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Seditious Spaces

Protest in Post-Colonial Malaysia

Nurul Azreen Azlan

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Protest in Post-Colonial Malaysia

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For fellow Malaysians

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After finishing my Masters in 2007, I remember swearing that I am never going back to school again. And yet, here we are.

In 2011, I read an article in The Guardian where they interviewed a professor from TU Delft who was teaching about cities and democracy. Intrigued, I wrote a research proposal and sent it his way. That was the long and short of how I got here. For that, I have to thank Wouter Vanstiphout who always manages to give a refreshing point of view, and has, in no small way, helped shape the work into what it is. The work would probably not get written at all, or would take a lot longer to finish, had Gregory Bracken not insisted we meet every fortnight, sometimes just for a chat. Those meetings were a constant in my PhD days which kept me anchored. I owe the improvements of my writing skills to Greg. Finally, I wished Wil Zonneveld had joined the team much sooner, for he brought an invaluable experience as a professor. To all my supervisors, thank you for your expertise and your patience.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

1MDB	1 Malaysia Development Berhad
BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front – incumbent coalition of political parties)
DART	Delineation Action and Research Team
DBKL	Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (The City Hall of Kuala Lumpur)
EC	Election Commission
ERL	Express Rail Link
FELDA	Federal Land Development Agency
GST	Goods and Services Tax
HINDRAF	Hindu Rights Action Force
ISA	Internal Securities Act 1960
KLCC	Kuala Lumpur City Centre (typically used to refer to the Petronas twin towers)
KLIA	Kuala Lumpur International Airport
LRT	Light Rail Transit
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCMC	Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MSC	Multimedia Super Corridor
NEP	New Economic Policy
PAS	Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat
PR	Pakatan Rakyat (People's Coalition – opposition coalition of political parties)
PTPTN	Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional (National Higher Education Fund Corporation - an agency under the Ministry of Education that offers study loan to students in higher education)
Pusat KOMAS	Centre of creative media promoting human rights causes in Malaysia
SOSMA 2012	Security Offences Special Measures Act 2012
SUHAKAM	Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia (Human Rights Commission)
UMNO	United Malay National Organisation
UUCA	University and University College Act 1971

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Summary

The title 'Seditious Spaces' is derived from one aspect of Britain's colonial legacy in Malaysia (formerly Malaya): the Sedition Act 1948. While colonial rule may seem like it was a long time ago, Malaysia has only been independent for sixty-one years, after 446 years of colonial rule. The things that we take for granted today, such as democracy and all the rights it implies, are some of the more ironic legacies of colonialism that some societies, such as Malaysia, have had to figure out after centuries of subjugation. While not suggesting that post-colonial regimes should not be held accountable for their actions, it is ironic to see a BBC commentator grilling the leader of a Commonwealth state about repressive laws and regulations inherited from the colonial era. (Even the term 'Commonwealth' is itself ironic, implying shared wealth, in reality it commonly meant a colonised country was contributing to the wealth of the metropolitan centre).

This research sought to understand how the trajectory of urban development, which is shaped by the colonial legacy, has produced the contemporary geography of contention in Malaysia. Given that public space is shaped by the colonial legacy, how does it facilitate or hinder street protests as a function of democracy, which is also a vestige of colonialism? To do this, rather than going into a long discussion about notions of public sphere and public space, much of which originated from Western traditions, I used postcoloniality as a lens for the topic[1]. By taking the concepts as a given, the postcolonial gaze allowed me to contextualise particular Malaysian conditions.
In this thesis I argued that the postcolonial narrative (democracy, modernisation, development) is ambivalent precisely because the colonial narrative itself is ambivalent; there was no real break between colonisation and the present condition. I examined three aspects in particular. Firstly, colonial architecture as a subversive 'third space', where independence amplified the subversive quality of colonial architecture because of the power vacuum left after the colonisers had left. Secondly, postcolonial 'amnesia', where certain aspects of history were conveniently forgotten or others selectively remembered in the production of space to build a hegemonic vision of society. Finally, I looked at postcolonial mimicry, where the post-colonial society imitated either the former colonial master or some other references that fit within its narrative. These notions were mapped onto public space which not only provided the backdrop for dissent but also shaped its form and practices.

1 Note: 'postcolonial', as a theoretical stance, is differentiated from the more simple 'post-colonial', which denotes a period in a country's history.

Protest provided a direct line for the interrogation of just how democratic postcolonial public space actually is. The mobilisations, negotiations, and potential conflicts that arise from the moment a street protest is announced reveal a lot about the politics of space as much as the event itself. Public space comprises material and discursive spaces and, at the time of writing, included social media which has become part of the infrastructure of protest. The empirical part of this research came from the Bersih 4 protest in Kuala Lumpur, which took place from 29-30 August 2015.

To ground the somewhat abstract postcolonial discussion, methods (outlined below) were used to collect and analyse data. Firstly, to understand the logic behind the control and surveillance of public space I reviewed literature on how architecture and public space are produced and governed in Malaysia. Secondly, I observed protest in both digital and material public space, which means I harvested social-media data about the protest but also observed street protests in Kuala Lumpur. This informed me how protest produces space within which protesters could foster a collective identity, something that is necessary for the continuity of the protest. I then conducted a thematic analysis on a large number of tweets collected during the protest to understand how information about their places were communicated. Other protests that have taken place in Kuala Lumpur since 1998, when new media started playing a role, were also mapped; this was crucial for the understanding of the spatial patterns of the protests.

By tracing the production of architecture in Malaysia we can see how the nation-building project was an ambivalent one, evidenced by how the state mapped their aspirations onto the built environment. Postcolonial amnesia is exhibited in how the Malay-Muslim identity is amplified in architecture while other identities were suppressed and only utilised when it seemed productive. Mimicry, on the other hand, can be seen in how certain architecture is created based on an imagined past, and how visions of modernity fluctuate between Occidental and Orientalist visual cues.

Malaysian public space is not only a colonial legacy in terms of its material infrastructure and regulations, it also carries traces of colonial practice. Here, mimicry was manifested in how society imitated the erstwhile colonial masters in seeking to avoid the Other (due to the perception that public space is dangerous and uncomfortable, and showing that segregation had moved from one defined by ethnicity to one defined by class). The lack of a clear break between the colonial and the Neoliberal can also be seen in how public space is governed. Undesirable activity was always framed according to its potential for disrupting economic activity, indicating that public space was perceived as being useful only for production and consumption, not for the performance of citizenship.

An urban-planning assessment of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya (the seat of the post-colonial government) was carried out to see which place could better support protest. Accessibility, land-use patterns, and urban form were all aspects of the city that were decided upon at the urban-planning level and throught to influence the probability of protest taking place. This indicates that a city can be designed to support or hinder the performance of democracy. I found that Kuala Lumpur, founded during the colonial era, was actually more supportive of protest activities than Putrajaya, a city purpose built by the newly independent democratic regime.

Analysis based on data collected around Bersih 4 was organised into four themes. I first examined how protest produces space. I did this by tracing how the collective identity, already formed by previous Bersih protests, was cultivated on social media in order to mobilise protesters to take to the streets. The act of converging in the same space and performing these spatial choreographies (marching, knowledge-sharing, occupation) further enhanced the collective identity. Images and descriptions of what took place on the streets then travelled through social media which in turn propelled events in the public space. While protest is shaped by the materiality of the urban environment, protest also produces space.

Secondly, a reading of the space revealed the interplay between symbolic places and the spaces of everyday life. Protests are shaped by the existing materiality of space, which the authorities could further control by putting up extra measures. Due to this, Bersih 4 ended up occupying the intersection between symbolic and institutional places and spaces of everyday life. The polite restraint shown by Bersih 4 (in not entering Dataran Merdeka – which was barred to them) served to amplify the distance between the state and the people, further magnified by the fact that the protest coincided with Independence Day (31 August). The junction that Bersih occupied was teeming with people throughout the occupation but Dataran Merdeka was left empty and silent on the eve of the Independence Day commemoration. On the other hand, a thematic analysis of tweets revealed that most of those that mentioned geographical places were inflammatory in nature, in the sense that they were urging people to join the protest. Therefore, while the state could construct the symbolism of the space, it does not mean that the space is viewed in a similar way by the people, which means, in turn, that it can be rewritten. This is one way in which the subversiveness of colonial architecture was manifested.

Thirdly, I found that the control of digital and material space was symmetrical. This can be seen in three ways: One, how regulations of both spaces can be used to suppress dissent; Two, how access to space can be blocked, either by blocking certain websites or platforms, or by limiting the access to the material public space; and Three, bottom-up

disruptions – while the Red Shirts disrupted Bersih's performativity in the material public space, cybertroopers were disrupting protest exchanges on Twitter.

Finally, the digital and spatial divide between Bersih and its opponents. The digital divide was not defined by degrees of expertise, but, rather, it revealed a differing logic of operation based on norms shaped by what was available to these different parties. Geographically, it revealed the difference between experience of organising protests for a collective cause versus a lack of experience (compounded by racist motivations). What this indicated was that the cleavage does not only run along communal lines, is also political.

The research showed how the production of the Malaysian built environment is ambivalent, as is evidenced by the traces of amnesia and mimicry found in the narrative, where identities are grafted onto projections of modernity. Putrajaya shows that there is a disconnect between what the regime claims itself to be, a democracy, and the city it builds. What Putrajaya seems to demonstrate (ironically, as the seat of a democratic government) is how urban planning can be used to design a city so that it does *not* support the performance of democracy. It is also ironic how Kuala Lumpur, a city founded during the colonial period, is now more accommodating to street protest, cementing its position as a subversive third space. The disconnect between the ideology of the regime and the kind of space it produces indicates a potential for architects and urban planners to be subversive by designing public space to be more democratic, regardless of a regime's ideology. Kuala Lumpur's mixed land-use patterns, accessible by multi-modal transportation and a tight urban form which gives the city a more walkable scale, indicates that the city is a place of everyday life since it supports a variety of functions and activities within easy reach of the populace. Since protests also seem to flourish in public spaces like these, where everyday life is lived, it further cements the role of protest as a part of public life.

The research also indicated the necessity of having material public space for the performance of democracy, thereby debunking the myth that digital space has somehow superseded public space. Just as the assumption that the Internet would result in the death of distance (ease of communication has, ironically, led to global cities becoming ever more important as nodes in global networks), this research shows how the Internet has the potential to expand the public sphere, and is actually instrumental in getting people to physically go to public spaces. Given how the protesters were communicating about place during Bersih 4, it shows how contestation of meaning does not have to be direct clash but that digital space could provide an arena even when material public space is off limits.

The way in which Bersih 4 materialised itself in Kuala Lumpur also shows that restraint on the part of the protesters could also be a productive protest strategy, since it can bridge the distance between the state and its citizens via a strategic reading (and occupation of) space. Since protest is a performance, in the sense that it is a way of communicating displeasure, the space it uses should not only be seen as something to use or overcome, but can also be utilised more actively. Bersih 4, through its occupation of an important street junction, showed how it could challenge the symbolism embedded within Dataran by amplifying it.

This research also shows how access to public space is crucial for the performance of democracy, and how public space can actually be designed to be more democratic, regardless of the ideology of the regime. Democracy has a spatial quality, and design can play a role in fomenting a more democratic urban environment.

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Samenvatting

De titel van de dissertatie, *Seditious Spaces* ('opruiende ruimten'), is afgeleid van een overblijfsel uit de Brits-koloniale tijd in Maleisië, de Sedition Act ('wet op de opruiing') van 1948. Hoewel het kolonialisme tot een ver verleden lijkt te behoren, is Maleisië pas 61 jaar onafhankelijk na 446 jaar koloniale overheersing. Zaken die we tegenwoordig vanzelfsprekend vinden, zoals democratie en alle daarin besloten rechten, behoren tot de meer ironische erfenissen van het kolonialisme die samenlevingen als Maleisië na honderden jaren onderwerping een plaats moeten zien te geven. Dit betekent niet dat postkoloniale regimes niet verantwoordelijk dienen te worden gehouden voor hun daden, maar het is wel ironisch om een pratend hoofd op de BBC de leider van een Gemenebeststaat de mantel te zien uitvegen over repressieve wet- en regelgeving die nog afkomstig is uit het koloniale tijdperk. (Zelfs de term Gemenebest is ironisch, omdat die het beste voor de gemeenschap van staten impliceert, terwijl de koloniën vooral bijdroegen aan de welvaart van één bepaald land.)

In dit onderzoek is geprobeerd inzicht te krijgen in de wijze waarop de voortgang van de stedelijke ontwikkeling, zoals vormgegeven door koloniale erfenissen, heeft geleid tot de tegenwoordige geografie van wedijver in Maleisië. Als we aannemen dat de openbare ruimte is gevormd door de erfenis van het kolonialisme, hoe bevordert of belemmert deze ruimte dan straatprotesten als functie van democratie, eveneens een overblijfsel van het kolonialisme? Om deze en andere vragen te beantwoorden, ben ik geen langdurige discussie aangegaan over noties als publieke sfeer en openbare ruimte, waarvan vele afkomstig zijn uit de westerse traditie, maar heb ik het onderwerp vanuit het postkoloniale perspectief beschouwd.[2] Door de begrippen als gegeven aan te nemen kon ik ze met een postkoloniale blik contextualiseren tot typisch Maleisische omstandigheden. In dit proefschrift betoog ik dat het postkoloniale narratief (democratie, modernisering, ontwikkeling) ambivalent is omdat het koloniale narratief zelf al ambivalent was, en dat er geen werkelijke breuk is geweest tussen de kolonisatie en de huidige toestand. Ik heb in het bijzonder drie aspecten onderzocht. Het eerste aspect is de koloniale architectuur als subversieve derde ruimte en het feit dat de onafhankelijkheid de subversieve aard van de koloniale architectuur heeft versterkt vanwege het machtsvacuüm dat de kolonisators hebben achtergelaten. Het tweede is het postkoloniale geheugenverlies waardoor bepaalde aspecten van de geschiedenis voor het gemak vergeten worden en andere selectief worden onthouden

2 'Postkoloniaal' wordt gezien als een theoretische houding terwijl 'post-koloniaal' refereert aan een periode in de geschiedenis van een land.

bij het scheppen van ruimte teneinde een hegemonistische visie op de samenleving te ontvouwen. Ten slotte heb ik gekeken naar de postkoloniale mimicry, waarbij de postkoloniale samenleving ofwel de vroegere koloniale heerser imiteert, ofwel andere verwijzingen die in zijn narratief passen. Deze noties worden uitgezet op de openbare ruimte, die niet alleen de achtergrond is waar tegengeluiden worden geuit, maar ook mede de vorm van het tegengeluid bepaalt.

Protest is een katalysator voor de vraag hoe democratisch de postkoloniale openbare ruimte is. De mobilisatie, onderhandelingen en mogelijke conflicten die ontstaan vanaf het moment dat een demonstratie wordt aangekondigd, zeggen veel over het ruimtelijke beleid, net zoveel als de demonstratie zelf. De openbare ruimte omvat de materiële en discursieve ruimte, en tegenwoordig ook social media, die een onderdeel zijn geworden van de infrastructuur van het protest. Het empirische deel van dit onderzoek is ontleend aan de demonstraties van de protestbeweging Bersih 4 in Kuala Lumpur op 29 en 30 augustus 2015.

Om een basis te verschaffen aan de meer abstracte postkoloniale discussie, zijn de onderstaande methoden toegepast om data te verzamelen en te analyseren. Ten eerste heb ik voor inzicht in de logica achter de beheersing en bewaking van de openbare ruimte in de literatuur onderzocht hoe de architectuur en openbare ruimte in Maleisië tot stand komen en worden gereguleerd. Ten tweede heb ik de protesten in de digitale en de materiële ruimte geobserveerd. Dit wil zeggen dat ik de data van social media over het protest heb verzameld en de straatprotesten ook met eigen ogen heb waargenomen in Kuala Lumpur. Hierdoor kwam ik te weten hoe de demonstraties ruimte opleverden waarbinnen de demonstranten een collectieve identiteit konden cultiveren, die nodig was voor de continuïteit van het protest. Ik heb een thematische analyse uitgevoerd van de tijdens de demonstraties verzamelde tweets om te kunnen begrijpen hoe plaatsen werden doorgegeven. Ook de eerdere protesten die in Kuala Lumpur hebben plaatsgevonden sinds 1998, toen nieuwe media een rol begonnen te spelen in de protestbewegingen, zijn uitvoerig in kaart gebracht. Dit was van cruciaal belang om inzicht te krijgen in de ruimtelijke patronen waarin de protesten zich afspeelden.

Door de productie van belangrijke architectuur in Maleisië te traceren zien we hoe ambivalent het project van natievorming was, zoals blijkt uit de manier waarop de staat zijn aspiraties in de gebouwde omgeving tot uitdrukking heeft gebracht. Het postkoloniale geheugenverlies is zichtbaar in de wijze waarop de Maleisisch-islamitische identiteit wordt versterkt in belangrijke architectuur terwijl andere identiteiten worden onderdrukt en alleen worden ingezet wanneer dat iets lijkt op te leveren. Aan de andere kant is mimicry te zien in bepaalde architectuur die wordt geschapen op basis van een imaginair verleden, en in de fluctuaties in de visie op moderniteit tussen westerse en oosterse visuele verwijzingen.

De Maleisische openbare ruimte is niet alleen een koloniale erfenis in termen van materiële infrastructuur en regelgeving, maar draagt ook de sporen van de koloniale praktijk. Hier manifesteert mimicry zich in de manier waarop de samenleving de koloniale heersers imiteert in hun vermijding van 'de ander' als gevolg van de perceptie dat de openbare ruimte gevaarlijk en onaangenaam is, waaruit blijkt dat de segregatie is veranderd: van een segregatie op basis van etniciteit in een segregatie op basis van klasse. De afwezigheid van een breuk tussen het koloniale en het neoliberale is ook zichtbaar in het beheer van de openbare ruimte. Ongewenste activiteiten zijn altijd als zodanig veroordeeld naargelang van hun vermogen om economische activiteiten te verstoren, wat erop duidt dat de openbare ruimte alleen nuttig is voor productie en consumptie, niet voor de uitoefening van burgerschap.

Er is een beoordeling van de ruimtelijke ordening in Kuala Lumpur en Putrajaya uitgevoerd om te zien in welke stad protesten beter worden gefaciliteerd. Toegankelijkheid, patronen van grondgebruik en verstedelijking zijn aspecten van de stad waarover wordt besloten op het niveau van de ruimtelijke ordening en die van invloed zijn op de kans dat protesten uitbreken. Dit betekent dat een stad zo kan worden gepland dat de democratische praktijk wordt ondersteund of belemmerd. Ik heb vastgesteld dat Kuala Lumpur, een stad die in de koloniale tijd is gesticht, meer ondersteuning biedt voor protestactiviteiten dan Putrajaya, een stad die doelbewust is aangelegd door het democratische regime.

De analyse op basis van de data die rond Bersih 4 zijn verzameld, is geordend in vier thema's. Ik heb eerst onderzocht hoe protest leidt tot ruimte. Dit heb ik gedaan door na te gaan hoe de collectieve identiteit, die al was gevormd tijdens eerdere Bersih-protesten, opnieuw werd gecultiveerd op social media om demonstranten te stimuleren de straat op te gaan. Het samenkomen op dezelfde plaats en het uitvoeren van ruimtelijke choreografieën (protestmarsen, kennisuitwisseling, bezettingen) hebben de collectieve identiteit verder versterkt. Vervolgens kwamen de beelden en beschrijvingen van wat er op straat gebeurde weer op de social media, die ze direct de openbare ruimte in slingerden. Terwijl het protest wordt gevormd door materiële aspecten van de stedelijke omgeving, levert het protest ook ruimte op.

Ten tweede bracht bestudering van de ruimte de interactie tussen symbolische plekken en alledaagse ruimtes aan het licht. Protesten worden gevormd door de bestaande materiële ruimte, die de autoriteiten verder kunnen beheersen door extra maatregelen te treffen. Daardoor bezette Bersih 4 uiteindelijk het snijpunt tussen symbolische en institutionele plaatsen en alledaagse ruimtes. De beleefde terughoudendheid die Bersih 4 betrachtte door niet naar Dataran Merdeka te gaan, dat voor hen was afgesloten, vergrootte de afstand tussen de staat en de bevolking, een effect dat nog werd versterkt doordat het destijds Onafhankelijkheidsdag was. Op het grote

kruispunt dat door Bersih bezet werd, was het gedurende de hele bezetting een enorme drukte, maar Dataran Merdeka bleef leeg en stil aan de vooravond van de viering van Onafhankelijkheidsdag. Aan de andere kant bleek uit de thematische analyse dat de meeste tweets waarin geografische namen werden genoemd, opruiend van aard waren in die zin dat ze mensen opriepen zich bij het protest aan te sluiten. Met andere woorden, hoewel de staat de symboliek van de ruimte kan construeren, betekent dit niet dat de betekenis van die ruimte door de bevolking op dezelfde manier wordt gezien en kan worden herschreven. Dit is één manier waarop de subversiviteit van de koloniale architectuur tot uiting komt.

Ten derde ontdekte ik dat de controle over digitale en materiële ruimtes symmetrisch is. Dit is op drie manieren zichtbaar: 1. In de manier waarop regulering van beide soorten ruimtes kan worden gebruikt om afwijkende geluiden te onderdrukken; 2. In de manier waarop de toegang tot een ruimte kan worden geblokkeerd, hetzij door bepaalde websites of platforms te blokkeren, hetzij door de toegang tot de materiële publieke ruimte te beperken; 3. In verstoringen van onderop: terwijl de Red Shirts de activiteiten van Bersih in de materiële publieke ruimte verstoorden, verstoorde de cyberpolitie de Twitter-berichten over het protest.

Tot slot is er de digitale en ruimtelijke kloof tussen de Bersih-demonstranten en hun tegenstander. De digitale kloof wordt niet bepaald door de mate van digitale handigheid, maar staat voor verschillende vormen van operationele logica op basis van normen die zijn bepaald door wat de verschillende partijen ter beschikking stond. Geografisch betekende de kloof het verschil tussen de ervaring van het organiseren van protesten voor een collectieve zaak en het gebrek aan zo'n ervaring, aangevuld met racistische motieven. Dit bracht aan het licht dat de scheiding der geesten niet alleen langs sociale lijnen loopt maar ook politiek is.

