bonding agent that connects people. As indicated in the poem's second line, Fan Yew Teng links many locales in Kuala Lumpur with cuisine names that express the location's meaning and cultural identity:

Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lumpur  
I love your *nasi lemak* in Gombak  
Your roastduck from Pudu  
Your muton curry at Brickfields  
Your *Bak-Kut-Teh* in Kepong  
Your *nasi briyani* at Kampung Baru  
Your sugarcane water at Cheras  
(“Kuala Lumpur! Kuala Lumpur!”, p. 67)

The diversity of meals described in the locations surrounding Kuala Lumpur are all recognisable to the city's residents of various ethnicities. For example, *Nasi Lemak* is a Malay trademark meal; roast duck and *bak kuh teh* are Chinese dishes; and *nasi briyani* is an Indian dish. For a poet of Chinese ancestry, not only does he recognise the food of other races in the region, but he also expresses fondness for all the meals, demonstrating that the tie has been built and entrenched in the region. This inclusion of other races as part of Fan's commitment to the location also indicates a favourable development for the local populace. This is because, before Independence Day, various ethnic groups concentrated only on their food, which was designated for their ethnic requirements (Jalis, 2008). Additionally, there was a dearth of cross-cultural understanding between ethnic meals and the customs and cultural features that accompanied them. Thus, in this poem, written following Malaysia's independence (1957), the interaction between people of all races has been interwoven via the use of cuisines from various locations in Kuala Lumpur.



In another poem by C.P Hew entitled “Bak Kut Teh” at Pudu Market, the poet depicts a lively scene of middle-aged Chinese men and women in samfoo wearing “black rubber boots” patronising “meat ribs in herbal soups” before they begin their daily grind. The eatery is simple – marble tables with Chinese tea, chillies and garlic placed on them. The waiter in “sleeveless Pagoda singlet” is a striking image; he wears a cheap tank top that is unpretentious. Indeed, Pudu Market is a great contrast to skyscrapers seen earlier.

Although others may have never eaten the meals owing to a variety of reasons (religious, medical, to mention a few), the significance of how the cuisine signifies a certain race, ethnic, cultural, and identity demonstrates the type of attachment and knowledge established by the poet via the place. Bak Kut Teh serves as a communal meal for this Chinese community in this setting, while the speaker of the poem observes from afar. He is captivated by the sight, yet he stays estranged. They, unlike the speaker, lack the luxury of time:

Next moment they have gone  
all but the empty bowls and bones  
so quickly as though in protest,  
against the dawn that came too soon. (p. 94)

The unpretentious meal embodies the modest joys enjoyed by these city dwellers. They are the backbone of the city, and yet they are denied the pleasures of life.

### HISTORICAL ATTACHMENT OF A PLACE

Place attachment is an integrated notion that incorporates the connection between love and emotion, knowledge and trust, activities and behaviours associated with a particular location (Edi & Arnis, 2020). In particular, historical episodes that have a connection to a location stay ingrained in people's minds. The age in which a site such as Kuala Lumpur was discovered, developed, and created is a component of the history of attachment to and attribution of its creation. The persons linked with each period shape the site, its character, and importance. It serves as a means for readers to engage with the site and create a connection with the vision and description of the location via documentations and recordings, including poetry.

Additionally, Brown and Raymond (2007) observed that a person's sense of place is dependent on the breadth of their experience with the environment and their social interactions with it. Via their poetry, the poets express their own experiences and perspectives on the location, as well as the social bonds developed as a consequence of their interactions with their surroundings. Among the four poems included in this study, Ee Tiang Hong's “Kuala Lumpur May 1969” is totally committed to a particular moment in the city's history. The poem's title and content both paid tribute to the 13 May 1969 catastrophe, making a strong connection between the people and area at the time. Those who were involved, witnessed, or informed about the history may establish a connection to and attachment to the area (on several levels). This results in what Jorgenson and Stedman (2001) refer to as place identity, which is defined as an individual's cognitions, beliefs, perceptions, or thoughts about the self's involvement in a specific spatial environment, in this instance, the May 1969 historical occurrence.

To provide context to the 1969 racial riot, Malaysia's polarisation is powered by three fundamental divisions, each of which dates all the way back to pre-colonial times. The nation's principal dividing line is ethnic. Since independence, the dominant national identity narrative has

been that Malaysia is for Malays—the largest ethnic group in the country. Other communities—specifically, Chinese and Indian Malaysians whose forefathers immigrated in the country before independence, as well as the many smaller indigenous ethnic groups on Borneo—perceive themselves as not having equal rights and status in many ways. The country's established racial hierarchy has been put to the test on several occasions, revealing ethnic divisions and resulting in varied degrees of inclusion throughout time.