Het onderzoek toont aan dat de productie van de Maleisische gebouwde omgeving ambivalent is, zoals blijkt uit de sporen van geheugenverlies en mimicry in het narratief, waarin identiteiten worden geënt op projecties van moderniteit. Putrajaya laat zien dat er een gat gaapt tussen wat het regime zegt te zijn, een democratie, en de stad die het bouwt. Wat Putrajaya als regeringszetel ironischerwijs lijkt aan te tonen is dat ruimtelijke ordening kan worden gebruikt om een stad te ontwerpen die de democratische praktijk niet ondersteunt. Het is eveneens ironisch dat Kuala Lumpur, de stad uit de koloniale tijd, nu meer inschikkelijk is tegenover straatprotesten en daarmee zijn positie als subversieve derde ruimte verstevigt. De tegenstrijdigheid tussen de ideologie van het regime en het soort ruimte dat het produceert wijst op de potentiële subversieve mogelijkheden voor architecten en stadsontwikkelaars om de publieke ruimte democratischer te maken, ongeacht de ideologie van het regime. De gemengde patronen van grondgebruik in Kuala Lumpur, toegankelijk dankzij

multimodale vervoersmogelijkheden, en de strakke stedelijke vorm die de stad een beloopbare schaal oplevert, zijn een aanwijzing dat de stad een plaats is voor het alledaagse leven omdat zij functies en activiteiten ondersteunt die binnen het bereik van de stadsbevolking liggen. Aangezien ook protesten lijken te gedijen in openbare ruimtes zoals deze, waar het dagelijks leven zich afspeelt, versterkt de stad de rol van het protest als deel van het openbare leven.

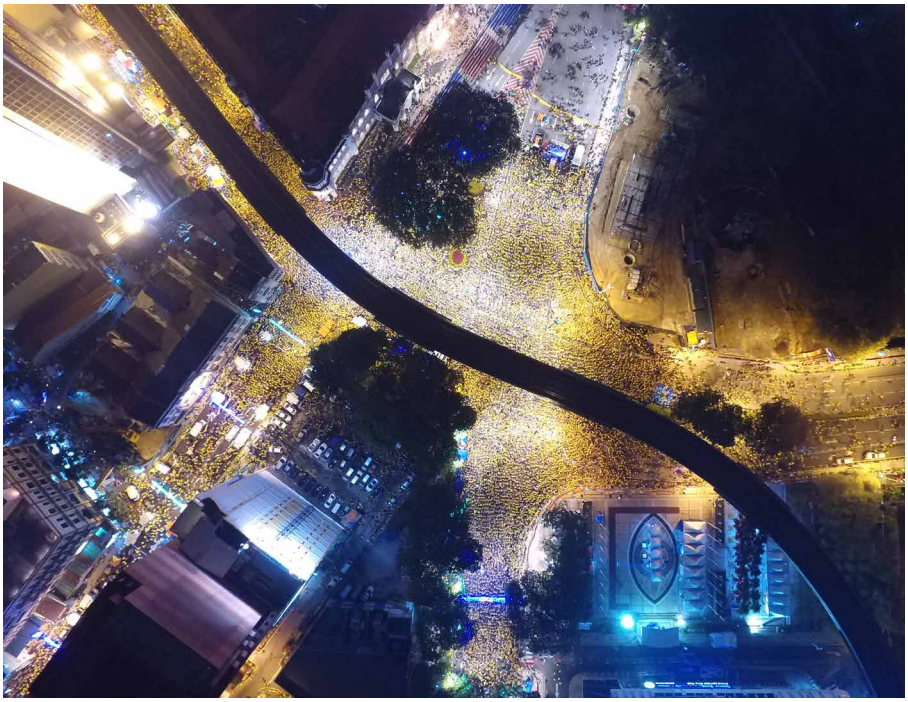
Het onderzoek wijst ook uit hoe noodzakelijk de materiële openbare ruimte is voor de uitoefening van de democratie, en maakt zo een eind aan de mythe dat de digitale ruimte de openbare ruimte overbodig heeft gemaakt. Zoals het argument dat de verspreiding van het internet zal leiden tot het einde van het begrip afstand dankzij het communicatiegemak, onjuist is gebleken in het licht van de grotere opbloei van wereldsteden door het gebruik van het internet, zo laat het onderzoek ook zien hoe het internet in potentie de publieke sfeer kan vergroten en een cruciale rol speelt om mensen daadwerkelijk naar de openbare ruimte te krijgen. Gezien de wijze waarop demonstranten plaatsen doorgaven tijdens Bersih 4, hoeft de strijd om betekenis niet noodzakelijkerwijs een directe botsing te zijn, maar zou de digitale ruimte daarvoor het strijdperk kunnen bieden wanneer de materiële openbare ruimte niet toegankelijk is.

De manier waarop Bersih 4 zich in Kuala Lumpur manifesteerde toont ook aan dat terughoudendheid aan de kant van de demonstranten eveneens een productieve proteststrategie kan zijn, omdat daarmee de afstand tussen de staat en de burgers duidelijke kan worden gemaakt middels strategisch lezen en bezetten van de ruimte. Aangezien protesteren een performance is voor zover het een manier is om ongenoegen te uiten, moet de ruimte die het inneemt niet slechts worden beschouwd als iets om te gebruiken of te boven te komen, maar kan deze ook meer actief worden benut. Zo laat Bersih 4 met de bezetting van het grote kruispunt bijvoorbeeld zien hoe het de symboliek van Dataran kan uitdagen door die te versterken.

Uit het onderzoek blijkt hoe toegang tot de openbare ruimte van cruciaal belang is voor de uitoefening van de democratie, en ook hoe de openbare ruimte in feite meer democratisch kan worden ontworpen, ongeacht de ideologie van het regime. Democratie heeft een ruimtelijk aspect en vormgeving kan een rol spelen bij het bevorderen van een meer democratische stedelijke omgeving.

TOC

Prologue



The Bersih 4 protest in Kuala Lumpur (Source: Malaysiakini)

Kuala Lumpur. 29.08.2015

(The prologue is adapted from an article published on the Global Urban Lab blog)[3]

The colour of the day is yellow. It is the morning of the protest, and we are still undecided whether we should put on our yellow Bersih t-shirts or wear some other neutral colours. Red is out of the question altogether. The people who are counter-protesting have taken red as their colour. Yesterday, the authorities banned yellow

3 https://bit.ly/1TnjXid

items of clothing, now considered subversive under the Printing and Publication Act of 1984. This may seem like a no-brainer. We are after all going to a protest, why would the ban of something banal such as a colour make us hesitate? Surely the authorities are not serious. How could yellow t-shirts be seditious?

I am in Kuala Lumpur to observe Bersih 4, an organised rally protesting against the 1MDB financial scandal which also implicates the Prime Minister, due to the RM 2.6 billion found in his personal bank account. As the name suggests, this rally is the fourth iteration of these organised by the civil society movement, Bersih 2.0 (Bersih), which is a coalition of NGOs that call for electoral reform. Since achieving independence in 1957, elections are regularly held every five years, even though the same coalition, Barisan Nasional won every time. Bersih (clean in Malay) argues that the electoral system needs to be reformed, claiming manipulation of the system such as gerrymandering. Bersih 4 is organised over two days, designed to end as the clock strikes midnight, ushering in the commemoration of Independence Day on 31 August 2015.

It may seem perplexing why we would hesitate, but for a generation who spent our formative years being depoliticised, the anxiety is real. We sometimes hear about how our political leaders cut their teeth as student activists in the 1960s and 1970s, how they would lead protests, and how the less fortunate members of society would actually turn to student leaders for advice after experiencing some form of injustice. This might as well be a fairy tale since we simply could not relate to it. When we started university, we had to sign a document agreeing that we would not participate in political activities, in line with the University and University College Act 1971. Protest, is after all, not our culture, at least according to them. So here we are, in our thirties, some of us joining a street protest for the first time ever, and uncertain about what to wear.

I check #Bersih4 on Firechat again, the app made popular by the Hong Kong Umbrella Revolution. Instead of using broadband, the app utilises Bluetooth, requiring users to be within a certain radius of each other in order to communicate, believed to make surveillance of the protest a tad harder for the authorities. Last night there was a flurry of exchanges about the yellow t-shirt, with advice such as protesters should enter the city wearing everyday clothes, and only change into yellow once they have reached their intended destinations. I then scan #Bersih4 on Twitter to see if there are tweets about people getting arrested for wearing the yellow t-shirt. On the Facebook page of Bersih 2.0, which the organisation uses to disseminate information and advice about the rally, there is no mention about the t-shirts today. So far, so good. I open WhatsApp to confirm our rendezvous point.

Although we are staying within walking distance of Dataran Merdeka, the square that Bersih wanted to occupy until the eve of Independence Day, we are meeting our contact person at one of the gathering points suggested by Bersih, Brickfields. Upon exiting the hotel, we go up the pedestrian bridge connecting several streets to the Light Rail Transit (LRT) station. We get off at KL Sentral in Brickfields, the capital's rail transit hub, one of the mega-projects of the 1990s that connect the city to Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). Making our way through the brand-new adjoining seven-storey shopping mall, Nu Sentral, we arrive at the meeting point. A crowd has already formed at the entrance of the mall, taking refuge from the punishing tropical sun underneath the pedestrian walkway that connects the mall to the monorail station.

Of the three gathering points suggested by Bersih, Brickfields is the farthest from Dataran Merdeka. The high concentration of Malaysian Indians in the area hint at the British colonial legacy of spatial segregation. The Dataran, a rectangular playing field defined by imposing British Raj architecture, is situated between the Malay and Chinese areas. Protests held in any one of the ethnic enclaves have in the past invited comments tinged with racial undertones. In this sense, occupying Dataran is strategically a masterstroke since not only it is neutral ground, but the three gathering points are situated in Malay, Chinese, and Indian enclaves, the majority ethnic groups in Malaysia.

We start to march towards Dataran Merdeka. Leaving the tight urban form behind, the disconnect between the city center and Brickfields could be sensed through the lack of buildings defining this particular stretch of Jalan Tun Sambanthan. Upon crossing Klang river, the urban form starts to densify again. We are in Chinatown. Here the urban form is tighter than Brickfields due to the smaller urban blocks of shophouses. This is the oldest part of town.

The stretch between Menara Maybank (which is another gathering point) and Dataran Merdeka is already jam-packed with yellow-clad protesters. Underneath the road median, sheltered by the overhead LRT line, some protesters have already started claiming space to occupy for the night. This area is well served by the public transportation system, with seven rail stations within a one-mile radius of Dataran Merdeka, complemented by the train station at KL Sentral and the bus station by Menara Maybank which connect the city centre to the rest of peninsula Malaysia. The restaurants around this area are packed with protesters, and business is brisk for ice-cream vendors on mopeds. The hotels are also booked by some protesters, who concerned that the police would block entry into the city center as they did during Bersih 3, were already in place for a couple of days prior to Bersih 4.

Dataran Merdeka is off limits. The city hall, Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL), forbids Bersih from occupying the square, citing that preparations for the celebration of Independence Day are under way. All four entrances to the square are blocked. Not wanting to give any semi-legal excuse to the authorities get rid of the protest, Bersih choose to oblige, and even set up their own human-chain barrier to ensure that the line would not be breached. This is how protesters end up occupying the northern entrance to the square, which is accessible from three directions, and also the one closest to an LRT interchange, Station Masjid Jamek. Because this area is effectively a big junction, it could accommodate the big crowd, and the mix of programmes on both Jalan Tun Perak and Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman offer more amenities such as places to eat, hotels, and 7-Elevens.

The sun goes down. With the drop of temperature, the atmosphere becomes more festive, aided by the sound of vuvuzuelas. The majority of the crowd are sitting cross-legged on the tarmac facing the makeshift stage where Bersih has organised speeches. On Twitter, Bersih requests protesters to stop playing vuvuzuelas as the speeches are drowned by the racket. Small groups are forming where different activities are carried out. A group of activists are briefing protesters on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman on how to get more involved with volunteering, meanwhile on the parallel road, Jalan Raja Laut, a sharing session about youth activism is taking place, surrounded by posters and protest signs. Earlier on, some Muslim protesters performed their evening prayers on the street. A number of protesters have settled down for the night, occupying the pavement, heeding Bersih's advice on Twitter to spend the night near Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman and Jalan Tun Perak. On Twitter and Instagram, protesters are sharing information and their experience about the protest using the hashtag #Bersih4. On other days, the space is used for everyday life; for working and shopping and living. But tonight, everywhere is yellow.

In contrast to the flurry of activities happening on this side of the barricade, the Dataran stands empty. Although preparations for the state-sponsored spectacle of Independence Day celebration were taking place in the days leading up to the rally, the Dataran is eerily quiet during the protest. The emptiness is amplified by the grand colonial facades, which once housed important functions such as government offices and the High Court. But now, most government functions have been taken out of the city, and were moved to Putrajaya, an instant city which is also part of the mega-projects of the 1990s. Putrajaya is at present Malaysia's centre of administration. But if the government has not been in Kuala Lumpur since the late 1990s, and the buildings around the Dataran now mostly house galleries and museums, then why doesBersih keep on organising their protests here, and not in Putrajaya where the centre of power lies?

1 Introduction

Contemporary protests around the world, from the Arab Spring (begun 2010) to Occupy (begun 2011), not only erupted in urban spaces, they also existed in the virtual sphere. Images of protests are tweeted and Instagrammed, replete with their own hashtags. Due to the extensive presence of protest in the virtual sphere, especially social media, these protests have been called the Twitter Revolution (Buettner, 2016; Christensen, 2011; Jungherr, 2008; Rawal and Nixon, 2012).

Due to the seemingly immense role that the Internet has played in mobilising these protests, some have claimed that the virtual sphere has now replaced urban space.[4] This is emphasised more in the non-democratic and authoritarian states where media is controlled by the state, and the Internet has provided an alternative discursive space for people to air and discuss their grievances.

Physical public space, however, still plays an important role for the performance of democratic rites (Parkinson 2009), including street protests. Events transpiring in the physical public space, for example the demonstrations in Tahrir Square, Cairo, provide images to be broadcasted in the virtual sphere (Juris 2012; Parkinson 2012). These images spark discussions and awareness, and consequently perpetuate action in the physical public space, and vice versa. Teresa Hoskyns, on the other hand proposes that the virtual sphere allows civil society groups to connect on a global scale, and this culminates in conferences held in the physical space (Hoskyns 2014). Hence, the physical space is crucial in providing material to be broadcasted in the virtual sphere, and once connections are made online they did not stay there, instead they mobilises groups to organise events in physical public space.

Nevertheless, the availability of public space is under threat through privatisation and other neoliberal policies (Hoskyns, 2014; Low and Smith, 2006; Minton, 2012; Parkinson, 2012). The production of public space is either forfeited to make way for spaces of consumption, or the management and policing of existing public space has been privatised. Using security as a rationale, public spaces are also militarised and deputised for control against the public (Graham 2010; Parkinson 2012).

4 Marshall McLuhan famously predicted in 1964 that our need to be physically around each other would lessen once we get more connected.

The problem is exacerbated in post-colonial societies due to colonial legacies. In post-colonial societies, notions like democracy, which we take for granted today, were inherited from departing colonial masters (Hernandez 2010). Cities and infrastructures developed during the colonial period were also produced to primarily maximise trade and commerce, the principal colonial endeavours. This extended to the treatment of colonial subjects, either utilised to maximise production, or otherwise tolerated as long as they did not interfere with the process. Since democracy, space, and democratic citizenship, among others did not grow organically in post-colonial societies, there are disjunctures between the notions attached to those concepts and the actual practices of society.

Over time, the disjunctures caused by colonial legacies develop into an inability of the political system to cope with the changes in society, hence producing political decay (Fukuyama 2011). Although political decay at times results in ruptures like protests and revolutions, it also hinders postcolonial societies from grasping the full extent of democratic notions such as the right to dissent and the importance of aspiring to have public spaces not entirely devoted to the pursuit of consumption. This also applies to the state, for whom the democratic system of governance was something new and not fully comprehended. The desire to modernise, and appear modern, also resulted in policies favouring the construction of infrastructure aimed at production and consumption, neglecting spaces for public use. Such policies may even be contradictory. For example, the aspiration to join the knowledge-based economy (k-economy) market in the 1990s pushed the Malaysian government into developing infrastructure for the Internet, resulting in a high level of Internet penetration and thus the growth of alternative news sites, which it then tried to curb with a fortification of censorship laws. This is on top of several colonial-era laws which the state has maintained, such as the Sedition Act 1948.

The problem of post-colonial societies then lies in dealing with the political decay associated with colonial legacies that hinders democracy, while pursuing modernisation. Since democracy is also a spatial practice (Hoskyns 2014), one of the solutions is to ensure that the public space which is necessary for democracy to function is not only available but can be used in a meaningful way. To do this, we must first establish how the postcolonial public space enables or disables the performance of public claim-making as a function of democracy in Malaysia. Public space is not only limited to material space, it also considers the discursive digital space provided by the Internet which, by way of providing an alternative space for dissent, propels events happening in the street and yet at the same time also threatens its importance. This research examines notions of postcolonial (as opposed to merely 'post-colonial') third space, amnesia, and mimicry embedded within the production of the built

environment and public space which it will argue is ambivalent due to the hybridity of post-colonial processes.

The case study is Malaysia, a former British colony, which at the time of writing sees a renewed protest culture beginning in 2007 sparked by the Internet-savvy Bersih movement calling for electoral reform. After almost thirty years of relative quiet, punctuated only by the Reformasi rallies in 1998, the first Bersih rally in 2007 triggered an explosion of street protests which have continued to the time of writing. Both Bersih and subsequent rallies utilise social media to mobilise, discuss, and plan the rallies. Hence there is a strong correlation between the virtual sphere, in this case social media like Facebook and Twitter, and the sudden proliferation of protests in the urban space since 2007.

Although the official Malaysian narrative of history celebrates the notion that Independence was achieved not through a bloody revolution but by virtue of non-violent protest, dissenting voices have been met with authoritarian measures like the Internal Security Act 1960 (ISA) and the Sedition Act 1948, which is also a colonial legacy. Malaysia is a 'hybrid regime', existing in between democracy and authoritarianism (Diamond, 2002). Although Malaysia uses formal democratic institutions to obtain and exercise political power, it violates the criteria of modern democratic regimes consistently enough to create an uneven playing field (Levitsky and Way, 2002).

In its pursuit for modernisation, Malaysia has also put more emphasis in developing infrastructure for the production of capital and spaces of consumption, neglecting the development of public space. The 1990s were defined by mega-projects; a new seat of government, Putrajaya, was built alongside Cyberjaya, Malaysia's attempt at creating its own Silicon Valley. Together with this, Malaysia developed the Multimedia Super Corridor, building the infrastructure for information and communications technology (ICT) to encourage the growth of knowledge-based economy. The old capital city, Kuala Lumpur, remains as the financial capital, and is in danger of being overwhelmed by shopping malls. For people in the capital and in big cities, shopping malls are the 'public' space, where they go to socialise and spend their spare time. A new breed of malls has emerged in the past few years, designed to mimic urban space, albeit without the friction and hassle you might encounter on a typical street. This is coupled with the proliferation of gated-housing, guarded by private security companies.

Even after the construction of the new capital, Putrajaya, protests still take place in the old colonial capital, Kuala Lumpur. The contested spaces were also either built during the era of British Malaya or related to independence. The geography of protest also reveals the vestiges of the ethnic segregation policy practiced by the colonial British.

This research first analyses how both urban and virtual spaces are produced, managed, and governed, mainly through literature, before examining how both spaces are used for protest, through observation, interviewing, and harvesting of social media data. The findings from the content analysis are presented mostly through mapping. An overview of the methodology is presented in Chapter Two, while more detailed explanations of the methods are explained throughout the thesis, corresponding with the particular analysis that the respective chapters aim to tackle.

The next chapter conceptualises postcolonial spaces of protest and also reviews literature related to this, to inform us how the research into physical and digital spaces in relation to protest could be conducted. Chapter Three examines the colonial legacies which culminated in the politically hybrid regime of Malaysia, including the spaces that the hybrid regime has produced, with its mega-projects and privatisation of public space. Chapter Four further elaborates the production, governance, and use of Malaysian public sphere and public space. Chapter Five discusses the geography of protest, analysing why Kuala Lumpur is more accommodating to protest than Putrajaya, from the perspective of urban planning. Chapter Six provides us with a description of Bersih 4, where the empirical data for this research came from. The analysis is presented in Chapter Seven, where instead of separately discussing how Bersih transpired in, and affected, physical and digital spaces, it presents four themes of analysis where both physical and digital spaces are woven together — mostly because it is within these two spaces that dissent is simultaneously found. 'The Production of Space' discusses how Bersih also produces space instead of just manipulating and overcoming space and place. 'Symbolic Spaces vs Spaces of Everyday Life' on the other hand, demonstrates how both the regime and the protesters engage with and possibly alter the symbolism and meaning of the spaces they come in contact with. How the state controls and manipulates both physical and digital spaces is discussed in 'Control and Surveillance of Space'. Finally, we discuss the different ways that Bersih and their opposite, the Red Shirts operated in 2015 in the section 'Digital/ Spatial Divide'.

2 Postcolonial Spaces Of Protest

Chapter Two aims to conceptualise postcolonial spaces of protest and subsequently examine literature that deals with protest in relation to physical and digital spaces in order to inform how the research would be conducted. 'Postcolonial urbanity' examines why the lens of postcolonialism is deemed appropriate to examine the politics of space which influences the performance of democracy in Malaysia. The discussion is then extended to particular aspects of postcoloniality that could be unpacked through examining the politics around spaces of protest, in particular third space, amnesia, and mimicry. To inform the empirical part of the project, the research turns to literature that discusses how protest has been researched in relation to physical and digital spaces. Some general themes are consolidated from the literature and evaluated in terms of their potential to inform us about the main focus of postcoloniality of space, following which, specific methods used to gather and analyse the data are explained.

§ 2.1 Postcolonial urbanity

Reg: All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, a fresh water system, and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?
Xerxes: Brought peace!
Reg: Oh. Peace? Shut up!

Monty Python's Life of Brian, *(1974)*

The sketch above from the iconic Monty Python film, *Life of Brian*, depicts a group of rebels plotting a scheme to oust the Romans from their city. In an attempt to arouse the sense of injustice shared among them, Reg indignantly began by stating that the Romans had taken everything from them and their fathers (and their fathers' fathers, and their fathers' fathers' fathers...), but had given nothing in return. The meeting apparently did not go as planned, since instead of rousing anger among fellow rebels, Reg's speech was met with a list of improvements that the Romans had actually brought.

The scene exemplifies the complexities that colour both the effects of colonialism and the ambivalent relationship between the colonised and the coloniser. The effects of colonialism cannot be simply summarised using absolute language which would result in binary extremes (Us versus Them, East versus West, Good versus Evil). Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1995) argued that Europe comes into focus by inventing the Other — hence to discuss the effects in binary extremes is to use the colonialist's language. As we can deduce from the scene, despite the material improvements supposedly brought about by the Romans which resulted in better living conditions, Reg and his friends still felt a sense of injustice due to the Romans' suppression and subjugation of them. Conversely, in many societies, after independence, the expectation to rebuild also resulted in postcolonial amnesia, where the traumatising experience of being colonised necessitated the deletion of colonial memory in its entirety (Gandhi 1998).

The term 'postcolonial', when attached to something like society or literature, is typically understood in a temporal sense, which makes it simply 'post-colonial', in that it begins with the departure of the colonial power. In this instance, it is used to denote the process of decolonisation which is perceived to begin after gaining independence — a moment in space and time, in which references are made to specific 'social, demographic, political, cultural, and spatial built forms in once-colonial societies of the periphery' (King 1993, 90).

However, beyond the 'chronological construction of post-independence,' (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 2), postcolonialism is also a critical framework that challenges the dominant narrative by questioning the colonial production of knowledge and its corresponding structures and hierarchies (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 2; Radcliffe 2011; Yeoh 2001, 456). This is because due to the persistent legacy of colonisation, the postcolonial condition began at the onset of colonisation, and not as something that comes after the departure of the colonising power (Gandhi 1998). Therefore, postcolonialism is a 'politically motivated historical-analytical movement [which] engages with, resists, and seeks to dismantle the effects of colonialism in the material, historical, cultural-political, pedagogical, discursive, and textual domains' (Lawson 1992, 156). Postcolonialism is thus not only a temporal concept, it is also a way of seeing.

Brenda Yeoh, however, reminds us that this emancipatory and recuperative stance of postcolonialism has also been questioned, noting Perera's (1998) argument that putting the prefix 'post' in front of colonialism has a similar effect as referring to the period before colonisation as pre-colonial, it puts the colonial period as the main point of reference (Yeoh 2001, 457).

Yeoh went on to argue that by applying a postcolonial framework on specific spaces that have material and imagined dimensions such as the city, the opportunity to 'grasp the substance along with the critique and avoid the navel-gazing tendencies of postcolonial studies' opens up, since it is 'in the urban nodes that one often locates the crucibles of nationhood and the sites of postcolonial politics' (Yeoh 2001, 457). Space has always been central in postcolonial studies, Edward Said's work has been 'intimately spatial' and later works after Said also continued this trajectory of engaging space within the discourse (Teverson and Upstone 2011, 1), most notably Homi Bhabha (1994), with his concept of 'third space' where hybridity takes place and also the nation as a site of colonial encounter. Treverson and Upstone (2011, 2) surveyed how postcolonial studies have engaged space: space as metaphor (as Bhabha approached it), awareness of location, how place defined identity and how that identity is in turn defined by others, colonial manipulation of national boundaries, and consequently the struggle to form a cohesive identity within those very inherited boundaries. Yeoh, however, went straight to tackling the problematic definition of the postcolonial city, since postcolonial is not just a temporal concept — it also includes urban sites within the empire and also those which had not been through the supposedly emancipatory process of independence such as Hong Kong — since the metropolitan centre is intertwined with its colonial counterparts in the periphery, they need to be discussed under one postcolonial framework (Yeoh 2001, 457–58). Jane M. Jacobs in *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (1996) utilised the latter approach where she discussed both spaces in the metropolitan centre of London and the colonial periphery cities in Australia.[5] Nalbantoglu and Wong in *Postcolonial Space(s)* (1997, 7), explicitly defined postcolonial space as a 'space of intervention into those architectural constructions that parade under a universalist guise and either excludes or repress differential spatialities of often disadvantaged ethnicities, communities, or peoples', directing their focus on the discourse within the architecture discipline itself. Felipe Hernandez (2010) also used a similar approach by 'translating' Homi Bhabha for architects, and in the process brings back the spatial terms that Bhabha has conceptualised as metaphors to the material space.

Acknowledging that the 'postcolonial condition' begins at the onset of colonialism (Gandhi 1998), this research interrogates how the trajectory of development since independence, which is shaped by colonial structural and spatial legacies, has produced the contemporary geography of contention. The focus on spaces of protest provides an opportunity to scrutinise the particular colonial legacy of democracy, specifically how the postcolonial condition has impacted the degree of publicness in

5 Jacobs also noted that since she is Anglo-Australian, there is ambiguity of her position as both coloniser and antipodean.

terms of how spaces are produced, governed, and utilised. The emergence of social media into this postcolonial structure provides another facet to its public sphere, therefore analysing how social media are inducted as infrastructure of protest, could provide us with clues whether this postcolonial structure is being challenged. After all, 'sporting pastimes apart, and the English language, urbanism was the most lasting of the British imperial legacies' (Morris and Winchester 1983, 196).

This research is not about excavating the past, rather it uses the past to inform the present. This is inescapable, since not only colonialism left Malaysia a material legacy such as cities and infrastructure, it also left the more enduring legacy of socio-economic structures, and most importantly, the legacy of democracy. As Lee and Lam noted, the end of the twentieth century is shaped by 'a modernity that is scored by the claws of colonialism, left full of contradictions, of half-finished processes, of confusions, of hybridity, and liminalities' (1998, 968). Hence, though the research does not directly engage with colonial discourse, it is concerned with the legacy aspect that postcolonialism deals with, and the subsequent issues associated with colonial legacies.

§ 2.1.1 Conceptualising postcolonial spaces of protest

Subversive third space

When the structure of this thesis was first planned, the research intended to look at how the rise of corporate pseudo-public urban spaces, privatisation, and also militarisation of public spaces have compromised the availability of spaces for public claim-making, and how it unfolds in a postcolonial city like Kuala Lumpur, contrasted with Western examples. This means that the availability of public space was viewed as a given, and corporatisation as something that encroaches on public space afterwards. Later on, realising that Kuala Lumpur is a city that grew and prospered through tin-mining during the time of British colonialism, it was seen as emblematic of the colonial endeavour, which had always been centred on profit-making. Hence, since the production of space was already geared toward commercial ventures, the very act of using these spaces for protest is already a contestation of power, regardless of the cause for dissent.

Since this is the space where the interests of those who make and govern the space (architects, developers, etc.) collide with the aspirations of the users, Felipe Hernandez (2010), building on Homi Bhabha's work, argued that architecture is a 'third space'

where culture is most productive, thus spatialising Bhabha's notion of third space which is a 'metaphor for the hybrid postcolonial encounter' (Teverson and Upstone 2011, 10). Third space opens up the opportunity to challenge and transform the postcolonial conditions besides allowing us to extend the discourse beyond the 'coloniser-colonised' binary (Radcliffe 2011, 131–32). Edward Soja (1996), on the other hand, anchored his interpretation of third space (or Thirdspace as he called it) in the material geography, where he applied the concept on his analysis of Los Angeles. Similar to Soja in his application of the third space on the material space, albeit focusing on the categorisation of space according to their functions, Ray Oldenburg (1998) argued that third spaces such as cafes and parks between the first (home) and second (work) spaces are crucial for democracy and civil society. Third space is thus a robust concept indeed, from Bhabha's utilisation of it as a pure metaphorical tool to explain colonial encounters (metaphor), to Soja's notion of third space as different way of thinking about geography, beyond the materiality and representation of space (methodology), to Oldenburg's clear use of the term as a spatial category (taxonomy). However, for the purpose of this research, Bhabha's concept of third space is deemed more appropriate as a frame of analysis, due to its underlying concern with the postcolonial condition. While Oldenburg's third space is also attractive since it immediately conceptualised the third space as crucial for democracy and civil society, its focus on the taxonomic liminality between work and home is too limiting for this work — the research first discusses the production of the built environment in general, before zooming in on the liminal space where people become a public.

Bhabha, earlier on, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), posits that this encounter between different actors in the liminal third space produces hybridity. Hybridity, in its crudest sense, is something newly produced by the combination of two or more elements, and the term has biological and botanical origins. In Latin it meant the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar[6], but it was not used widely before the nineteenth century, and certainly not with a racist undertone until then (Ackermann 2012). Empirically, this could be seen in one the artefacts of hybridity: architecture (Ackermann 2012; Burke 2013), illustrated by eclectic colonial buildings which consist of multiple architectural elements from different cultures. Architecture is one of the principle means of representing the colonial order (Morton 2000). Although the elements are static (domes, windows), the cultures they represent are not. Bhabha (1994) argues that hybridity occurs at the margins between these cultures and it is where the cultures are altered and reshaped.

6 (Definition of hybrid in English by Oxford Dictionaries n.d.)

These terms — hybridity and third space — signal the desire to conceptualise a different way of examining the colonial condition beyond the typical binaries of Colonised and Coloniser, Us and Them, and East and West, for example.

Hence, going back to the case of colonial architecture, the occurrence of hybridity refers to the colonial process of producing space, which consisted of 'inclusion and exclusion' that signified the ambivalence of the colonisers who aspired to both civilise and yet uphold their authority over the colonial subjects at the same time. This ambivalence, and the notion that hybrids are neither pure nor original, challenge the origins of identity and thus authority, therefore hybrids have the potential to be subversive (Bhabha 1994; Mabardi 2000). This occurrence of hybridity in the third space also unsettles the historical narrative that produced it, and allows for new political initiatives to emerge (Radcliffe 2011, 134), in line with Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of 'intentional hybridity' which Bhabha used as a starting point to develop a postcolonial hybridity that subverts authority to the colonial situation (Ackermann 2012).

Building on Hernandez's argument that architecture is a third space, and since colonial architecture is both materially and culturally hybrid, the research argues that colonial architecture is thus a third space which is subversive due to the ambivalent hybrid processes. This reference to colonial processes does not mean that the subversiveness of hybrid architecture existed only in the colonial time, in fact it became amplified after independence. Conversely, it can even be argued that the subversiveness only manifests itself post-independence, since the primary signifier of meaning (the colonists) had departed, leaving the space open for new interpretations.

This colonial legacy has different meanings for the post-independence authorities that govern and administer the space and the public. Before independence, the authorities and the public were the same end of the spectrum, they were both colonised subjects, although there were differences between them which were manipulated to the advantage of the colonialists. Peter Burke in *Cultural Hybridity* argued that 'when cultures meet, some individuals and groups participate in the process more than others' (Burke 2013, 67). Post-independence, the colonists left behind a vacuum in many ways, including the role and governance of spaces. Before, the clear hierarchy between the actors defined the meaning of space and subsequently the code of conduct. After, the power vacuum amplified the differences between the groups, and had manifested in how space is perceived and treated.

The authorities, which were originally derived from the politically elite group during the colonial period, had preserved the space and limited its use for state-approved activities such as official functions, corporate events, and some recreational activities, thus mirroring the role of the colonialists. Independence is expressed as a spectacle,

with celebrations of Independence Day carried out (for example in the Padangs of both Kuala Lumpur and Singapore) while the space was never really liberated for public use. Public activities which go beyond leisure are not encouraged, and acts of public claim-making such as rallies and street protests can be criminalised; activists and protesters are often charged with laws inherited from the colonialists (Malaysia, Singapore, India, and Pakistan still retain sedition acts enacted during the colonial period). Laws which were used to keep the colonial subjects in line were still maintained, although now wielded by authorities derived from the same group.

This contestation for primacy in a colonial legacy is what makes colonial architecture a subversive third space. The ambivalence signified in the colonial process of producing the space is replicated by the post-independent authorities who celebrate the departure of the colonialists, and yet seeks to reproduce a similar position via utilising the very instruments left by them. Hence the post-independence authorities, themselves hybrids, were mimicking the colonial masters (Bhabha 1984). The space can only be used in manners considered respectable and within the remit of what is deemed acceptable by the authorities. The authorities desire the functions of colonial architecture limited as a beautiful token in the consciousness of the independent public, useful as a tourist attraction, while stripping off its potential as a public space. In this way, the colonial legacy of using 'urban spaces for conspicuous consumption and the maintenance of inequality' (Home 2013, 227) is still pervasive.

Secondly, colonial architecture, due to its importance for commerce and governance, is also well-connected both in the larger constellation of colonial cities and at the local city scale. Due to their accessibility and proximity, the infrastructure around the space is utilised by people in daily life, and over time improvements are made to meet the rising demands. Thus, it becomes even more connected and accessible. Colonial architecture, in this case spaces like Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur, is also often the biggest urban space in the city. Both accessibility and design make the space suitable for gatherings. This aspect, made possible by infrastructure originally laid down by the colonisers, also make it subversive due to the simple factors that the space is available and conveniently situated. The staid and imposing architecture also makes a great backdrop, should they manage to get enough people to fill up the space.

Of amnesia and mimicry

Two other concepts useful for the analysis of postcolonial spaces of protest are amnesia and mimicry, since formerly colonised states would map their aspirations on the architecture and urban spaces they produced often in relation to their colonial past. While the colonial trauma could result in the deletion of the colonial memory in

its entirety (Gandhi 1998), postcolonial amnesia could also be defined as a political construct which consists of selective remembering and convenient forgetting of certain aspects of history, used to build a hegemonic vision of society (Wieringa 2009). The selective remembering could also result in particular forms of mimicry. While mimicry was originally conceived as the colonial desire for 'a reformed, recognisable Other, a subject of difference which is almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 1994, 86), the research expands the analysis to include the post-colonial state who voluntarily practise mimicry as a form of nostalgia, enabled by the sort of amnesia proposed by Gandhi (1998). Therefore, while the two concepts could very well be discussed separately, they are discussed together here because both of them deal with the act of making something in particular visible, which could be achieved by concealing others, sometimes violently so.

While notions of amnesia, or more often its opposite, memory, have been extensively discussed in architecture and urban planning (Crinson 2005), they have rarely been framed from the particular postcolonial perspective of amnesia. Perhaps the most well-known for the former among architects is Aldo Rossi's *The Architecture of the City* (1982), where he argued that a city remembers through its buildings — the book was written in reaction to how European cities were rebuilt according to Modernist principles after the Second World War. Likewise, even though cultural production such as literature, film, music, and language; and matters pertaining laws, sex, and gender issues, have been interrogated to shed light on the amnesia embedded within them, the amnesia perspective has rarely been spatialised, or at least critically used to analyse architecture and the built form. In this matter, Abidin Kusno's *Appearances of Memory: Mnemonic Practices of Architecture and Urban Form in Indonesia* (2010), where he argued how buildings serve as reminders of the practices of the past, and articulate the anxieties caused by the tumultuous periods of change in Indonesian society, is particularly instructive, since he focused on architecture to shed light on Indonesia's postcolonial condition. The notion of amnesia would help to uncover the potential rupture caused by the deliberate remembering of certain aspects of the Malaysian culture which are projected on architecture and the built form, while conveniently forgetting those who do not neatly fit within the hegemony.

Postcolonial mimicry has also been scantly applied to the analysis of architecture and urban planning. In his analysis of the Israeli ski resort in Mount Hermon, Mori Ram (2014) noted how mimicry has been utilised in discussions about various disciplines such as archaeology (Panja 2002), linguistics (Hill 1999), and medicine (Langford 1999), and also to interrogate notions of identities such as race (S. Ahmed 1999) and sexuality (Andrade 1994), but the potential of mimicry as a lens to interrogate spatial performance has remained underdeveloped. Ram (2014, 737) interrogated the spatial mimicry embedded within the space produced by the colonising force to

render it as an integral part of the state. While the material hybridity (East meets West) of colonial architecture has been discussed, this perspective is also often uncritical (Hernandez 2010, 77–80). The subversiveness of mimicry lies in the ambivalence it produces because the result is a subject which is very similar, but not quite the same — the difference is necessary in order to maintain hierarchy (Bhabha 1984, 126 and 129). This is evident in the class of mimic men that was produced in order to serve as intermediaries between the colonist and the colonised to ensure the smooth running of the Empire. Mimicry also exposes the hypocrisy of the colonial project, since the subjugation of the colonies made a mockery of the post-Enlightenment language of liberty (Bhabha 1984, 126). Bhabha's effective quote of V.S Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (Bhabha 1984, 128) demonstrated this:

We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all the reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new.

Naipaul 1967, 146

On the other hand, various literature has also discussed the colonies' role as laboratories of modernity (Cooper and Stoler 1997; Phillips 2006; Porter 2006; Rabinow 1995; El Shakry 2007; Wright 1991) and how the modern was actually applied and not tested in the colonies (Walther 2015, 4). Lukito (2015) interestingly discussed the role of hybrid architecture of Pasar Gambir in Batavia (1920s-30s) as the laboratory of modernity's bridging apparatus in the Dutch colony. Gouda (2000) specifically investigated the mimicry embedded in how the Dutch East Indies served as an experimental laboratory for the colonising force between 1900 and 1942. An example of how Bhabhaesque colonial mimicry was operationalised to explore the ambivalence of colonial modernity could be found in Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) where the Indian counter-scientists remained undetected because of the colonial disdain for the natives (Schulze-Engler 2009, 178). By making visible the mimicry in the production, governance, and use of space, we can see in what way the aspirations of Malaysian society, as projected on the built form, stem from colonial legacy.

In summary, this research attempts to locate the underlying mimicry and amnesia in the subversive third space, which exposes the destabilising ambivalence embedded in the nation-building narrative of the post-colonial state. As moments of rupture, protest provides an invaluable window into how the narrative is challenged, and the unfolding negotiations arising around protest events provide insight into the politics of space. The following section reviews the literature that investigates the relationship between protest and both physical and digital spaces, in order to inform the methodology.

§ 2.2 Physical and digital spaces of protest

In order to research how postcolonial public space enables or disables protest, this research refers to previous work that has investigated the relationship between protest and physical and digital spaces. For this purpose, the literature is not limited to work that dealt with postcoloniality, rather, a more general approach is utilised in this survey, since the methods could then be contextualised to the postcolonial setting. Firstly, work that dealt with the spatiality of protest, looking at how the materiality and governance of space have shaped protest, but also how protest has the potential to produce space. Following this, literature that investigated the relationship between new media and protest is reviewed, focusing on how new media, particularly social media, has been inducted as infrastructure of protest. In particular, it looks at how research into the ways new media enables/disables protest has also addressed or incorporated the physical space and place. Finally, methods derived from both approaches are put together in relation to their appropriateness to the case study.

§ 2.2.1 Spatiality of protest

Infrastructure enables and disables certain actions in the city (Graham and McFarlane 2015), and this argument could be extended to the discussion linking space to protest. Space is the site and object of contentious politics, either to be occupied, an obstacle to overcome, or as an enabler to have in mind (Auyero 2006, 6). Space structures protest.

The materiality of space shape interaction and mobility, and this is extended to protest as well (Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziartot 2008, 161). The spatial arrangements in Seoul and Buenos Aires determine the actions taken in public space, for example how protesters used the wide boulevards to march through the city, but then disappeared into the maze of small alleyways once pursued by authorities (Salmenkari 2009). In his discussion about the student protest in Beijing in 1999 in retaliation to the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Dingxin Zhau (2013) contended how the built environment enables mobilisation and participation of spontaneous protests in Beijing and The People's University, whereas in the case of Tsinghua University, the built environment is less crucial since the protest is more organised. Trombetta (2013), reporting from Cairo during the January 2011 demonstrations, noted how the urban fabric of Cairo shaped practices of resistance and security responses, and how activists and police copied each other's tactics over the course of ten days until the demonstrations culminated on Tahrir Square.

The control of space is thus crucial, and for that reason space is now increasingly deputised and up to a certain point militarised to silence protest (Graham 2010; Mitchell 2003; Parkinson 2012). Sara Fregonese described the very urban response of the Bahraini authorities in demolishing the Loulou (Pearl) Roundabout where protesters had gathered, and also the fences and concrete walls erected in the streets around Tahrir Square which broke the spaces into controllable zones hindering movement and mobility (Fregonese 2013, 111). Control of space does not always have to be physical, it could also be done through the governance of urban space. Laws and regulations of space have been used to shut down protest activities which were deemed undesirable for various reasons (Mitchell 2003). Mitchell illustrated his points using three empirical examples: a mall, an airport, and city blocks, which as can be seen are arranged according to the level of publicness afforded by property ownership. Protest happens in place, and by controlling where it could take place, the protest could either be completely silenced since it does not happen at all, or the effectiveness dramatically reduced because the visibility and exposure is limited. Mitchell provocatively concluded by proposing that only illegal protests are then effective given the spatial constraints shaped by lawful regulations.

However, protest also produces space, since space is socially constructed (della Porta and Fabbri 2016; della Porta, Fabbri, and Piazza 2016, 13). Sites of protest become the 'place' to be, since the activities taking place there create a sense of belonging through frequent and emotionally intense interactions (della Porta and Fabbri 2016, 37). Sites of protest can also be productive in other ways, for example by being 'political laboratories' where practices of direct democracy, self-organisation, and egalitarianism (Juris 2012; della Porta and Fabbri 2016, 37) could be explored, or even alternative models of society since the typical logic of economy is not applicable to sites of protest. Protest could also influence the meaning of particular places, since sense of place is also a political construction that emerged from concrete practices (Drainville 2005).

Activists tend to strategically situate protest in symbolic spaces like Tahrir Square in Cairo or even Zucotti Park in New York, but at the same time, protest could also take place in the non-iconic spaces of everyday life. As demonstrated by the Israeli 'tent protests' which took place on Tel Aviv's Rothschild Boulevard in 2011, by turning away from iconic spaces, the action is unburdened by irrelevant symbolisms that could drown the message of the protest, and the space of everyday life could appear as an alternative political imaginary (Wallach 2013, 151). Rothschild Boulevard is 'typically associated with Tel Aviv's hedonistic and cosmopolitan lifestyle' where people go for sushi and espressos, and this was where the first tent of the movement was erected by a young woman who was driven out of her apartment due to rising rent prices (Wallach 2013, 151).