Due to the poem's 1985 year of composition, it serves as a reminder of the writer's memories of the 1969 event in Kuala Lumpur. By reliving the tragic event, Ee establishes a link with his memories, a relationship that necessitated both a mental and emotional journey that resulted in the imagery in his poems. The lines 'we remained inside day after day/counted our blessings not to have been caught/inflamed section of the city/where the parang hordes had gathered' vividly recall the exact images of Kuala Lumpur during that chaotic time. These lines effectively communicate the memories associated with that encounter, which elicited a variety of emotions, including melancholy, fear, worry, and despair. Furthermore, the top keywords associated with the 13 May 1969 disaster include 'parang', 'throng', 'riots', 'army', 'leopard-sport attire', 'barbed barrier', and 'curfew'. Thus, discussing historical details about the area helps to establish a strong connection between the person and the region:

As now more and more distant  
Bitterness, recrimination day by day subside  
Ashes on flower, leaf, and shoot  
In the sparse valley of a memory

("Kuala Lumpur, May 1969", p. 54)

In the remarks above, Ee divulges that the episode touched not just him, but also on the local community. Even though the tragedy happened years ago, it will not be forgotten for years to come, especially by those who were involved, witnessed, or touched by the incident. The lines 'ashes on flower, leaf and shoot/ in the sparse valley of a memory' (p. 54) act as a reminder that this incident will forever be remembered and linked to the area as a source of identity and historical context. Even years later, the ashes represent the countless people who died in riots and gatherings, as well as the destructions inflicted, will remain irrevocably tied to the place. This emotionally charged and serious piece is best understood considering the author's life, which has been severely impacted by the catastrophe. For Ee, the decision to depart in the aftermath of the occurrence may be read as being highly affected by the local circumstances at the time. His move to Australia in 1975 had a significant impact on Ee's development as a writer and on the bulk of his works.

Despite his relocation to Australia, Ee continues to write about his homeland and the memories associated with it. For him, the misery of being cut off from memories of his long-forgotten birthplace results in a growing attachment to his homeland rather than to his newly found locale. The individual's attachment to the familiar area in the form of memory and historical background bonds him to it via his works and writings. While the other poems focus on his thoughts, ideas, and projects, with a strong emphasis on pain and loss to convey the aftermath of the tragic incident, this poem, 'Kuala Lumpur,' records the occurrence – which serves as a testament to the reasons for his emigration and departure from the country – an answer to those who may wonder about his choices.

It is vital to grasp the meaning of locales for the individuals who occupy these familiar surroundings to comprehend the choices and decisions that people make throughout their lives. Thus, in Ee's case, the historical tragedy has affected him physically and emotionally, and through his poem, he establishes a connection between himself and the location depicting the incident,

which serves as a memorial, a reminder, and as an integral part of the location's identity, where it is still remembered and associated with to this day. In summary, the attachment between a person and a place is significant because it entails a range of factors in establishing the connection, including the perceptual, psychological, physical, and social elements of the individual contact with the location.

Besides Ee, Chin Woon Ping's poem "Lorong Sarawak, Kuala Lumpur 1969" is embedded with the same historical event of racial riots that happened in the city during 1969. Lorong Sarawak (Sarawak Alley), adjacent to Pudu Road was among the locations involved in the incident. However, instead of using the setting of the city as a mean to express his feelings on the matter, Chin's poem is embedded with personal attachment towards the incident as he explores, describes, and expresses his emotions using the words like 'hurt', 'pain', 'dying', 'cruel', 'darkness', 'defeats' are the outcome of the historical event which took place and has affected the persona's mind and behaviour. Instead of describing the cityscape, readers are able to understand the pain that the persona endures through his exploration of feelings of that incident. The ambiguity lies in the complete erasure of ethnic discord, but the pain of partners torn apart due to hatred of laws/against our kind' (p. 34) shows the speaker's bitterness of the discord. The lines 'take out your defeats on me/ scream out your hatred of laws/against our kind, I simply won't/ confess how everything smarts so' bring out a more nuanced understanding of the riot. Chin's agony is pain of being betrayed by someone intimate:

you never hurt willfully  
your limbs enclose mine with no sound  
of pain and we thrash  
in the heat like dying snakes (p.34)

The trust deficit will continue to exist in perpetuity. The reality that 1969 looms over every Malaysian and threatens to ruin the delicate inter-racial relationships is conveyed in the poet's remembrance of Kuala Lumpur, which was the epicentre of the upheaval. Lorong Sarawak may be only an alley, but it bears long-lasting consequences for the speaker. What is obvious is that there has been a gradual accumulation of anger over the years.

## CONCLUSION

People and their encounters with certain locales are explored through the lens of psychogeography, which is a field of study that investigates how people interact with, develop, define, and relate to space and place. Our concentration on Kuala Lumpur via the poems included in Vethamani's anthology of Malaysian poetry, which spans many decades of Malaysian literature in English, may be restrictive in one sense, since various Malaysian poets not included in this collection have also used Kuala Lumpur as the backdrop for their creative works. However, working within the literary tradition of Malaysian Literature in English, which is composed of a broad group of authors, demonstrates a wealth of viewpoints.

Our examination of eight poems exposes some of the city's most intriguing facets. From its modest origins as a muddy estuary, the city, Malaysia's capital, has developed a distinct façade of contemporary and traditional buildings. The city itself is a study in divergences: squatters' huts and low-income housing are crammed amid magnificent towers. Development comes at a cost when planners overlook the influence of space, energy, human transportation, and other

infrastructure. Several of the poems covered in this article, such as "Kuala Lumpur! Kuala Lumpur!" and "Kay Elle," show the cost of growth that disregards the city's inhabitants. Poor planning always has a detrimental environmental and social effect. Other poems, such as "Lorong Sarawak, Kuala Lumpur, 1969: and "Kuala Lumpur, 1969," bring a tragic moment in Malaysian history to life. Poems like "Still Brickfields" and "Bak Kut Teh at Jalan Pudu" are wistful remembrances of a bygone era. Food memories abound in the poets' evocation of Kuala Lumpur. Human reactions to the city, whether sad, pleased, or bitter, illustrate the poets' connection with Kuala Lumpur. It is a metropolis that evokes wonder, adoration, and worry in equal measure.

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