Spatial imaginaries are particularly useful as 'place frames', where grievances are communicated in geographical terms, which could remain conceptual and not tied to any empirical place (Martin 2013, 91). Martin developed her 'place frames' based on three analytic collective action frames: motivational, which could be defined as the normative spatial imaginaries that the movement aspires to; diagnostic, where the problems are described in relation to place; and finally, prognostic place frames, where based on the motivation and diagnostic, a remedy is concocted in the form of plans of action (Martin 2013). Martin argued that by moving away from the gaze of the scholar on spatial analysis, place framing allows scholars to investigate the geography within contention as communicated by activists themselves.

A more 'architectural' approach to analysing space in relation to protest is to examine the material structures built to either facilitate the occupation of space or to hinder it. Here, the academic approach seems to favour examining preventive architecture installed by authorities (Graham 2010; Parkinson 2012) rather than paying a similar attention on structures built by protesters. Parkinson notes that street elements like bollards, which prevents access of large vehicles, are deputies of authorities camouflaged as landscape features (Parkinson 2012). Of the structures built by activists and protesters, barricades are the preferred architectural element to be analysed (Figure2.1) (Douglas 2007; Hazan 2015). This even extends to the barricades found in the everyday life, such as around construction sites (Keyes 2016). Gregory Cowan (2004), on the other hand, traces the structures built during protests in Australia between 1971 and 2003, arguing that the 'ephemeral, mobile, and highly collaborative' characteristics of the structures also reveal potential alternative to architectural thinking and societal processes. For example, the impermanent and mobile quality of structures such as tents and camps challenge the idea that architecture is permanent and static, while the process of building the structures suggests a more democratic approach is possible (Cowan 2004). Adam Ramadan's approach to analysing protest structures is similar to the latter. Ramadan argued that the protest camp functions as a political 'public space of transformative political action and radical progressive change (Ramadan 2013, 148) free from the expression of sovereign power.

FIGURE 2.1 A map of barricades constructed in Paris between 1795 and 1871 (source; Douglas, 2007).

§ 2.2.2 From streets to tweets

Although social media was heralded as the main catalyst of contemporary protests following events such as the so-called Twitter Revolution after the Iranian election in 2009 and the Arab Spring in 2011, scholars were quick to paint a more sober picture of the phenomenon. There were already issues of unemployment and repression simmering in society before the Arab Spring, hence the mystification of the role that social media played tend to ignore the deeper history of the rebellion (Youmans and York 2012). Since 'information does not flow in a vacuum but in a political space that is already occupied' (Keohane and Nye 1998), attention must be given to the socio-political context where social media operates (Christensen 2011a). Social media is supposed to be social, not political, but it could foster the networks that could facilitate political participation (Lim 2014). In conceptualising the relationship between social media and the Arab Spring, Comunello and Anzera (2012, 465) advised against taking a 'technological deterministic' approach where focus is given to examining how

technology affect society, instead they suggested we consider the complex relationship between society, technology, and political systems.

Social movements and dissidents have always incorporated new technology which were available in the daily life in their operations, for example how text messages were used to mobilise people against the Estrada regime in the Philippines in 2001 (Lande 2001; Lim 2014; Rafael 2003) and how information circulated in forums and listservs on the Internet was printed and put up in the streets during the Indonesian Reformasi in 1998 (Lim 2015). Since social media allows interaction between a lot of people to happen in real time regardless of location (relatively speaking), it was quickly inducted into the infrastructure of protest — by being a tool for mobilising support, coordinating actions, building transnational networks, and broadcasting events and information (Juris 2012; Khondker 2011; Lubin 2012; Shirky 2011). These scholars also note the potentials of social media in long term support of civil society and the public sphere, and not the short term outcome of regime change (Shirky 2011), producing a sense of connectedness and solidarity, and also enabling a horizontal structure of organisation (Lubin 2012).

Social media is however limited by several factors, such as how access to it can be easily shut down by the authorities (Howard, Agarwal, and Hussain 2011; Lubin 2012; Shirky 2011) although Lubin noted that in that instance it could also push people to go to the streets, and how it is less effective for facilitating complex discussions. Khondker (2011) also pointed out how this new media also becomes a contested site, since the authorities could also create competing content broadcasting their own propaganda. Youmans and York (2012) devoted an entire paper to how the potentials of social media are limited by the algorithms which shape the interactions and also the policies adopted by the corporations that own these platforms. This literature did not, however, discard the spatial aspects of protests. On the contrary, since it tends to be empirically written around events such as the Occupy movement or the Arab Spring, which are ultimately spatial, they also examined the roles that social media played in mobilising the protests. Jeffrey Juris theorised the role of social media in assembling the masses within a physical space as an emerging logic of aggregation (Juris 2012). Social media in general, and in particular Facebook, helped protesters in Tahrir Square to make decision about participation, logistics, and the likelihood of success since the channels were not easily controlled by the regime (Tufekci and Wilson 2012). Nabhanay and Farmanfarmaian (2011) examined the amplified public sphere produced at the intersection of physical space, social media, and mainstream media.

However, though these authors acknowledge and address both spatial events and digital communication in their analysis of the protests they stopped short of drawing a direct link between physical places and digital spaces and how they implicate the

movements. Here, David Meek's work is instructive. The dichotomy between the spatial and cyberspace is dissolving with the emergence of Web 2.0 and Media 2.0 studies in 2004.[7] Meek (2012) argued that cyberplace (Barry 2008) is defined by interactions which are 'explicitly embodied in space/time — or events' hence 'cyberplace provides us with an embodied engagement with place, whereas cyberspace is disembodied'. Potential criticism was pre-empted by explaining that the cyberplace is not material, but an 'existential spatiality' produced by the communication linkages created by 'geographic function of the internet and assorted new social media' (Meek 2012). By focusing on events, Meek proposed a phenomenological approach to analysing 'cyberplace,' by examining how awareness that motivate people to act was created through participation in the media.

In this instance, the work of Merlyna Lim is also illuminating since she examines how social movements navigates through both place and the digital space simultaneously. Lim (2015, 118) argued that the dichotomy between cyberactivism and place-based analysis is created by treating them differently and separately, while the 'digital media is rooted in the physical world'. By focusing on how social movements operate, and noting their presence in both the material space and the Internet, Lim (2014, 2015) could draw a link between both physical and digital spaces by examining the networks which are not placeless. Lim's empirical approach however differs from Meek because instead of examining how people are mobilised to participate, Lim focused her attention to the communication during the event itself. By analysing tweets, Lim situates the digital within the spatial by mapping where the tweets are coming from during protests, and noted how the protesters used digital media to communicate logistics amongst themselves during the event.

The 'intermodality' between social networks and other media creates a hybrid space for social movements (Lim 2014, 69). This advances Kluitenberg's (2006) similar conception of hybrid space, where 'the public is reconfigured by a multitude of media and communication networks interwoven into the social and political functions of space to form a "hybrid space."' Lim's (2015) model of the hybrid space also consist of very physical media such as sneakers containing memory cards thrown across the border during the Tunisian revolt, and coffeeshops where face-to-face interactions promote sympathy and exchange of information.

7 Web 1.0 denotes the passive viewing of online content, whereas Web 2.0 defines the interactivity of online interaction where content is also user-generated. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter are characteristic of Web 2.0.

These approaches have been useful in providing insights on how social media has been used in social movements to facilitate communication between online and offline activities in the material space. Some either examined specific platforms such as Lim's work with Twitter (2014, 2015), Youtube (Meek 2012), and blogs (Fahmi 2009), or draw their conclusions from observing how social media is used in general during specific events (Tufekci and Wilson 2012). However, the discussion on why activists chose certain platforms over another for a particular action tend to be done in a more anecdotal manner, even though the different functions afforded by the platforms also shape the actions taken by the activists.

It is also imperative to note that while applications such as Whatsapp, Telegram, and Blackberry Messenger have been categorised as social media, they function differently since they allow for communication to happen privately. In this instance, they are more similar to the SMS and also email. In discussing the role of social media in protest and revolutions, we cannot discard how private messaging applications such as these also play an important role in the wider ecology of communication (Tufekci 2014). This is demonstratable by the 2011 London Riots, where although dissemination about the riots took place on Twitter and Facebook, rioters mostly communicated using Blackberry Messenger (Baker 2012; Lewis et al. 2011), an encrypted system. The affordances of Blackberry Messenger, where users remain anonymous since the user name is not tied to their phone number, together with encryption, allowed for rioters to covertly communicate with each other (Baker 2012).

§ 2.2.3 Affordances of social media

We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and Youtube to tell the world.

Anonymous protestor during the anti-Mubarak protests in 2011.[8]

The tweet quoted above encapsulates the different kinds of actions taking place on a variety of social media platforms. While this quote has typically been used to showcase the savviness of contemporary activists or how social media facilitates protests in regimes where mainstream media is censored, it also highlights the 'affordances' of the

8 This quote has often been used in articles commenting on the role that soclal media plays in protests but the original post could not be found. This brings into question the integrity of the quote since the source is doubtful.

platforms. In a more general term, 'affordances' mean what media technologies allow people to do (Bucher and Helmond 2017, 3). In researching the role that social media affordances play in social movements, Harindranath et al. (2015, 3) used Hutchby's (2001) definition of affordances: 'usage possibilities only realised in the interaction between an object and an agent'. They also contended that the 'relational character' of affordances allow us to overcome the limitations of technological deterministic and social-psychological theories and we have to look at both the 'functional features and social processes' (Harindranath, Bernroider, and Kamel 2015, 3). In their analysis of the Egyptian protests of 2011-2013, they found out that there were nine perceived affordances of social media in digital activism: information validation, information supplementation, perpetual self-updating, perpetual mass-updating, self-reportage, monitoring and influencing, self-organisation, interactive communication, and self-presentation. The affordances could have a significant impact on mobilisation, therefore challenging the conventional argument of the need for a unified identity to enable mobilisation (Harindranath, Bernroider, and Kamel 2015, 10). They also found that Facebook is preferred for richer interaction whereas Twitter was used more for instant information, and Youtube is viewed as more trustworthy alternative to television (Harindranath, Bernroider, and Kamel 2015, 9). The perception of what different platforms allow them to do also shape their protest-related social media activities, for example, activists feel more free on Twitter (public) since they feel that the less personal network they have there grants them more privacy as opposed to Facebook (private) (Comunello, Mulargia, and Parisi 2016). Hence, Twitter is seen as the more appropriate platform to engage with more controversial topics (Comunello, Mulargia, and Parisi 2016, 526).

Although the research is not specifically about the affordances of social media, it is worth noting since the findings will be shaped by how activists and protesters engage with the media in relation to the protest event. Hence, by realising early on the kinds of actions platforms allow and limit through their interface and algorithm, it will help us to understand why data is produced in a particular way.

§ 2.2.4 Social media research

Even though research into social media is crucial simply because it has almost seamlessly become part of how contemporary society works, and by extension adopted by social movements and protest organisers, it is worth taking a step back to reflect on what it means for this particular research. Tufekci (2014) has warned us against the pitfalls of big data research, while Lee et al. (2013) outlined the challenges in doing

new media research. We must be aware of how social media applications are part of a larger communication ecology, even though researchers tend to focus on single platforms (Tufekci 2014), and that the context where this interaction takes place matters (Christensen 2011a). The representativeness of social media findings should also be carefully communicated, since the adoption of particular platforms differ according to the context. Another layer that affects the representativeness is also how the data is collected, since the method used could already filter the data and thus affect the findings.

§ 2.3 Researching postcolonial spaces of protest

This section consolidates the discussion above in order to inform us how the research would be conducted. While the postcolonial lens serves as the overarching methodology that underlines the aim of the analysis in general, various methods were used in order to systematically collect and analyse the empirical data. Simply put, the research aims to inform the more discursive and abstract postcolonial discussion with empirical evidence. The research paradigm is interpretive, and the methods are qualitative. However, a certain distance is maintained between the researcher and the subject. While it can be argued that the researcher tends to correct those that referred to her as an activist because it implied a certain tendency for unscientific bias, the actual reason is that this research is not an action research — calling oneself an activist discredits the work of real activists.

The themes that emerged from Section 2.2 were used to identify the analysis appropriate to the research, and also to inform the data needed to make it possible. Taking physical space as the primary concern, the research first uses the different ways of researching spatiality of protest as a springboard, upon which the analysis is then expanded to the digital dimension where appropriate.

Firstly, in terms of how protest produces space (della Porta), the analysis would not be limited to how the convergence of protesters in the streets of Kuala Lumpur could create new spaces where solidarity is strengthened, but also the possible presence of this space in the more ephemeral digital dimension, where solidarity is first forged and developed after the protest event (Chapter Seven). This analysis informs us about how collective identity, crucial for the mobilisation and momentum of social movements, is constructed in the public sphere and public space shaped by the postcolonial society. While the ambivalence of these spaces could contribute to their subversive quality,

the spaces they help produce could also be read as a subversive third space. The data that would enable this analysis came from a direct observation of protest, supported by secondary data.

Secondly, the discussion about the symbolism and meaning of the physical spaces that are engaged and/or ignored by the protesters is extended to the context of how these spaces are communicated online (Chapter Seven). Deborah Martin's 'place-frames' (discussed in Section 2.2.1) was adapted to analyse the physical spaces embedded in digital communication. Meaning and symbolism of spaces involved in the protest inform us about how the postcolonial state utilises colonial spatial legacy to scaffold the narrative of nation-building, and conversely, how the protesters engaged or pointedly chose not to engage. Much could also be learned from the absence of action, or a lack of engagement with particular places, especially if the state is particularly invested in them. To conduct this analysis, social media data about the protest Bersih 4 was simultaneously scraped along the observation of the protest.

Thirdly, the analysis on the control of space during protest is not only limited to how access to physical spaces is controlled, but also how digital spaces are controlled and manipulated in relation to protest (Chapter Seven). This was done by conducting a content analysis of the tweets, looking for certain patterns about which places are mentioned and the ways they were communicated. To understand the logic behind the control and surveillance of both spaces in the postcolonial state necessitates the examination of how public sphere and its subset public space are produced and governed in Malaysia (Chapter Four).

However, the analysis on how the materiality of space could impact the mobilisation, patterns, and interaction of protest is done differently — while it is not accompanied by a digital counterpart, the materiality of infrastructure, particularly architecture and urban form produced by the postcolonial state, provides valuable insights into the aspirations of the regime (Chapter Three). This relies mostly on existing literature about architecture and urban planning in Malaysia. The analysis on how the material infrastructure and urban form enable protest in Kuala Lumpur is contrasted with its twin city, Putrajaya, since while both cities are important to Malaysia, they could not be more different from each other (Chapter Five). Archival research provided most of the material for this analysis, together with interviews with protesters and key figures, the result of which was then mapped. Photos from the protests, when available, were compared with Google Street View images, in order to ascertain the paths that protesters took. This was crucial for the mapping exercise.

The primary data collection was centred around the event of Bersih 4, which took place on 29 and 30 August, 2015. While the Bersih 4 protest was observed first-hand

in Kuala Lumpur, the collection of social media data concerning the protest has been put in place since 31 July, 2015, almost immediately after Bersih announced their intention to hold the rally. Even though the counter-protest organised by the Red Shirts two weeks after Bersih had plenty of potential, due to short notice, the data of this protest could only be gained from second-hand sources, even though the collection of social media data was extended to cover it as well. The secondary data collection, which provides much of the necessary context for the research both in terms of the socio-spatial setting, and also the Bersih movement and protests, was derived from archival and literature search, and also interviews with activists and protesters.

§ 2.3.1 Methods and tools

Social media

The scraping of social media data was conducted by Tag Sleuth (www.tagsleuth.com), a social media analytics company. The tool could scrape social media data produced on Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Vine that mention particular hashtags instructed by the client (hence 'Tag' Sleuth). Data could be downloaded as PDF files or Excel spreadsheets, separated according to the different platforms. Even though the scraping yielded data from all the above platforms, after examining the results, it was decided that the analysis would mostly focus on data from Twitter, simply because it constituted the bulk of the data, and different platforms produce different kinds of content. A brief explanation about how Twitter works and which hashtags were used is provided at the beginning of Chapter Six, while the analysis from this data collection exercise is laid out in Chapter Seven.

Thematic Analysis

Social media data was examined mostly through a methodical thematic analysis of selected tweets. While metadata such as the tweet handle (i.e who was tweeting), the time the tweet was sent, and also the geographic coordinates that came with some tweets, could be quantified, plotted on a graph, or indicated on the map instantly; the textual, photographic, and URL links that make up the content of the tweets were systematically examined and categorised. The application Gephi was used to plot the network graph indicating the relationship between places and also the categories. A

more detailed explanation about the ways in which the analysis was conducted could be found in Sections 7.2 and 7.3 of Chapter Seven.

Observation

A direct observation of the Bersih 4 protest which took place from 29 to 30 August 2015 was conducted in Kuala Lumpur. Even though the protest could be observed remotely by closely following both mainstream and new media, a direct observation of the protest enabled the researcher to experience the protest first-hand, and also to directly observe how the infrastructure of the city was used, and how spaces were utilised and occupied by the protest. The direct observation also allowed the researcher (to a certain extent) to verify information circulated on social media and also get a more holistic view of the protest, not just through the narrow keyhole of platforms such as Twitter. Having spent the week leading up to the protest in the city, the researcher was able to note how the city prepared itself for the protest and could also attend events that were held in relation to the protest, where various protest actors were met. A more detailed account of this could be found in Chapter Six, while the analysis could be found in Chapter Seven.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with various figures, ranging from protest actors (those who were directly involved with particular protests) to those who could provide information and context accordingly. Prior to the interview, interviewees were verbally asked if their identities can be revealed, and if the interview can be recorded. Appendix 2 shows the full list, with some interviewees anonymised accordingly. One protest actor was even generous enough to take the researcher to trace the paths that he and his friends took during the Bersih 2 protest in 2011. The information from the interviews mostly made its way to Chapter Five, where the geography of protest is discussed.

Mapping

Mapping was mostly the result of archival search, either consolidating and overlaying different maps together, or transferring textual and verbal information onto a map. Maps which are more diagrammatic were produced using Adobe Illustrator, otherwise maps are produced using the application QGIS. Maps concerning protest paths in Chapter Five were produced by putting together the information gathered from

newspapers, blogs, and interviews. Blogs were particularly instructive for photographs of protest, which could then be corroborated with Google Street View in order to ascertain the venues and paths of protest. Protest paths were first compiled into Google Maps, before the data was exported into QGIS for analysis. By compiling the data into Google Maps, future protests could be added from any web browser without having to install any GIS platforms. Another possibility afforded by this is crowdsourcing the data collection, since access to the maps created on Google could be made public and opened for editing by anyone. Most of the maps produced in QGIS could be found in Chapter Five.

§ 2.4 Conclusion

Chapter Two has provided us with the conceptualisation of postcolonial spaces of protest, particular to this research, and also an overview of the methodology derived from the review of the work that examines the relationship between protest and physical and digital spaces. By utilising data-collection tools and methods rooted in the empirical, the research attempts to circumvent the 'navel-gazing' tendency (Yeoh 2001) typically associated with postcolonial methodology. The research is concerned with unpacking postcolonial notions of third space, amnesia, and mimicry, through an interrogation into the production and governance of both the material and discursive public spaces, and how these spaces were then utilised by the people for dissent.

3 Architecture Of The Hybrid Regime

In this chapter, we discuss the socio-political structure of Malaysia in order to contextualise specific terminologies, such as democracy, and also to illustrate the particular forces that shape public space and dissent. Through the lens of architecture and urban design, we trace how the multi-scalar aspirations of the state often overlap with the global architectural zeitgeist, where notions of identity are constantly negotiated, resulting in specific expressions of architecture. The projects discussed are public projects, or at the very least, the state initiated and played a major role in their production.

Although the history of Malaysia stretches further back than the British colonial time, we begin our discussion with this particular period since this was when the present social, political, and economic structures started forming. Through a brief overview of the morphology of Kuala Lumpur, we get a glimpse of how the colonial political economy functioned on ethnic segregation which then manifested into spatial forms. The architecture of the Padang, on the other hand, informs us how the production of British colonial architecture is mired in hybridity, betraying the colonial justification of racial purity (Section 3.1). Modern architecture in the 1960s illustrated the state's complex attempts at emancipation (Section 3.2), while the 1980s was a period of grafting what was viewed as heritage, at least in form, into modern typologies (Section 3.3). The state's desire to position the country as a modern business destination with high-tech facilities, poised to join the Information Age, was reflected in the mega-projects of the 1990s, which resulted in a fifty-kilometre-long Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) (Section 3.4). While the intensive construction of infrastructure for wired connectivity, together with promises of no Internet censorship were aimed at attracting foreign investors, this had the unintended consequence of opening up Malaysian public sphere.

While the production of these different architectures has provided us with a snapshot of how the state functions, to further clarify the socio-political structure of Malaysia, the research refers to scholars in political science who had theorised the country as a hybrid regime (Section 3.5). Based on the criteria for democracy, we then trace how Malaysia has violated the requirements often enough to be categorised as a hybrid regime. The two aspects discussed by scholars: how the space of civil society is managerial rather than critical, and also how elections are manipulated, finally bring us to Bersih (Section 3.6).

§ 3.1 The Padang: Of colonial power and segregation

FIGURE 3.1 Dataran Merdeka. (Source: Author)

Malaysia is a post-colonial society, having gone through 446 years of Western colonisation, beginning with the Portuguese in 1511 until the Malay peninsula and Singapore gained independence from the British in 1957. In 1963, Sarawak and Sarawak in Borneo were granted independent self-rule and independence respectively. Shortly after that, together with the Federation of Malaya (the states in the Malay peninsula) and Singapore, Malaysia was formed. In 1965, Singapore ceased to be part of Malaysia.

British presence in Malaya began in 1771 when they set up a trading post on Penang, an island off the Kingdom of Kedah (Swettenham 1907). Penang was the first of the Straits Settlements, a political entity controlled by the British East India Company (and later on as a crown colony). Malay rulers who worked together with the commercial interests in the Straits Settlements brought in Chinese labourers to expand tin-mining activities, and it was because of the disruptive clash between the Malay-Chinese factions that the British finally started intervening in the rest of the Malay peninsula (Hirschman 1986, 336). The 1874 Pangkor Treaty in which British 'advisors' were assigned to Malay Sultans was a landmark event, since apart from matters of religion and Malay customs, virtually everything else was to be administered by the British.

From this point onwards, the transformation was not only limited to the political and economic aspects, but also ethnic relations (Khoo 1981; Kim 2001, 69), since British and Chinese capitalists started bringing in large numbers of Chinese, Indian, and Indonesian labourers in order to expand the export economy of tin and later, rubber (Hirschman 1986; Kim 2001, 69). Over time, apart from the Straits Settlements, two other political entities emerged in the Malay Peninsula: the Federated Malay States, where there were common constitutions administered by a British Resident General, and the Unfederated Malay States, which were singular British protectorates.

Although the influx of foreign labourers resulted in the formation of a pluralist colonial society, there was actually little interaction between the groups, which resulted in an even more limited integration with the existing population (Gomez and Jomo 1999, 10). The Chinese were mostly based in urban-based tin mines; the Indians in semi-rural plantations; while the Malays were encouraged to stay in rural villages; and this spatial segregation enhanced the identification of race with economic functions, especially since land policies discouraged the Chinese and Indians from pursuing subsistence agriculture (Goh 2008, 238; Gomez and Jomo 1999, 11; Hirschman 1986, 353). The Malays were then absorbed into the civil service, beginning with the entrance of the Malay elite into junior administrative functions, and later on as teachers and policemen, which provided them with some status (but with low pay) in comparison with the Chinese who were more involved in commercial activities (Hirschman 1986, 352). Even towns, where interactions could potentially happen, were spatially segregated along ethnic lines (Christopher 1988; Hirschman 1986). Chinatowns and Indian Bazaars were acceptable in the colonial towns, provided they existed separately and never as a hybrid of the two, and this was even more stringently applied to the European sectors since the colonials sought to minimise conflict and contact with indigenous people, providing the Europeans with a high degree of social comfort (Christopher 1988; Dick and Rimmer 1998, 2308). The whole political economy of British Malaya functioned on this racialised colonial structure, and it was this racialised structure that the present national elites inherited together with the pluralist worldview (Goh 2008, 234).

The history of Kuala Lumpur embodies these complex ethnic relations of the colonial venture that began with ethnic groups working together and ended up with segregation. In 1857, Raja Abdullah, a Malay chief, sent a group of Chinese miners to look for tin in the area, resulting in a steady stream of Chinese prospectors who were funded by money from the Straits Settlements (Gullick 1994). Because their supply boats could not go further up the river, the Chinese ended up settling on the east side of the confluence of the Klang and Gombak rivers, while the Malays ended up to the north of this enclave, in the area between the two rivers, avoiding the Chinese quarter because the latter kept pigs around their dwellings (Gullick 1994). From then

on, the morphology of Kuala Lumpur was characterised by ethnic segregation (King 2008, 16). The British, who only came later after the area started showing promises of prosperity, kept a careful distance across the river due to distrust of the Chinese — see Figure 3.2 (Gullick 1994; King 2008, 19; Lai 2007). In 1881, after a flood and a great fire destroyed most of the city, the British Resident, Frank Swettenham, ordered the buildings to be reconstructed with bricks and tiles. The brick factory, which is now known as Brickfields, depended on Tamil labourers, and they ended up settling around the area situated to the south of the confluence (Baxstrom 2008). Even though it can be argued that the spatial segregation along ethnic line happened in a more organic fashion in Kuala Lumpur, since the British only came later and by then some spatial logic had already emerged, they also did not discourage it.[9]

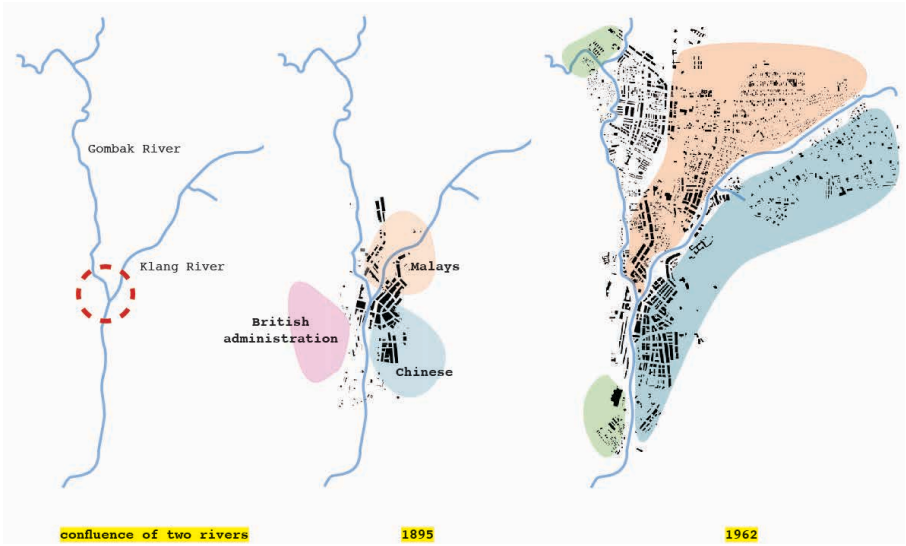


FIGURE 3.2 Kuala Lumpur grew along segregated racial lines. While the Chinese community (blue) congregated to the east of the river, the Malays (orange) settled in the area between the Klang and Gombak rivers. The British (red) who came later maintained a safe distance across the river from the Chinese. The Indians (green) later settled close to the railyards and the brick kilns, where they were working as labourers. (Source: Author)

9 The spatial segregation of Singapore was, on the other hand, laid out in a very detailed manner, and manifested the British 'divide and rule' colonial method. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles executed a detailed racial taxonomy, even subdividing the Chinese area according to the provinces of origin. Raffles argued that the Chinese were a quarrelsome lot, so it was better to keep them separated (Home 2013).

TOC

Ross King (2008) extended the analysis of ethnic segregation beyond spatial distribution to attributes of urban form. In Figure 3.2, the Chinese area (in blue) is typified by a tight urban form with narrow alleyways, a 'dense, uncontrolled, labyrinthine' zone of disorder like other Chinatowns in Southeast Asia, while the Malay area is more reminiscent of the carefree 'kampung' lifestyle with its expansive space laid out in a more organic form (King 2008, 16, 31). Indian communities occupied often marginal lands, close to railways, to the south (Brickfields) or north (Sentul) of the city centre. The British, who first cautiously settled in the hills in the western side of the river, later on descended and built their 'padang' alongside other administrative buildings by the river.

Dataran Merdeka exemplifies the 'padang', a hybrid colonial planning tool that the British used to develop colonial settlements in South East Asia. Originating from the fifteenth century Maidan-i-Nashq-i-Jahan in Esfahan, the British adapted the Maidan for instrumental administration in Indian cities such as Bombay and Madras, and was first implemented in the Malay Peninsula on Penang Island in 1786 (Lai 2010, 57). The original Maidan was adapted by the British in India to create 'an exemplary space for surveillance, military drills, display and governance — as well as belligerent activities such as sport and commemoration exhibitions' (Lai 2010, 55). The public square is one of the eight components of the standardised Grand Model of British colonial settlement, with the grid layout and open space representing 'the ultimate symbol of the imposition of human order on the wilderness (Home 2013, 13). 'The European colonial cities [...] appeared as spaces of Enlightenment reason, civilised and civilising in a savage world' (King 2008, 19), and the rectilinear gridiron layout embodied 'classical ideas of symmetry, order, and proportion' (Home 2013, 13).

The architecture of the Dataran is impressive, articulated to symbolise the power relations of the time. The Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad (the site where the Reformasi movement later brewed in 1998), was originally planned to be a Neoclassical town hall, but was later changed to be the 'Peninsula's first and grandest Raj-style monument' to acknowledge the indigenous Malay rulers (King 2008, 16; Lai 2010, 59) and in its colonial period was referred to as the Secretariat (Figure 3.1). The Neoclassical and Tudor buildings lining up the other sides of the Padang represent British presence (Lai 2010, 59) are more moderate in style and scale, and in this way, complement the grandeur of Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad.

Since economic, social, and spatial structures were already defined along racial lines, it is perhaps no surprise that the British would encourage political mobilisation to be organised along the same cleavage in the late 1940s (Jomo 2004, 1). The British consolidated the three separate administrations of The Straits Settlements and the Federated and Unfederated States into one political entity, the Malayan Union in

1946, right after the Second World War. This was a watershed moment. The cause of rupture at this point was also racially defined, since the Malays were provoked by this British move to strip the already limited power of the Sultans in addition to the equal citizenship opportunity extended to the communities once assumed as transient (Funston 2001; Gomez and Jomo 1999, 11). Thus, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) was formed in 1946, led by Malay aristocrats, who organised protests against the Malayan Union (Funston 2001) In the same year, the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) was formed, and later on in 1949, a group of Chinese business leaders formed the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) in order to ensure that their economic interests were protected through political involvement (White 2004, 392). Together, they formed the Alliance which met the British condition that independence would only be granted to a multi-ethnic leadership (Gomez and Jomo 1999, 12).

The Union Jack was lowered on the eve of 31 August 1957, signifying the end of colonial rule, and in 1989 the name was changed from Padang to Dataran Merdeka. This practice of changing the names of places to claim ownership and identity did not stop then, as recently as November 2014, City Hall renamed major roads in Kuala Lumpur after the Sultans, further instilling a Malay hegemony over the city. For example, Jalan Sultan Yahya Petra was known as Jalan Semarak, and before that, it was called Jalan Henry Gurney, after a British High Commisioner. Perched on a hill behind the Dataran, where the British first settled when they moved to Kuala Lumpur, is the police headquarters of Bukit Aman that overlooks the whole square like a panopticon. King (2008, 94) proposed that Kuala Lumpur is a city of surveillance born out of the racial tension that breeds a culture of distrust and fear, and this impenetrable tower of police headquarters which surveils the Dataran embodies that notion spatially. Moving the Courts out of Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad and changing the function of the building to house the Ministry of Information, Communication, and Culture is an Orwellian masterstroke that further cemented the notion of surveillance.[10]

10 The Court of Appeal and the Federal Court moved to the Palace of Justice in Putrajaya, while the High Court was moved to Jalan Duta, at the fringes of Kuala Lumpur. Both places are difficult to get to by public transportation.

§ 3.2 The optimism of modernist architecture

FIGURE 3.3 Masjid Negara. (Source: Author)

The Union Jack may have been lowered on the Padang on the eve of 31 August 1957, but the fresh beginning brought by the dawn of independence was celebrated in a new space, Stadium Merdeka (Stadium of Independence). Erected specifically as a venue for the proclamation of independence in 1957, the Stadium is one of the spatial manifestations of the nation-building project pursued by the newly minted nation. By turning away from the readily available and hierarchically recognisable space constructed by the colonisers to mark a new beginning, the colonial spatial order is inverted — Jamaica, Zambia, and Namibia also built stadiums for their proclamations of independence in 1962, 1964, and 1990 respectively (Lai 2010). The inversion is also inherent in the architectural typology which translates to different spatial articulation — where King (2008) noted that the lawn is the crown jewel of the architecture of the Padang, the stadium inverts the Padang by placing a building in place of the lawn. Lai (2010) argued that the elevated sitting arrangement raises

the status of spectators as citizens, and the collective gazing upon commemorative events has a galvanising effect in instilling national identity and unity. The Stadium is Modernist, reflecting both the zeitgeist and a break from the resplendent Neoclassical and British Raj architecture of the Padang.

This deft manoeuvre of combining functions and projecting the aspirations of the young nation is characteristic of the architecture of the time. While the Malay-Islam identity was central to the nationalist imagining (Goh and Liauw 2009, 72) — a colonial legacy that could be traced to the Pangkor Treaty — the architectural treatment of post-independent buildings strove to project a Malaysian identity. The solution was found in the global architectural zeitgeist, the International Style, where the clean lines of Modernism were then articulated to respond to the tropical climate, therefore circumventing the ethno-religious divide and yet at the same time rooting the architecture to its place (Goh and Liauw 2009, 72). Not that the architects turned away completely from what was already there, references to the local vernacular architecture such as the 'kampung' (village) Malay house manifested sophisticatedly in the climatic solutions of sun-shading, deep overhang, and porous walls.

While Stadium Merdeka is exemplary in its inversion of the colonial order, the delicate task of projecting a national identity not steeped in ethno-religious aesthetics could be found in Masjid Negara (the National Mosque) (Figure 3.3). The Masjid is part of the nation-building project after gaining independence in 1957, and was supposed part as an ensemble of structures, including the Parliament and the Memorial — symbolising religion, democracy, and commemoration — this was to be on hills to the west of the city (Lai 2007, 98). Tun Razak, the Deputy Prime Minister who chaired the design committee requested that the mosque be Malaysian, not embellished with references to England or Turkey, or even mosques in Melaka or Selangor which designs were more regional (Lai 2007, 101). The team at the Public Works Department tasked with the design was led by Howard Ashley, a British architect and two Malay architects, Hisham Albakri and Baharuddin Abu Kassim, who had recently returned from their studies in Great Britain — even though Baharuddin was the only one of the original team that saw the project from beginning to end (Lai 2007, 101).

Although the tropical Modernist architecture that arose in this period was a masterstroke in projecting a Malaysian identity that is climatically responsive without falling into any ethno-religious trope, the way they clumsily fit into the urban context also reminds us of the European roots of Modernist town planning, where a tight urban form was seen as producing the unsanitary slum conditions of European cities (see Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin). Therefore, the architecture viewed as emancipatory for the colonised also came from the same direction of the departing colonisers, bringing with it the issues associated with Modernist town planning which has since largely shaped

the trajectory of Malaysian built environment. Under the guidance of Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew who had built in Africa, the Department of Tropical Architecture at the Architectural Association (AA) in London played an important role in this transmission, by adapting Modernism to the (post)colonial tropics (Crinson 2003; King 2008, 101). Crinson (2003) noted how the first generation of native architects in Ghana and Malaya, educated in the metropolitan centre, were classic 'mimic men' in their colonial hybridity — crucial in the careful management of decolonisation and thus continued investment after British loss of India. Thus, although the resulting architecture in its Modernist form managed to convey the emancipatory spirit while simultaneously projecting a sophisticated Malaysian identity, a closer inspection of the underlying processes of producing this architecture and its accompanying ideology reveal that emancipation is at best symbolic, and there was no real break between the former colonial structure and the post-independent regime.

§ 3.3 1980s: The soul-searching decade

FIGURE 3.4 Bank Bumiputra. (Source: Author)

'There is no reason why a skyscraper should not have a roof which reflects our national identity. Many elements of Malaysian art can be incorporated into any modern building.'

Mahathir Mohamed, Malaysian Prime Minister (Kultermann 1987, 68)

The architecture of Bank Bumiputra's headquarters, close to the river confluence where present-day Kuala Lumpur was founded, is emblematic of the soul-searching years of the 1980s (Figure 3.4). Built in 1985, the headquarters visually consists of two very different buildings. The podium level of a 34-storey tower is extruded from the tower footprint, topped with two extra floors and finally capped by a traditional roof of the Malay house. The lack of ornamentation on the tower's facade, which consists of repetitive floor plates, is typical of the International Style. The four-storey building attached to it could not have been more different. The form, facade treatment, and also the iconic roof, were designed to make the building resemble a Malay house, albeit a blown-out version of the elegantly proportional original version. The juxtaposition between the globally recognised International Style of the tower and the postmodernist treatment of its annexe in the headquarters of a bank that was set up as a result of an

affirmative action policy reflects a sharp turn from the inclusive direction attempted before.

The optimism of the post-independence years started to crack towards the end of the 1960s. After the second general election, a race riot erupted in Kuala Lumpur on 13 May 1969 driven by a stark inequality that ran along ethnic cleavages. The urban Chinese in the victory procession, which sparked the riot, allegedly called for the Malays to leave the city and go back to their 'kampungs', indicating that this divide is also spatial. Between 1948 and 1957, the colonial ethnic segregation contributed to a more intense urbanisation of the Chinese; during the Emergency, in order to cut off potential support base of the Communists, mostly Chinese households were moved to New Villages, either newly constructed or adjacent to existing towns, where access was controlled and surveillance was constant (Hirschman 1976, 447; King 2008, 68; Salleh and Choguill 1992; Yeoh and Hirschman 1980, 7). While the Chinese were disgruntled at the limit of their freedom, this provision of infrastructure, albeit basic, irked the Malays as well as they saw it as an investment by the British government in the Chinese community (King 2008, 68). By 1957, the urban population consisted of 55 percent Chinese, 35 percent Indians, and 14 percent Malays (Yeoh and Hirschman 1980, 8). This spatial representation further reinforced the identity of the citizens of this young nation (Sioh 2010, 480).

The riots led to the formation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971, designed to eradicate poverty and eliminate identification of economic identity with race (Jomo 2004, 1). The Second Malaysia Plan (1971-75) specifically aimed to reduce imbalance between economic, urban-rural, and race gaps (Salleh and Choguill 1992, 142). Although the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) agricultural scheme aimed at resettling landless Malay farmers so they could practice commercial farming was already introduced in 1956, it was not until after the NEP that it accelerated (Sioh 2010, 478; Yaakob, Masron, and Masami 2010, 88). New urban centres opened as a result of this effort to urbanise rural populations and reduce the geographical divide defined by ethnicity (Salleh and Choguill 1992, 139; Torii 2003, 225; Yaakob, Masron, and Masami 2010, 88).

This restructuring aimed at tackling imbalance has however been argued to lead to the rise of 'crony capitalism' (Gomez and Jomo 1999) where a close relationship emerged between the state and a group of select entrepreneurs; this was seen as an inevitable outcome of the NEP (White 2004, 390). White (2004, 391–93), however, argued that the roots of crony capitalism could be traced back to the Alliance, where Chinese businessmen, via the MCA, financially propped up UMNO Malays' political ventures, resulting in a reciprocal relationship where the Malay special rights in politics and government were recognised in return for non-interference in non-Malay business. This pre-NEP phenomenon is illustrated via the well-meaning funds for rural development in the 1960s: while UMNO politicians could access the funds, they lacked the technical know-how of infrastructure

building, a field dominated by the Chinese, leading to a partnership between the two with barely any knowledge or skill transfer (Shamsul 1997, 248). This infamous partnership is called 'Ali Baba', where Malay political connections are used to get government projects but the actual work is done by the Chinese counterpart while the Malay serves as a sleeping partner (Chin 2009, 168; Jomo 2004, 19; White 2004, 401).[11]

Another unintended consequence of the NEP is the advancement of 'Ketuanan Melayu' (Malay supremacy) which consequently exacerbated cultural tensions (Goh and Liauw 2009, 74; Gomez and Malaysia 2004, 57). Tay Kheng Soon argued that senior government officials warned architects to come up with designs that reflect a Malaysian identity (Kusno 2002, 135), signifying the role of the state in pushing this ethnic-centric agenda (Goh and Liauw 2009, 74). At the same time, local architects were also pushed to set themselves apart due to competition from incoming European and American architects in the region, which coincided with a liberalised economy following a brief recession in the mid-1980s (Goh and Liauw 2009, 74; Kusno 2002). Both these factors contributed to the rise of a neo-traditionalist architecture where elements of Malay vernacular dwellings were incorporated into modern typologies (Goh and Liauw 2009, 74; Mohamad Rasdi 2005).

Abidin Kusno (2002) astutely observed the reaction to this emergence of a Malay-revivalist architecture, by focusing on the discourse spearheaded by two leading architects in the region, Tay Kheng Soon and Ken Yeang, between the late 1980s and early 1990s. Tay criticised the tendency of local architects to appeal to the global zeitgeist, postmodern architecture, by the incorporation of ethnic and cultural symbolisms which he claimed to be 'historically absurd' (Kusno 2002, 135). Yeang, on other hand, while agreeing that there was a need to set the local architecture apart on the international scene, abhorred the ethno-religious projections which he deemed as mere window-dressing (Kusno 2002, 136). Both of them promoted climatic-responsive solutions as a shared tropical identity rooted in its place and time, similar to post-independence attitude, albeit breaking away from the modernist box by incorporating 'high-tech' solutions to the skyscraper, an approach that established Ken Yeang's career and even won him an Aga Khan Award in the 1993-1995 cycle (Goh and Liauw 2009, 75–76; Kusno 2002, 134–36). Kusno noted how the background of both could have propelled them to push this kind of architecture: Tay could be projecting a Singaporean vision of a plural Malaysia, a sore point that led to Singapore leaving the Federation two years after independence whereas Yeang, being a 'Westernised Chinese-Malaysian,' might have been critical since the state-led initiative of

11 Coincidentally, Jack Ma, the executive chairman of Alibaba, the Chinese online shopping platform, was appointed as the digital economy adviser to the government of Malaysia in March 2017.

projecting a Malaysian identity has excluded the presence and contribution of non-Malays (Kusno 2002, 136 and 138).[12]

§ 3.4 Mega-projects as utopian imaginings

FIGURE 3.5 The Petronas Twin Towers. (Source: www.thisiskl.com)

The excitement in Malaysia of knowing that the Petronas Twin Towers would be 'an architectural star' of Hollywood's *Entrapment* (starring Catherine Zeta-Jones and Sean Connery) in 1999, turned into horror when the film came out; the filmmaker had spliced a scene so that the gleaming Twin Towers are immediately foregrounded by a slum-like riverside, to be found in Melaka, a different city, some 100 kilometres away (Bunnell 2004). Prime Minister Mahathir accused the scene as a deliberate

12 Yeang attended Cheltenham College, the Architecture Association, and Cambridge University.

misrepresentation of Malaysia, which confirms 'neo-orientalist imaginings of the "Asian city"' (Bunnell 2004, 298). Mahathir's mega-projects of the 1990s, of which the Twin Towers serve as the centre piece, were designed to propel the country into the future, in line with his Vision 2020 where the country would be fully developed (Figure 3.5). Just as the post-independence architecture in the 1960s attempted to project colonial emancipation, Mahathir's mega-projects were also not merely about building infrastructure. Rather, it sought to project a specific image of modernity, which ironically is modelled on Occidental imaginings (see King 1996). Therefore, while the dismay at this misrepresentation is not unfounded, the reaction also exposed a postcolonial complexity that belies the East-West dichotomy (Bunnell 2004, 298).

The 1990s witnessed a reorientation of Kuala Lumpur from a federal capital to a globally recognised node (Bunnell 2002a; Yeoh 2005). The Twin Towers mark one end of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), which stretches fifty kilometres southward from downtown Kuala Lumpur to Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) which is neither geographically nor visually part of the city. In between, the new administrative city Putrajaya was built, together with Cyberjaya, Malaysia's own attempt at a Silicon Valley. To facilitate movement between these nodes, a fast train connection was built between KLIA and the city. A transportation hub, KL Sentral, was designed around where the train terminates in the city, a traveller could access the rest of Kuala Lumpur via the network of light rail services or even the rest of peninsular Malaysia via diesel train. The Twin Towers and KL Sentral however, are not solitary structures. Instead, they are used as catalysts for development: the twin towers are essential components of the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) masterplan, a 'city within a city' replete with its own street furniture design, whereas the architecture of KL Sentral is now imperceptible due to the wall of skyscrapers surrounding it.

Conceived in the Information Age, the MSC is a mega-scale infrastructural project aimed at positioning Malaysia as a regional IT hub, thus plugging into the informational society and subsequently the global economy (Abbott, Macdonald, and Givens 2013, 112; Bunnell 2002b). This tapping into the so called 'space of flows' (Castells 2004, 2010) is however marked by the creation of new 'intelligent' urban spaces defined by a 'high tech' modernity (Bunnell 2002b), rather than retrofitting existing infrastructure to better serve the technological demands of the Information Age. The generous tax, hiring, and ownership incentives offered in order to attract foreign investments, came together with the displacement of plantation workers where Putrajaya and Cyberjaya now stand (Bunnell 2002b, 271).

FIGURE 3.6 Putrajaya. The Prime Minister's Office terminates this 100-metre-wide boulevard. (Source: Author)

Putrajaya, the 'instant city', is clearly programmed to serve the administrative and bureaucratic purposes of the Federal government, with other functions included only to support the main program (Figure 3.6). This includes housing for civil servants with sporting facilities and serving them is a shopping mall called Alamanda. King observed that the urban design celebrates the executive rather than legislature (Canberra, Washington, Seoul) or head of state (New Delhi, London, classical Beijing) and this distancing of the executive from the legislature is 'profoundly a political action' (King 2008, 150). Even though early sketches of the masterplan indicated the Parliament House as terminating the main axis of the city, the decision to move Parliament to Putrajaya was later scrapped since it would mean that the Federal Government would have to return Kuala Lumpur to the state government of Selangor (King 2008, 150).

The twin city, Cyberjaya, is one of the many technopoles launched in the Asia Pacific region where urban spaces were designed as high-tech sites in order to emulate the Silicon Valley experience, subsequently launching the nation state into an increasingly digitised global economy (Brooker 2012, 42). The science parks and manicured green spaces for employees were designed to make this 'intelligent' city self-sufficient, together with fibre optics that connects the MSC to other nodes in the global network, therefore isolating

the footloose, highly trained international knowledge-workers from their immediate surroundings but connecting them to far-flung places like London or Hong Kong. Brooker (2012, 49–50) shrewdly noted how there were no public squares or any of the traditional Malaysian street patterns, this was done to discourage people from loitering, while the pervasive presence of CCTV cameras all over the city also signifies the notion of surveillance as justified through arguments of security and safety. While Cyberjaya was proposed as the antidote to the congestion and chaos of Kuala Lumpur, Brooker (2012) argued that the expatriate community were willing to commute to work from the suburbs around Kuala Lumpur, choosing city life over the lakeside serenity that Cyberjaya offered; some even quipped that Cyberjaya was more like Siberia: a work camp cut off from the city.

On one hand, this intensive construction taking place in the material space in order to realise real-time connectivity that overcomes geographical boundaries reveals the reliance of cyberspace on complex infrastructure which is inherently spatial (Graham and Marvin 1996). Places also benefit from being wired, a cursory look at real-estate advertisements during the time of writing revealed availability of high-speed Internet connection as a valuable asset that could impact rental rates.

On the other hand, the furore *Entrapment*'s spliced scene reveals a careful image-crafting exercise based upon the visual imagery provided by the production of specific architectures. To put Malaysia on the map, the architecture of both buildings that terminate the MSC axis were designed by internationally renowned architects: Kisho Kurosawa designed KLIA, the new gateway to the country, while Cesar Pelli won the competition to design the Twin Towers (Boey 2002; Brooker 2012). The involvement of these international architects in these landmark structures lent prestige to the MSC, which is actually more of a 'frame of mind' than a place (Ariff and Goh 1998; King 2008, 133). The advisory board also included top executives of notable technology firms, such as Bill Gates, in order to promote the MSC as 'the Silicon Valley of the East' (Boey 2002, 36). Finally, the branding strategy could also be seen in the lingo of superlatives: The Petronas Twin Towers as the tallest buildings in the world, Cyberjaya as the first 'intelligent' city, Putrajaya as a paperless government, all aimed at what is imagined as 'World Class' infrastructure (Boey 2002, 34).

The visual imagery invested in the architecture assisted the state in mediating this positioning of Malaysia as a modern, high-tech, and global site with national integrity (Boey 2002, 39–40), while not further alienating the citizens, especially since the development is already geographically polarised.[13]

13 Mahathir justified the decision on the site by arguing that the future is unknown, and therefore the MSC should be a test bed before the infrastructure is scaled up to the rest of the country (Mahathir, 1998).

Mahathir (1991, 1998) simultaneously argued that the move from Kuala Lumpur to Putrajaya was not just a physical migration but also signified a paradigm shift where old legacies were to be shed for modern ways; this vision of modernity was then cleverly shrouded in Asian values. Hamzah Bakar, the Chief Executive Officer of KLCC Holdings, in charge of the development, echoed this sentiment when he said that while projects should be modern and business-oriented, they should also be concurrent with history and culture (Boey 2002, 40).

To project the Asian values embedded in local history and culture, the state again referred to Malay-Islam aesthetics for inspiration to be mapped onto the architecture. This is in line with the trajectory of the 1980s; Pelli's design of the Twin Towers incorporated Islamic patterns as the basis for the floor plans, reminiscent of Menara (Tower) Dayabumi from the early 1980s when references to Islamic art were integrated into the facade design. The centre of Putrajaya is dominated by a combination of domes, a shorthand for Islam, together with steel and glass signifying high-tech modernity. While references to Malay architecture are made, such as the roof structure of KLIA which is supported by stilts, they seemed to be more subtle than the 1980s; the mega-projects further amplified the Islamic identity (Goh and Liauw 2009). This is due to the growth of Islamic resurgence after the riots in 1969 among the middle class produced by the NEP (Shamsul 1997, 254). The application of Islamic references in architecture is therefore a masterstroke, since it instantaneously attempts to attract and placate this generation of voters while signifying economic ties with Muslim Middle-Eastern, and other Southeast Asian countries (Boey 2002, 46).

FIGURE 3.7 Masjid India. (Source: author)

Even though references to other ethnic or religious identities which are also present in Malaysia seem rather muted in the architecture of institutions, they are amplified as an instrument of urban renewal of the places shaped by the colonial legacy of segregation. In 2003, the government gave Petaling Street an urban design make-over — the street was pedestrianised and topped with wavy blue glass roof supported by white metal pillars — supposedly mimicking a dragon (King 2008, 31) – although not everyone in the Chinese community welcomed the gesture, arguing that it signalled their position as a minority (Loo 2012). The area in front of Masjid India (Indian Mosque) was pedestrianised in 2004 and topped with a massive roof structure reminiscent of the kampung house, therefore cementing the Malay-Indian Muslim character of the quarter (Figure 3.7). Although the architectural treatment of Brickfields was more understated than Petaling Street and Masjid India (there is no covered pedestrianised area here), the launch of Brickfields as Little India on 28 October, 2010 was no subtle affair — Little India was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh, together with Malaysia's Prime Minister, Najib Razak. These are then packaged as tourist attractions under the tagline 'Malaysia Truly Asia', the multiculturalism

of Malaysian society is useful as a branding exercise, in order to sell the country as a tourist destination.

Together with the tax breaks and other incentives offered in the Bill of Guarantees of the MSC, Mahathir also promised no Internet censorship (Brooker 2012, 40; Bunnell 2002b), not only to attract investment, but also because Internet censorship was thought of as impossible (Pepinsky 2013, 90). He later openly regretted this decision on his blog (Mohamad 2014). This move completely changed the Malaysian public sphere and will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

§ 3.5 The hybrid regime

Although the NEP has created and expanded a Malay middle class (Shamsul 1997, 252), change is slow in coming since the communally organised political parties continue to make appeals according to ethnic lines (Gomez and Jomo 1999, 178). Since the negotiations for independence were spearheaded by an elite who were already benefiting from the colonial system, marked by an absence of a long and elaborate political struggle, Alatas (1977, 166) argued that there was no sharp break in the ideological consciousness of the Malay elite, especially since racial ideologies justified and continue to justify their actions (Hirschman 1986, 357). Instead, the new elite seized the already existing colonial infrastructure of censorship and control to be utilised in the nation-building process (Harper 1996, 239). This utilisation of colonial legacies of surveillance in the democratic system (also a parting gift from the colonisers) has driven Malaysia to be categorised as a hybrid regime.

The conception of Malaysia as a political project is rife with contradictions, with the most glaring one being the imposition of democracy by the departing colonials, where a Western concept based on an ethnically homogeneous nation-state is grafted upon a plural society (Harper 1996, 240). The colonial ambivalence of inclusion and exclusion (Bhabha 1994) underlines the political processes that produced the post-independent hybrid regime. Hybrid regimes are governments which (claim to) practice democracy but breach the democratic criteria so often that they actually exist between being fully fledged democracies and dictatorships (Diamond 2002). This is mostly prevalent in,

but not limited to post-colonial states.[14] Diamond, in *Thinking about Hybrid Regimes* (2002), observed that of the electoral autocracies of the 1960s and 1970s, only the Malaysian and Singaporean regimes survive today.

Hybrid regimes are often described in transitional and reductive terms, either on their way to becoming fully democratic, or as Linz (2000) scathingly proposed, better described as diminished forms of authoritarianism, although they could also be viewed as a possible type of regime in their own right (Jayasuriya and Rodan 2007; Levitsky and Way 2002). Crouch (1993) described Malaysia as a halfway house between democracy and authoritarianism due to the ambiguous impact of socio-economic change that generated the pressures which pushed the regime in an authoritarian direction while other pressures facilitated democratisation. Levitsky and Way (2002), as mentioned before, suggested that Malaysia falls under the 'competitive authoritarian' category, different from 'delegative democracy', which still meets the basic requirement of democracy, but not fully authoritarian either. Because it is unable to eliminate democratic rules in totality, it is also quite distinct from 'facade' electoral regimes.

Because Malaysia claims (and aspires) to be democratic, what are the criteria of the modern democratic regime? And how does Malaysia differ as a hybrid regime? The executives and legislatives of modern democratic regimes are chosen through open, free, and fair elections, and virtually all adults can vote; political rights and civil liberties are protected, including freedom of the press, freedom of association, and freedom to criticise the government without fear of reprisal; and elected authorities possess real authority to govern and are not subjected to tutelary control (Levitsky and Way 2002). However, while they are not fully democratic, competitive authoritarian regimes are not fully authoritarian either because they are unable to eliminate democratic rules; rather than openly violate democratic rules they opt for subtle forms of persecution and co-option; government and opposition still take democratic institutions seriously; and opposition can and does pose significant challenges (Levitsky and Way 2002). Meredith Weiss (2006, 35), on the other hand, chose the term 'illiberal democracy', succinctly describing Malaysia as possessing the institutions and procedures of a democracy, but is 'illiberal in its constraints on popular participation and civil liberties'.

While freedom of association clearly exists in Malaysia - opposition parties, unions, and cause groups could be formed and registered at the Registrar of Societies (under

14 The state of Brunei, however, went right back to the monarchy system after independence.

the Home Ministry) — the capabilities of these organisations are often weakened and limited by the government, therefore limiting their effectiveness in influencing policy outputs (Case 1993, 186). Although civil society can canvas for support and the government intermittently addresses the grievances they raise, the potential for civil society to affect structural change is curtailed through various legal mechanisms aimed at limiting freedom of expression, such as the Sedition Act 1948, a colonial legacy; and the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012. Under the guise of ensuring security in this climate of terrorism, the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act was passed in 2012 to replace the notorious Internal Security Act 1960, and in 2016 it was used to detain the leader of Bersih, Maria Chin Abdullah, in the days leading up to the fifth Bersih rally. Therefore, civil society lacks the autonomous and unregulated space needed in order to be effective in challenging the regime (Bell et al. 1995, 166). Civil society thus serves more as a 'safety valve for social discontent' rather than a meaningful agent of change, and this is amplified by the opposition parties' apparent acceptance of the status quo since they have not been able to offer a coherent alternative to the voters (Case 1993, 187). In this instance, rather than fostering a critical civil society and public space, they are managed by the semi-democratic regime (Bell et al. 1995, 166).

Elections are held regularly in Malaysia and opposition parties could even win individual seats against government candidates, although they are prevented from winning enough seats to form a majority at the federal level, caused by a manipulation of electoral procedures — this includes malapportionment of districts, hurried campaign periods, bans of open-air opposition rallies, and the government's unimpeded use of media outlets, state facilities, and on-the-spot development grants — practices that the Electoral Commission has generally left unchallenged (Case 1993, 187). Elections in a context like this serve to legitimise the status quo; rather than putting the incumbent under scrutiny, it is the loyalty of the voters that is being tested (Bell et al. 1995).

§ 3.6 Bersih

As a civil society organisation that focuses on electoral reform, Bersih provides a unique window to those interested in whether the hybrid regime is liberalising or becoming more authoritarian in nature. Throughout this chapter we have seen how ethnic cleavages have defined socio-economic and political structures of Malaysia since the colonial period, and how these structural cleavages have managed to endure features of modernisation such as rapid urbanisation and, lately, the rise of new

media (Pepinsky 2013). By focusing on a democratic institution — in this instance the electoral process — rather than reacting to government policies or championing communal issues, Bersih has managed to circumvent structural cleavages, which might pave the path for political liberalisation (Pepinsky 2013, 99).

Bersih ('clean' in Malay) is a coalition of civil-society groups and NGOs pushing for electoral reform in Malaysia. Although opposition parties were a part of Bersih at its conception in 2006, in 2010 the coalition was relaunched as Bersih 2.0, this time without the affiliation to any opposition parties.[15] The steering committee of Bersih is elected every two years by the NGOs, and the attempt to ensure that participation and mobilisation extends beyond the western corridor of peninsular Malaysia can be seen through the six regional vice-chairperson posts. Bersih's call for electoral reform could be broken down into eight specific demands, five of which target different technical aspects of the electoral system. These are: clean the electoral roll, reform postal ballot, use of indelible ink, a minimum of twenty-one days for a campaign period, and free and fair access to media. The other three are more general: strengthen public institutions, stop corruption, and stop dirty politics.

Protest movements have invariably been adept at absorbing available technologies available (Lim 2016), and Bersih is no exception. Conceived in 2006, ten years after the MSC was launched, and marking the penetration of the Internet for general consumption in Malaysia, the inclusion of the Internet as Bersih's infrastructure seemed inevitable, especially since the Reformasi protests which sparked in 1998 had already incorporated the use of websites and list servs in its arsenal. While Bersih organised its first street protest in 2007, and used emails, blogs, and text messages to evade surveillance, it was not until 2008 that the new media finally became prominent as tools for mass political mobilisation due to the emergence of social media sites like Facebook and Youtube (Liow 2012, 301). Thus, by its second rally in 2011, just like its global contemporaries such as the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement, Bersih was conversant with the utilisation of new media to mobilise people onto the streets, something which extended beyond the political borders of Malaysia with solidarity rallies taking place in thirty-two cities around the world under the aegis of Global Bersih. In retaliation to what was deemed as an inadequate response by the government through the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reform, Bersih organised its third rally in 2012, foreseeing a looming election, which did take place in 2013. Bersih 4 occupied the streets in 2015, in light of the 1MDB financial scandal which implicated the Prime Minister, Najib Razak. Because of this, it was criticised by

15 Even though the official name of the movement is Bersih 2.0, it will be referred to as Bersih in this research. The numbered Bersihs would then refer to the rallies that it organised (Bersih 2, Bersih 3 etc.)

some as losing focus. Bersih 5, organised in 2016, was distinctive for its attempt to mobilise via road convoys in both East and West Malaysia prior to the protest, therefore expanding its geographical reach in the material space, no longer only relying on digital space to overcome geographical distance. Unlike the first three Bersih rallies, Bersih 4 and 5 were neither met with direct violence from the authorities, nor were they free from intimidation. All of Bersih's rallies took place in various sites in Kuala Lumpur, all within one mile of the confluence of the Klang and Gombak rivers.

While it is not the objective of this research to ponder whether political liberalisation is indeed happening at large in relation to Bersih, especially since, at the time of writing, it has been ten years since its conception and electoral reform is still slow in coming, Bersih's rallies are invaluable to this research for their proficient manoeuvring between both digital and physical spaces, ever evolving digital and spatial tactics, which, together with the responses from the authorities and counter-movements, and the discourse before and after each rally, informs us whether the Malaysian public space is evolving as a function of democracy. The various architectures mentioned above, from the colonial Padang to the Twin Towers, have served as the backdrop of Bersih's rallies, revealing the complex relationship between history, infrastructure, daily life, and civil society. The contrast between Kuala Lumpur, the colonial city, where most of these structures stand, and the purpose-built new seat of power, Putrajaya, where protest is curiously absent, is also revealing.

§ 3.7 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have seen how the production of key architectures were wrought with ambivalence, where amnesia was manifested in how certain aspects were not just included but also amplified while others were conveniently excluded since they did not neatly fit into the narrative set by the state. The underlying structure of this ambivalence is ethnic cleavage, a colonial legacy which has proven to be durable and has survived modernisation of infrastructure and also rapid urbanisation. The process of independence and the production of architecture that was supposed to signal emancipation were overseen by a class of mimic men, and the struggle for emancipation has, ever since, been focused mostly on the visual aspects, oscillating between Occidental and Oriental imaginings (the Manhattanisation of Kuala Lumpur and the domes and boulevards of Putrajaya). Since independence was spearheaded by the same elite that benefited under the colonial political economy, there is no break of ideology and therefore the colonial structure persists. One of the most ironic of British legacies: democracy, is

then expected to work within this durable political economy which has been lopsided since the very beginning, hence, the emergence of the hybrid regime, which provides the condition for Bersih to exist. While Bersih exists within this structural divide, it attempts to overcome that divide by targeting the democratic institution itself, and while doing so, reveals the politics of both digital and physical spaces.

Having understood the background of the problem and the context wherein it takes place, in the next chapter, we can proceed to discuss Malaysian public space.

4 Malaysian Public Space

The previous chapter informed us of how the socio-political structures of Malaysia have produced iconic architectures and public spaces that reflect the state's aspirations while being simultaneously conditioned by instruments of dominance and surveillance. The latter aspect, however, warrants a further explanation since this is where dissent is shaped and controlled. Therefore, this chapter examines the notions of control and surveillance over Malaysian public space. It consists of two parts. Firstly, continuing the trajectory from the previous chapter, we discuss the production, governance, and utilisation of the material public space, with a particular focus on how it enables or disables the performance of public claim-making. The discussion is then expanded in the second part to include the discursive public sphere, since a lot of exchanges about protest would take place in this sphere, both online and offline, in social and conventional media. A similar approach is applied here — the production, governance, and utilisation of discursive media are discussed in order to unpack the context within which the communication about protest took place.

§ 4.1 Fear and loathing in Kuala Lumpur

Satellite towns, gated communities, and shopping malls started to proliferate in Malaysia in the 1980s, and together with the growth of car ownership in Malaysia, signified a rising income and a burgeoning middle class (Dick and Rimmer 1998). This surge of urbanisation could be traced to two factors: the second Malaysia plan (1971-1975) conceived after the 1969 race riots which drove the state to push for the urbanisation of Malays (Salleh and Choguill 1992, 140), and also the liberalisation of the economy after a brief recession in the 1980s which enabled the flow of foreign capital into the country (Goh and Liauw 2009, 74; Tedong, Grant, and Abd Aziz 2014, 32). The government reduced its role in the provision of housing, leaving it to private developers who favoured the affluent, and increasingly built enclosed residential projects on the periphery of the capital (Tedong, Grant, and Abd Aziz 2014, 32). The neglect in the provision of affordable housing for low-income group has widened the inequality gap, and created an atmosphere of fear (Dick and Rimmer 1998; Tedong et al. 2014, 1006; Tedong, Grant, and Abd Aziz 2014, 32). By the 2000s, this fear and the perception that the state has not been adequate in reducing the crime rate, has resulted in originally open neighbourhoods informally adopting the enclosed model

via erecting barricades and hiring security companies (Tedong et al. 2014, 1011). Often this amounts to nothing more than a makeshift manual boom gate and a lone security guard sitting under a parasol. While this does necessarily ensure safety nor security, Low (2001) suggested that the addition of walls, gates, and guards enhanced the spatial segregation in the built environment and produced a landscape of fear. This 'splintering urbanism', where the urban landscape became even more fragmented, was in line with the broader global trend at the time (Graham and Marvin 2009). The transfer from public to private has also exacerbated the dismantling of the public realm resulting in the de-politicisation of space (Hoskyns 2014).

Strict zoning and the distance between work and home demanded motorised transportation, but the lack of public transportation pushed the ownership of private motorised vehicles, in line with Mahathir's national car project, Proton, launched in 1983, together with fuel subsidies (Kasipillai and Chan 2008, 41). A study about the walkability of Kuala Lumpur found that most of the respondents travel by their own vehicles and prefer to do so, citing that walking in the city makes them feel tired (Shamsuddin et al. 2013, 116–17). Interestingly, only 9 percent cited the lack of public transportation close to work as a reason to opt for private vehicles, 59 percent cited the lack of comfort on public transportation as the main reason why they preferred their own vehicles (Shamsuddin, Hassan, and Bilyamin 2012, 175). The same study also found that the city centre is seen as a place of work and not for social interaction (Shamsuddin, Hassan, and Bilyamin 2012, 175).

While some argued that the city centre of Kuala Lumpur is reasonably comfortable for walking, it has been noted that this provision is mostly concentrated in tourist destination areas (Zakaria and Ujang 2015, 651). This could contribute to the above-mentioned perception that the city centre is only for work, and also that it is not walkable (Shamsuddin et al. 2013; Shamsuddin, Hassan, and Bilyamin 2012). The streets are dominated by cars and motorcycles and not climatically responsive to the tropics, therefore not pedestrian-friendly (Kozlowski, Ujang, and Maulan 2015, 49; Wong 2011). The Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020 outlined the walkability issues that the City Hall intended to address; lack of legibility, disjointed pedestrian linkages, and also a general lack of amenity and provision for pedestrians (DBKL, 2004). These issues have also been outlined by Wong (2011, 316), although he intriguingly argued that Kuala Lumpur are 'two cities' where the city of everyday life is closed and private and walking is an imposition, whereas during ethnic celebrations, the city becomes highly pedestrianised albeit policed.

Since ethnic celebrations feed into the tourism tagline, 'Malaysia, Truly Asia', it can be argued that the provision of a walkable environment is only deemed necessary when it has the potential to be generate revenue.[16]

The neglect of public space and the ensuing negative perception of walking is exacerbated by the development of shopping malls as social and leisure spaces by private developers. According to Figure 4.1, there were 155 shopping malls in the Greater Kuala Lumpur area as of 2017, and people were willing to pay an extra 3 percent for homes closer to malls — ten more have popped up since 2015, but half stand empty (Property Price Tag, 2017: 48), and this has prompted discussions in the media about the possible oversupply of shopping malls (Achariam 2017; Radin Ghazali 2017; Lau 2017; Li 2016; Shi 2016). Instead of building only shopping malls, developers are building mixed-use developments in the more lucrative parts of town, maximising the potential return possible from the high land value. Projects like these would combine apartments, offices, and retail spaces all set upon a giant plinth. In developments such as the Publika or Plaza Damas in the Greater Kuala Lumpur area, the circulation even mimics an urban setting, where patrons could drive on the 'ground' level and walking is possible in between the towers, aided by small pockets of spaces and more generous 'public spaces' used for events. In this pseudo-public space (Davis, 1990), patrons could sample 'street life' albeit without the friction that they might encounter in a real street, since the private ownership ensures that access and conduct are controlled by the private security installed by the management, whose ultimate aim is to maximise profit. While Mike Davis (1990) observed this similar trend as the American public space being turned inside out, it can be argued that the process of spatial inversion in Malaysia took place right from the beginning, with the declaration of independence taking place in the purposely built Stadium Merdeka (see Chapter Three).

16 The Tourism Minister, Nazri Aziz, quipped that the Bersih 4 protest showcased Malaysia's commitment to democracy and was good for tourism http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2015/10/20/nazri-bersih-4-saved-govt-billions-in-tourism-advertising/

FIGURE 4.1 Location map of shopping malls in Greater Kuala Lumpur (Source: Property Price Tag, 2017).

Not only are private developers filling the gap of providing social and leisure spaces, but public spaces are also blatantly privatised. An example of this is the Padang Banda Hilir in the historic center of Melaka, 100 kilometres from Kuala Lumpur. The Padang is not only significant because of the surrounding colonial and thus historical structures but also important in its own right in the history of the nation, since this was where Tunku Abdul Rahman (Malaysia's first Prime Minister) announced the impending independence of Malaya from the British upon his return from the negotiations in London on 20 February, 1956. A shopping mall, Dataran Pahlawan (Warrior Square), was constructed on top of the Padang, and a section of the top floor is left open and planted with grass in order to emulate the old Padang. Therefore, not only has the size of the Padang been reduced, the control wielded by the private management over the space also dramatically reduces its publicness. The attitude imbued in the treatment of heritage is also revealing, while the colonial buildings are left standing since they are visual and fit into the branding of Melaka as a historical tourist destination, the 'empty' Padang which actually marked the beginning of the country was torn apart in order to make way for generating revenue.

Although in recent years there have already been efforts to improve public space in central Kuala Lumpur, with projects like the River of Life, a regeneration project that aims to improve the rivers in Klang Valley, this project is exemplary of the neoliberal approach towards space. The River of Life is one of the initiatives under the National Transformation Program spearheaded by Prime Minister Najib Razak, and while the

project's websites specified its objectives of revitalising the river in order to create a more liveable waterfront, its ultimate aim for doing so is to increase the economic value of the area (River of Life website, retrieved August 2017). After a competition, the international firm AECOM was chosen to head the RM-one-billion project, reminiscent of the 1990s, where attempts were made to position Malaysia in the global scene. This top-down approach is complemented by efforts to enhance participation of the public through initiatives such as Think City, which provides grants to individuals and groups for small projects that aim to improve the city. It is however worth considering that Think City is part of Khazanah Nasional, the investment arm of the state. [17]

In line with this neoliberal approach towards space, activities which are not just deemed unproductive to capital, but also hinder others from participating in the production and consumption of capital by their very presence, are regarded as 'undesirable' and need to be concealed. Prior to events of national importance, such as sporting events or official visits of foreign dignitaries, the state would round up the homeless in Kuala Lumpur in order to protect the developed image it has cultivated (Achariam and Hamid 2017). While there are many soup kitchens that operate in the city centre, in 2014 the Federal Territories Minister, Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor, attempted to ban them from operating within a two-kilometre radius of the city centre, citing that soup kitchens were unsanitary and were drawing rodents to public space, which happens to be the commercial and historical district of Kuala Lumpur, and therefore a tourist destination (Kechara first casualty of Ku Nan's 'move out of KL' policy 2014; PM moves to fish Ku Nan out of soup kitchen mess 2014; Premananthini 2017; Yeoh 2017). The sanitation excuse echoes a colonial attitude towards space, which while did not specifically result in a violent restructuring of the city, indicates an attempt to justify eviction as improvement, since the activities are not aligned with the production of capital.

It is thus perhaps not that surprising that street protests are frowned upon and the excuses given tend to allude to economic reasons. Various figures (including Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor) and organisations have stated that street protests negatively impact the income of traders around the city center (Amly 2015; Bernama 2015; Group: Bersih demo will be bad for business 2011). This argument was even expanded

17 During the Ninth World Urban Forum which Kuala Lumpur hosted in February 2018, Think City constructed a micro-house and communal living experiment on the historic Medan Pasar as one of the ways to repopulate the city with young people (ThinkCity | Rejuvenating The City Together n.d.). This trend which originated in cities like San Francisco and London was born out of the lack of affordable housing in the city. While property prices in Kuala Lumpur are high, and many people do indeed live outside the city centre, the fact that this experiment was conducted by an organisation funded by the government indicated a lack of political will to tackle the structural problem of the housing market.

to the national level in 2015, when Abdul Rahman Dahlan, the Urban Wellbeing, Housing, and Local Government Minister tweeted several arguments advising Bersih to postpone its fourth protest, since the protest would have allegedly caused the local currency, the Ringgit, to slide down even further (Lai 2015). While these allegations have been met with counter-arguments that streets are regularly closed for corporate sporting events and also ethnic and religious celebrations among others, and that there were no complaints about businesses being negatively affected then, these arguments were still aligned with the economic line of reasoning, focusing on the producer/consumer identities while neglecting the citizenship aspect that would grant the people the right to express themselves in a democracy. In this instance, the publicness of the space is dramatically reduced to only access and ownership, stripped off the other aspect of publicness which is political and associated with citizenship. The publicness here deals with performing citizenship by active participation in public life in the political sense (Misak 2009). Since infrastructure enables or disables different kinds of actions in the city (Graham and McFarlane 2015), the curtailment of public claim-making activities in the public space indicate that democracy is being disabled. John Parkinson (2012), a political scientist, analysed the spatial needs of democracy and argued that spaces where people can come together for public claim-making is crucial, but contemporary public space tend to cater more for people to eat sandwiches and are too cluttered for protest to take place. In spaces like this, people are consumers, not citizens (Parkinson, 2012).

While there are various laws that directly deal with regulating dissent in Malaysia, and these in turn indirectly affect the use of public space, laws that regulate public space are also at times used to curtail street protests. Act 171 of the Local Government Act 1976 details the jurisdiction of the local municipalities in Malaysia. Part VII (Sections 63-68) specifies the local municipality's authority over public space. Section 65 states the right of the authorities to temporarily close down public space, which DBKL used together with the Local Government (Dataran Merdeka) (Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur) By-Laws 1992 to block Bersih 3 from occupying the Dataran (Pragalath 2012). Section 4 of this by-law gives a long list of nineteen items detailing the activities that could not be conducted on Dataran Merdeka without the consent of the Commissioner (the Mayor) — this includes: eating, drinking, or smoking; stepping on the grass; entering or climbing the 100-metre flag pole; and lying down or sleeping on the square. Section 8 is the most important since it specifically states that any kinds of assembly shall not take place without a permit from the Commissioner — the next five sections specify the conditions of the permit application. Also important is Section 14, which gives the Commissioner the right to order out any persons who have not complied with the rules — interestingly, while the English version of this Act, Section 14 (2) was amended to also include that the Mayor could remove these persons by force, this has already been spelled out in the Malay version of the Act. The document

was prepared on 5 June, 1992 by then Mayor of Kuala Lumpur, Elyas Omar, and was approved by the Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad on 14 July, 1992. Another Act that could also be used by the local municipality is the Street, Drainage, and Building Act 1974 (Act 133), specifically Section 46 which deals with obstructions. Here, local authorities are given the right to remove any structures that they view as obstructing pathways or the public space. As a result, in order to not give the authorities any valid reason to throw them out, protestors have been known to not put up structures like tents — the student protest #OccupyParliament in 2015 is one example. Bersih usually uses trucks that serve as makeshift stages to bypass this rule. Barricades, that trademark architecture of protest, are noticeably missing from the Malaysian landscape of dissent.

If the publicness of space were to be traditionally defined by access and ownership (Low and Smith 2006) then in the Malaysian case it can be argued that privately owned spaces are more 'public' than the publicly owned space because they are more accessible, due to the lack of public transportation which forces people to travel by private vehicles, therefore removing the need to traverse public space in their daily commute. This is exacerbated by the lack of a pedestrian-friendly environment which in the Malaysian context should also include considerations of the tropical climate. The lack of access to the publicly available spaces have pushed people to shopping malls or other similar places which are privately owned, in order to participate in public life. In this instance, 'public' is understood as encountering strangers and casual acquaintances, and in the context of Asia, where so much of social and leisure space is provided by private enterprise, these commercial spaces could be seen as 'expanding participation in the public life' (Hogan et al. 2012, 61). While this is not entirely ideal, since at present private owners could enforce behaviour and activities which are perceived as productive, there is a possibility for democratically enshrined rights to be extended into these publicly accessible commercial spaces (Low 2015). The neoliberal attitude towards the production of space, where not only the provision of public services such as housing and public space are increasingly taken over by private enterprises, but the state's interventions are also aimed at economic gains (Tedong, Grant, and Wan Abd Aziz 2015), has however eroded the citizen identity in exchange for one of consumer (Parkinson 2012). This is evident in how the discussions around the use of public space for dissent are constantly framed in the potential loss of revenue, even when the spaces discussed are not privately owned.

In this instance, the state's attitude towards space is no different from the colonial masters' whose aim was to maximise profit via minimising friction, which was achieved via spatial segregation according to race, which was much more stringent in European quarters (Dick and Rimmer 1998). In researching the trends of gated neighourhoods in Malaysia, Tedong et al. (2014, 1006) found that political interventions have actually

further segregated urban spaces through facilitating surveillance enabled by enclosure, therefore spatially reproducing social inequality and fears of difference. While the above shows how the state is mimicking the colonial masters in the production of new spaces, the state's attitude in regulating Dataran Merdeka exemplifies its attitude towards public space, which in this instance also happens to be a colonial legacy. The strict rules in the special statute for Dataran Merdeka which spell out the long list of activities not allowed without the permission of the authorities, express the state's desire to enforce 'correct' behaviour upon the people. Dissent is out of the question. While everyday activities are regulated by this Statute, the space is regularly rented out for corporate events. As Staeheli and Mitchell (2008) noted, it was probably not surprising that privately owned spaces like shopping malls are stringently regulated given how monumental public spaces come with its own rigid set of rules. The state's attitude towards Dataran Merdeka indicates the lack of break from the colonial ideology, as proposed by Alatas (1977). The space is independent only in name.

This postcolonial mimicry is not only prevalent at the state but also societal level, since concerns of security and comfort also echoes the European colonial masters' tendency to avoid the Other (Dick and Rimmer 1998; Tedong, Grant, and Wan Abd Aziz 2015). This has resulted in a defensive strategy, open public spaces where possible encounters with strangers are to be avoided in exchange for spending time in an enclosed and controlled environment. The middle class would leave their air-conditioned homes in the morning, get into their air-conditioned cars, drive directly to their air-conditioned offices, and stop by the air-conditioned shopping malls on their way home (Dick and Rimmer 1998). The findings above by Shamsuddin (Shamsuddin, Hassan, and Bilyamin 2012, 175) that private vehicles are favoured over public transportation not because of the poor linkage but because the latter is uncomfortable also supports this argument. Tedong et. al. (2014; Tedong, Grant, and Wan Abd Aziz 2015) found that while fear is driving the demand for gated communities, and drive older neighbourhoods to informally adopt this form of enclosure, this fear is unfounded since the crime rate in Malaysia is generally low. The perception of threat is thus more potent (Davis 2018).

In summary, the neoliberal approach towards planning in Malaysia, where the production, destruction, and treatment of public space are aimed at maximising profit, has conceived a segregated landscape characterised by concerns of security and comfort, therefore reproducing colonial spatial patterns. The inequality has also resulted in the erosion of democratic rights and citizenship in public space as evidenced by how undesirable activities are constantly framed according to their potential threat to the production of capital. In this instance, the Malaysian public space has been inadequate in accommodating public claim-making, since its availability, access, use, and regulations are constrained by neoliberal principles.

Therefore, since no new meaningful public spaces are produced, and dissent in shopping malls is virtually impossible, contemporary protests still tend to take place in the old capital, Kuala Lumpur, even after the government has moved to the newly built administrative city, Putrajaya. This geography of protest will be discussed in further detail. However, before we delve deeper into how dissent manifests in the material space, it is necessary to present the context of discursive space where communication and negotiations about dissent take place.

§ 4.2 Malaysian public sphere

The Malaysian mediated public sphere of the pre-Internet era was characterised by state patronage and censorships (Leong 2015). Hence, although there was a concentrated public sphere which was indeed edited and curated by an elite, as Iosifidis and Wheeler (2016) argued, the monopoly also allowed the regime to manipulate the public sphere and shut down dissenting voices more easily (Figure 4.2). Before cable TV in the 1990s, there were two public television channels under the Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) and only one commercial channel, TV3, which is owned by proxies of the UMNO. Likewise, although there were more radio stations than television channels, they mostly served to convey information from the government to the public, and contents were rarely critical. Media Prima, an UMNO-linked company, owned all publicly available private television stations and most radio stations while the Utusan Melayu group own most of the newspapers (Abbott 2011, 14; George 2007, 896-97; Hopkins 2014, 10; Weiss 2012, 14). Opposition parties could hardly ever access the media, and because of this, could not counter-argue the negative portrayal of them (Gong 2011; Kim 2001, 73; Leong 2015, 53; Pepinsky 2013, 92; Sani 2005, 342). Under the Printing and Publication Act 1984, print media companies were required to renew their license annually, while the Broadcasting Act 1988 was also put in place to monitor the broadcasting agencies (Abbott, Macdonald, and Givens 2013, 111; Sani 2005, 342; Weiss 2012, 15). This ensured self-censorship, and since entry into the market was highly regulated, agencies did not face much competition from potential private broadcasting or printed media companies that could offer alternative content that could compete for attention from the same public.

FIGURE 4.2 Government's control over channels of communication. (Source: Author)

In 1996, the promise of no Internet censorship in the MSC Bill of Guarantees has expanded the Malaysian public sphere. Internet penetration in Malaysia is quite high, at 71 percent, according to the Freedom on the Net report 2016 by Freedom House. According to the 2016 Internet User Survey conducted by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 77.6 percent have access to Internet, while 96.5 percent of these are on Facebook. With the Internet, the 'one-to-many' model of mass media, where a select number of people prepare and control the content and the majority serves as audience is remediated as everyone can now participate in public interactions and debates (Rasmussen 2014, 1316). Cyberspace also enables 'transnational dialogical exchange' (Kellner 1998; Rheingold 2000) and has the potential to democratise access to information, undermine hierarchies, and facilitate transmission of debate to spatially dispersed areas (Iosifidis and Wheeler 2016).

The Internet is an infrastructure and not a medium (Rasmussen 2014, 1317) and in a hybrid state like Malaysia, it quickly became part of the infrastructure of protest (Liow 2012, 301; Postill 2014, 83). The 1998 Reformasi movement marked the beginning of online dissent since mainstream media could not be relied upon to relay information from the activists' side. The medium that activists used back then was a mix of listservs, email, blogs, and websites (Postill 2014, 83; Weiss 2012, 28, 2014, 100). Malaysiakini, an online news portal was launched around the time of Reformasi and became a popular alternative source of news and opinion pieces. A few other

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alternative news portals were also launched since then, and some have shut down like The Malaysian Insider (2008-2016), although the Editor, Jahabar Sadiq launched its reincarnation, The Malaysian Insight, in 2017.

Although the above may portray that the Internet is a democratising element in a hybrid state like Malaysia, Meredith Weiss has pointed out that the Internet is not always used for politics, with only 16 percent of the top fifty bloggers being political; the rest focus on entertainment (Weiss 2013, 599). People's attention has never been uniform, they also choose which topic to focus on, even in the pre-Internet era when the options were more limited (Webster 2013, 25). There is also a digital divide between urban and rural population at 75 percent of consumption by the urban population, although the difference is less pronounced now, and scholars have pointed out how digital information was transmitted into the physical realm via print-outs, CDs, SMS blasts, and through word of mouth (Liow 2012; Postill 2014, 87). Users are also divided along communal lines, discernible by language, and also interests. In a way, the digital divide portrays the Malaysian public, since the urban-rural divide can also be drawn along communal lines. Therefore, a Malay would be interested in accessing mostly Malay content, and likewise for the Chinese and Indian members of the public, whose Cantonese/Mandarin and Hindi/Tamil content could even come from sources abroad. Hence, just like interactions in the physical public space, the different ethnic groups may not necessarily encounter each other in the digital space. The contemporary Malaysian public sphere is made up of many 'public sphericules' that form around particular themes (Cunningham, 2001) that may come together to form 'issue publics' which emerge around temporary topics and events (Dahlgren, 2009) from time to time.

Even though the Internet was already part of the 1998 Reformasi, it was not until 2008 that new media 'came of age for political mobilisation' (Liow 2012, 301). While the websites, blogs, and listservs of Reformasi were effective at democratising access to information, the communication was one way, whereas the social media of Web 2.0 enabled users to simultaneously generate content and interact with each other enabling mobilisation (Leong 2015, 58). Since content-generation is no longer in the hands of a technically competent few, social media can easily be used to mobilise people and also to strategise, since anyone can post something and receive feedback almost instantaneously.

Three protests took place in late 2007, incorporating the use of Web 2.0 enabled social media, ushering in the election year of 2008. The Malaysian Bar Council organised a rally in September calling for an investigation of judicial corruption, and this was followed by the first Bersih protest on 10 November of that year. The third protest, organised by the Hindu Rights Action Front (Hindraf), protesting against discrimination

suffered by the Indian community, took place on 25 November, 2007 (Postill 2014, 87). Eliding authorities, communication about the protest took place (mostly) online through emails, blogs, and text messaging, and reportage was broadcast on Youtube and Facebook (Liow 2012, 303). A member of the ruling coalition admitted that the fate of the BN is now sealed after footage of Indian mothers with children being sprayed with water cannon went viral (Liow 2012, 303–4).

The terrible performance at the 2008 elections, where the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional did not win a two-thirds majority, served as a wakeup call for the authorities in terms of their digital presence. The pro-government factions have accused the opposition of having cybertroopers they call the Red Bean Army, whereas the term 'cybertrooper' itself, which is older, has typically been used to refer to pro-government social media users. Although the government initially denied that they have cybertroopers, they seem to have embraced the concept in recent years, with government ministers such as Mahdzir Khalid openly calling for UMNO members to engage in 'cyber wars' (The Star Online, 2015). Both Barisan Nasional and Pakatan Rakyat employ cybertroopers to conduct cyber attacks (Freedom House 2016; Leong 2015, 56–60).

The UMNO New Media Unit (NMU) was set up as a branch of the party's Youth Wing, which coordinated a network of bloggers, cybertroopers, and social media users to counter pro-opposition media content (Leong 2015, 56–60). As of 2012, the NMU had twenty-seven bloggers on board, and trained 1,800 members in social media (Hopkins 2014, 12). While Leong (2015) defined cybertroopers as separate from bloggers, Hopkins (2014), on the other hand, classified bloggers as cybertroopers, although both seemed to agree that these online media users are coordinated to counter content that support the opposing side. The NMU employed big data techniques to automatise the process of sifting through the big amount of social media data, and also employed outside talent — those who are not UMNO members and thus cannot be reprimanded by the party for disreputable behaviour — therefore allowing the NMU to distance themselves from these independent operators (Tapsell 2013, 627). Employing the economics of scale, cybertroopers could also potentially hijack a particular thread of discussion or communication, by flooding social media with their own messages. On Twitter, the account called @BNCybertroopers, active since April 2011, has 13,200 followers and posts either pro-government or anti-opposition propaganda materials. This is not to be confused with @BNCybertrooper, an account designed to 'troll'[18] the former with a more modest following of less than 2,000 followers. In this research's

18 'Troll' according to the Oxford dictionary: Make a deliberately offensive or provocative online post with the aim of upsetting someone or eliciting an angry response from them.

analysis of the twitter data gained from the Bersih 4 protest which took place in late August 2015, the pro-government cybertroopers can be detected from their bot-like content, specific hashtags and even their tweet-handles. This will be explained in further detail in Chapter Seven.

Regarding the political economy of social media, in the context of Malaysia we can discuss it in terms of how the state could possibly manipulate outcomes by directly engaging social media companies or even Internet providers. For example, during the Iranian election of 2009, the so-called Twitter Revolution, Twitter was supposed to shut down its services for maintenance works but was approached by the State Department to not do so, since Iranian dissidents were using Twitter to mobilise (Landler and Stelter 2009; Morozov 2011). Turkey simply shut down social media platforms when they thought it fitting to do — although the use of Facetime by Erdogan to communicate almost directly with individual Turkish people signifies that the shutting down of social media platforms was not because those in power were not social media savvy. While Malaysia has not blocked access to any social media sites, access to certain independent websites or newspapers has been blocked, indicating that blocking social media is always a possibility. During Bersih 4, the MCMC threatened to block websites that publicised the event (Freedom House 2016).

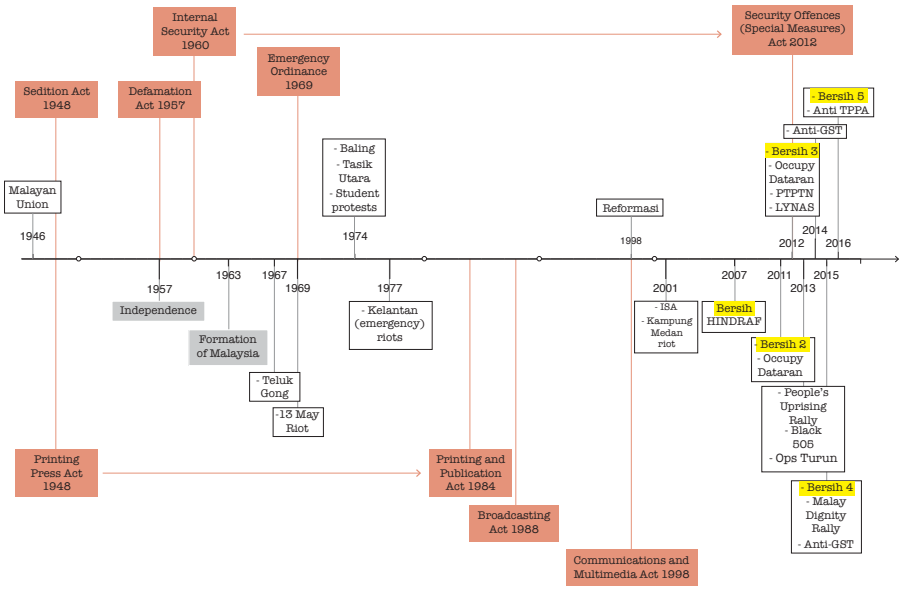

FIGURE 4.3 Timeline indicating the overlap between key protest events and laws and regulations. (Source: Author)

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Laws and regulations have evolved to adapt to the expanding public sphere (Figure 4.3). To regulate cyberspace, the Communications and Multimedia Act was passed in 1998 which replaced the Broadcasting Act 1988. An arrest was made in July 2016 over an 'insulting' tweet towards Prime Minister Najib Razak, under Section 233 of the Multimedia Communications Act 1998. After the activist Fahmi Reza was arrested under the same Act for depicting the Prime Minister as a clown, he started referring to it as Akta Sakit Hati (Hurt Feelings Act) and due to his large following on social media, especially on Facebook, this is how the Act has been referred to. The reach of this Act is however not only limited to the more public platforms like Facebook and Twitter, on 2 July, 2016, a seventy-six year old man was charged with the Act for sending an offensive image of the Prime Minister via Whatsapp (Bernama via Malaysiakini, 2016). In May and June 2016, no less than ten people were charged with 'Akta Sakit Hati' and the offences were always aimed at either Royalty or politicians. Together with the Printing and Publication Act 1984, they directly regulate the public sphere.

Apart from these, laws such as the Sedition Act 1948 and the Security Offences Special Measures Act 2012 (SOSMA) are also used to shut down dissent, often in the name of public order and security. The origin of both laws can be traced back to the British colonial period. While the Sedition Act 1948 is directly a colonial legacy, SOSMA was put in place to replace the Internal Security Act 1960 (ISA), which evolved from the Emergency Ordinance 1948. The Sedition Act prohibits activities which are deemed subversive and could disrupt peace and harmony; in practice it is used against activities which are viewed as debilitating to the government. In 2015 it was amended so that voicing dissatisfaction with the government or judiciary is no longer seditious, however, criticising the royal institution or religion could land one in jail. Disseminating subversive material could also be an act of sedition, hence retweeting or sharing posts on Facebook could get one arrested as well. According to Amnesty International (2016), at least ninety-one people were either investigated, arrested, or charged for sedition in 2015 alone. SOSMA on the other hand, allows for detention of up to twenty-eight days without trial and has been used to prosecute those who reported the 1MDB case. Apart from specific laws like those mentioned above, bloggers or online newspapers have also been charged with libel and defamation suits (Figure 4.4).

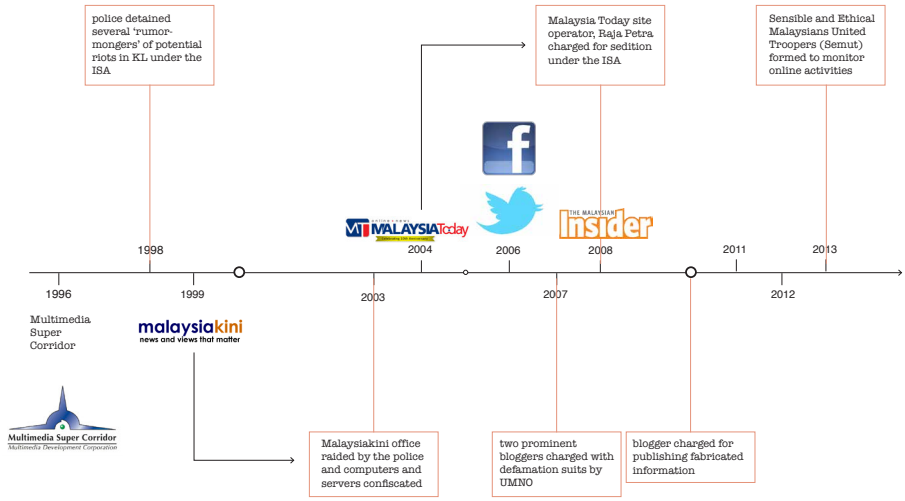

FIGURE 4.4 Law enforcement in comparison with key media landmark events. (Source: Author).

While new media had indeed opened up the Malaysian public sphere by democratising access to information and enabling political mobilisation, scholars have also warned us against solely crediting change to technology (Habermas 2006, 416; Rasmussen 2014). Terje Rasmussen (2014, 1327) succinctly summarised it, 'democracy is not to be found in cyberspace but in real society that includes analogue and digital communication'. Even though access to the same technology has been globally afforded and had indeed enabled the global protest phenomenon in 2011, how the technology is used, the ways the respective authorities responded, and how events unfolded in general were dependent on specific and complex local conditions. Therefore, the discussion of how social media is impacting the public sphere should also be treated with nuance, taking the context into consideration. Weiss (2013, 607-8) also reminds us about how the impact of this technology should be assessed in how its use translates into real-world action, as demonstrated by the Bersih rallies, but also how, despite their affordances, new media are also struggling with shifting collective identity, a very important factor that enabled the push for change. New media is not just a tool of communication, but also a social space where both established and new participants could interact (Weiss 2013, 592) — therefore contestation is inevitable, as evidenced by the increased efforts of the state to hegemonise the space. However, particularly interesting to this research is how activists and dissidents flocking to digital space due to limited access to physical public space, have actually resulted in public reclamations of the latter.

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§ 4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the Malaysian material and discursive public spaces are not just colonial legacies in terms of their material infrastructures and governing regulations, but also carry traces of colonial practices — specifically in how the control and surveillance are in line with the production of consumption spaces. The mimicry that manifested in how contemporary Malaysian society reflected the colonial attitude in its attitude towards public space — albeit segregating through class difference rather than ethnicity — also demonstrates the easy transition from colonialism to neoliberalism. However, the guarantee of no Internet censorship in order to attract investors had also, ironically, resulted in opening up the public sphere and democratised access to information. Therefore, while some scepticism should be reserved about how the improvement of public spaces in Kuala Lumpur are aimed at economic gains, and also the production of spaces of consumption takes precedence over public space, the availability of spaces to meet could indeed expand public participation as proposed by Hogan et al (2012: 61), and in the long view could have democratising effects as well.

It is within this controlled and surveilled space, where consumer identity is more important than citizenship, that dissent in Malaysia takes place. In the next chapter, we will see how dissent have unfolded within this online/offline setting.

5 Geography Of Protest

Chapters Three and Four have demonstrated how the architecture and public space of post-colonial Malaysia have been produced by particular socio-political conditions. It is against this backdrop that the empirical part of this research is presented. While most of the empirical data collected for this research have been derived from Bersih 4, before they are presented, it is most imperative that the trajectory of protests in Malaysian society is explained, with a focus on the geography of protests. This part is concluded with a spatial analysis comparing Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya, where the urban form and accessibility of both cities are appraised, in order to evaluate the publicness of both cities from the perspective of supporting/hindering public claim-making.

The data which informed this chapter came mostly from interviews and archival research. Findings from these exercises are then translated into maps. The maps in Section 5.1 were produced by mapping the paths and nodes of protests (discerned from the interviews and archival research) onto Google Maps. The maps are then exported into QGIS in order to be analysed. Put together, the proximity of the paths and nodes from different protests enabled the heatmap in Figure 5.10 to be produced, visualising the spaces which were used more than others.

§ 5.1 'Protest is not our culture': A geography of protest in Malaysia

§ 5.1.1 Protests before new media

After the first Bersih rally in 2007, the biggest street rally seen for a long time, Hishamuddin Hussein, who was then Malaysia's Minister of Education commented that 'street demonstrations are not part of our culture'(Demonstrasi jejas perpaduan 2009; Hisham: Street protests will only increase crime rate 2009). At the same time, Malaysia's official narrative of history celebrates the notion that independence was achieved not through a bloody revolution, but through negotiations with the British colonial masters, and this included the demonstrations that were organised by the

UMNO (which Hishamuddin is part of).[19] While it seems contradictory to demonise protest and then celebrate it in another instance, there is actually a logic to it. Street protests are more acceptable if they are against foreign entities or the opposition, and even encouraged if the cause enhances Malaysia's reputation, depending on the government's contemporary position on global issues. For example, it is possible to demonstrate in front of the US Embassy against the plight of the Palestinians, since Malaysia champions this cause, but protesting about local issues for which the government is responsible for would be frowned upon.

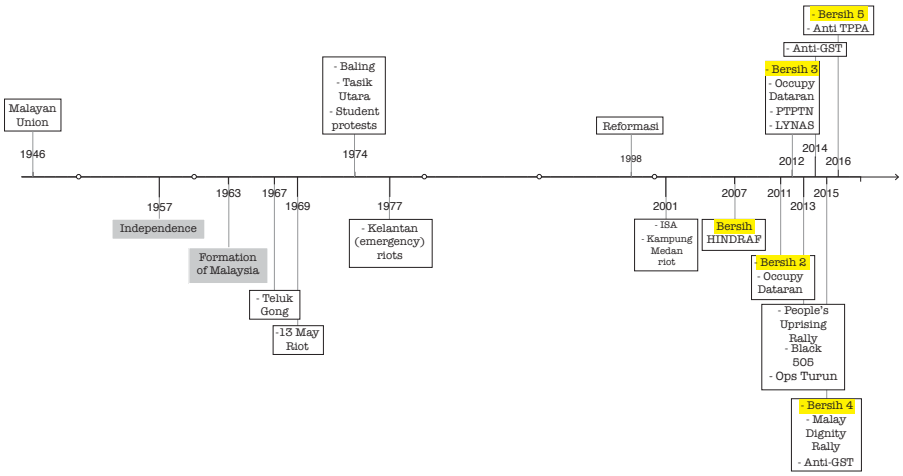

FIGURE 5.1 The timeline of street protests taking place in Malaysia since 1946

An examination of the situation before 2007 reveals that the relatively vibrant protest culture of today is indeed a contemporary phenomenon, since there was a relatively long quiet period since the mid-1970s, punctuated only by the Reformasi demonstrations in Kuala Lumpur in 1998 (Figure 5.1). Hence, Hishamuddin may not be completely off the mark, given the rather sporadic protest events taking place on the streets between mid-1970s and 2007. The source of pride of the official historical

19 UMNO was founded by Hishamuddin's grandfather, Onn Jaafar, who eventually left the party after his proposal to open up party membership to other ethnic groups was vehemently opposed. Hishamuddin, on the other hand, achieved instant fame when he wielded the *keris*, a traditional dagger symbolising Malay dignity at the party's Annual General Meeting in 2005. http://www.malaysia-today.net/hishammuddin-says-sorry-over-keris-waving/

narrative, the Malayan Union rallies in 1946, are an important landmark due to their role in securing independence from the British colonial masters. After the Japanese occupation ended in 1945, the British, upon their return, decided to pull together the various administrative structures of British Malaya into one, forming the Malayan Union. The signatures needed from the Sultans of the Malay states signifying their agreement to this arrangement were collected in a very short time (Miller 1965). The Sultans later on claimed that they were under duress since the new arrangement clearly further diminished their already reduced role in governance. The native Malays opposed the formation of the Malayan Union due to the reduced powers of the Sultans and also what was viewed as a loose policy of granting citizenship: these were deemed as jeopardising the position of the Malays in the multi-ethnic society. When two British Members of the Parliament (one Conservative and the other Labour) went to Malaya to gauge the mood of Malays and other races, they were met with protests wherever they went, with the full force in Kuala Kangsar where they consulted the rulers (Miller 1965).[20] The dissent against the Malayan Union gave birth to the UMNO, the leading organisation in the negotiations for independence, and since then, the major party in the ruling coalition. Although there were other non-communal, 'Malayan' organisations at the time, such as the All Malaya Council of Joint Actions (AMCJA) and also Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (Centre of People's Power), the British favoured the political parties that accepted the Malay-centric order they had sustained which were led by Western-educated elites and were capitalist in orientation (Weiss 2006). This violence-free narrative of independence has been contested by some, since it ignores the bloody Emergency period where the British attempted to flush out the communists from the jungle, that spatially also resulted in the New Villages which further entrenched segregation.

Post-independence, the period between 1967 to 1974 was characterised by a vibrant protest culture led by university students (Karim and Hamid 1984, 21 and 27; Weiss 2011). In the beginning of the 1960s, student activism was more limited to on-campus issues relating to student welfare (Karim and Hamid 1984, 1). Concerned with the plights of society, students came to the assistance of workers and peasants, helping organised labour to protest about their wages and working conditions. Peasants were evicted from the government land they squatted in Teluk Gong and Tasek Utara in 1967 and 1974, and together with the evicted squatters, students camped outside the State Secretariat buildings, and were also arrested together with the peasants (Karim and Hamid 1984, 21 and 27; Weiss 2011). The Tasek Utara incident was particularly

20 This protest was notable too because of the visible role that women played in it. The Sultana of Perak even led the protest, 'an unprecedented role for a ruler's wife.'

interesting since the arrest garnered further mobilisation and illustrated the close link between students in Malaysia and Singapore; students in Singapore protested in front of the Malaysian Embassy, while in Kuala Lumpur, about 2,500 students, joined by some lecturers and other intellectuals marched to the Prime Minister's office (Weiss 2011, 156). The next day, they were teargassed by the Federal Reserve Unit (FRU) and some were arrested, prompting students to take over the University Malaya campus (Weiss 2011). It all came to a head later that year. The Baling protest, which at its peak garnered 30,000 people converging in Baling in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia due to the drop of the price of rubber, was supported by students who not only went to Baling, but 5000 of them also protested in Kuala Lumpur on behalf of the peasants (Karim and Hamid 1984; Weiss 2011, 146). The FRU again tear-gassed the students, who then retreated to Masjid Negara. Having had enough, the authorities launched Operasi Mayang, where more than two dozen lecturers and students were arrested under the ISA and detained without trial in Kamunting (Weiss 2011, 159).

Prior to the 1969 General Election, students prepared their own manifesto and held rallies around the country, urging people to base their votes on issues and not on race (Weiss 2011, 146). However, a race riot broke out on 13 May in the streets of Kuala Lumpur. After the second election following Independence in 1957, in which the ruling coalition won by a small majority, the opposition parties Democratic Action Party (DAP) and GERAKAN held a 'victory' parade in central Kuala Lumpur which purportedly provoked and taunted the Malays, asking them to leave the city and go back to the 'kampung'.[21] The Malays retaliated and a race riot ensued, resulting in hundreds of casualties. The result of this riot was the resignation of Malaysia's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman and the installation of an affirmative action program, the NEP (Jomo 2004). This riot now serves as the bogeyman, typically dragged out either to halt demonstrations, or to remind the Chinese of their 'place'. The protests and demonstrations that happen in contemporary times took place in the same venues as these riots.

Apart from Operasi Mayang in December 1974, the state did another round of cleaning up in 1987 with Operasi Lalang, where around 100 politicians, lawyers, social activists, artists, and academics were arrested under the ISA (Weiss 2011). However, before both operations, the state had already introduced the University and University College Act in 1971 to address racial imbalance, prompted by the bloody aftermath of the 13 May,

21 According to the archive, the marchers held brooms in the parade to signify cleaning the city off Malays. The picture of one ethnically Chinese Bersih volunteer holding a broom at Bersih 4 in 2015 was passed around on social media in the attempt to portray to rally as repeating the 1969 riot.

1969 riots, where students of the Malay-only Institut Teknologi MARA were described in the official report as taking part. While students initially ignored the UUCA (1971) as evidenced by the events that transpired in 1974, the Act was ammended to be more stringent in 1975. Students were barred from joining political parties or activities. The UUCA (1971) was used to suspend or expel students, and, over time, together with the arrests, quelled the protest culture. The intellectual containment extended to academics as well, since the majority of the current crop of academics is made up of the post-NEP and post-UUCA generation, and had never experienced academic freedom (Weiss 2011, 226).

§ 5.1.2 After New Media

The government's efforts to clamp down dissent were effective, since the long period of relative inactivity that ensued was only broken down by the Reformasi rallies in 1998, the biggest street demonstration the country has ever seen since achieving independence in 1957 (Weiss 2006, 1). As mentioned before, the 1998 Reformasi rallies also marked the induction of online media into the ever-evolving infrastructure of protest. Anwar Ibrahim, then-deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia was sacked, arrested, and imprisoned on charges of corruption and sexual misconduct. His popularity propelled his supporters to go to the streets to protest. This led to calls for Reformasi, borrowing the concept from Malaysia's next-door neighbour, Indonesia, which had been in turmoil for some years and was going through its own Reformasi period against President Suharto at the same time. The Reformasi rallies resulted in a new political party in Malaysia called Parti Keadilan Nasional (Keadilan) helmed by the wife of Anwar Ibrahim, Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail. Together with other opposition parties, the coalition Barisan Alternatif (Alternative Front) was formed and together they managed to get 40 percent of the votes in the 1999 Malaysian General Election, with Keadilan gaining five seats. However, in the next election held in 2004, a major party component in the Barisan Alternatif, the Democratic Action Party (DAP) left the coalition, and Keadilan lost four of its five seats, with the sole remaining seat being Dr Wan Azizah's. The ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional (BN) won a landslide victory in this election with a 64 percent majority.

Before Anwar was arrested, he went on an eighteen-day tour of the country, rallying for support through his well-attended public lectures (Weiss 1999, 427). On 20 September, in the middle of the Commonwealth Games, when Queen Elizabeth II was in Kuala Lumpur, Anwar led a big rally through the city. While the Queen was scheduled to attend a service at a church on one side of Dataran Merdeka, Anwar was

addressing thousands of Reformasi protesters from the verandah of Masjid Negara, a kilometre away (Weiss 2006, 1). The crowd marched towards Dataran Merdeka, and in the ensuing days, rallies were held in the city centre in the vicinity of Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman and Kampung Baru, shadowing the riots of 1969 (Figure 5.2). Post-detainment, his supporters continued holding massive demonstrations in Kuala Lumpur every weekend, typically around the same area, and occasionally in other cities as well. The Reformasi movement somewhat rekindled student activism, in 2001, students held a protest against the ISA at Masjid Negara (Weiss 2011).

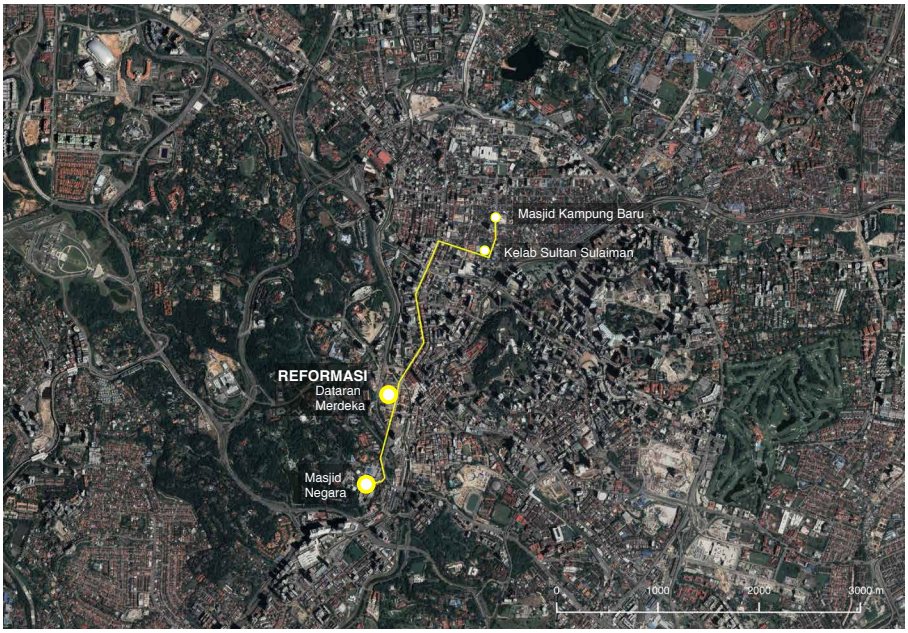

FIGURE 5.2 Reformasi in 1998. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018).

Although the government shifted to Putrajaya in 1999, a year after Reformasi, protests still have a tendency to take place in Kuala Lumpur. As discussed in Chapter Four, three protest events transpired in late 2007, setting the stage for the 2008 general election, where the BN coalition, although still winning the election, failed to get a two-third majority (Postill 2014, 87). Anwar Ibrahim had by then been released from prison, and his five-year ban from being politically active was lifted shortly before the twelfth Malaysian General Election of 2008. The opposition formed a new coalition, Pakatan Rakyat (PR), and managed to get almost 47 percent of the votes. The first Bersih on 10 November that year had added another layer to the existing geography of protest, although, after gathering at Masjid Negara and the vicinity of Jalan Tuanku Abdul

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Rahman and Pasar Seni, protesters marched to the Istana Negara (National Palace) to deliver a memorandum. Fifteen days later the HINDRAF protest took place, and since this protest was focused on how British colonialism resulted in the plight of the Indian community, it targeted the British High Commission on Jalan Ampang (Figure 5.3).

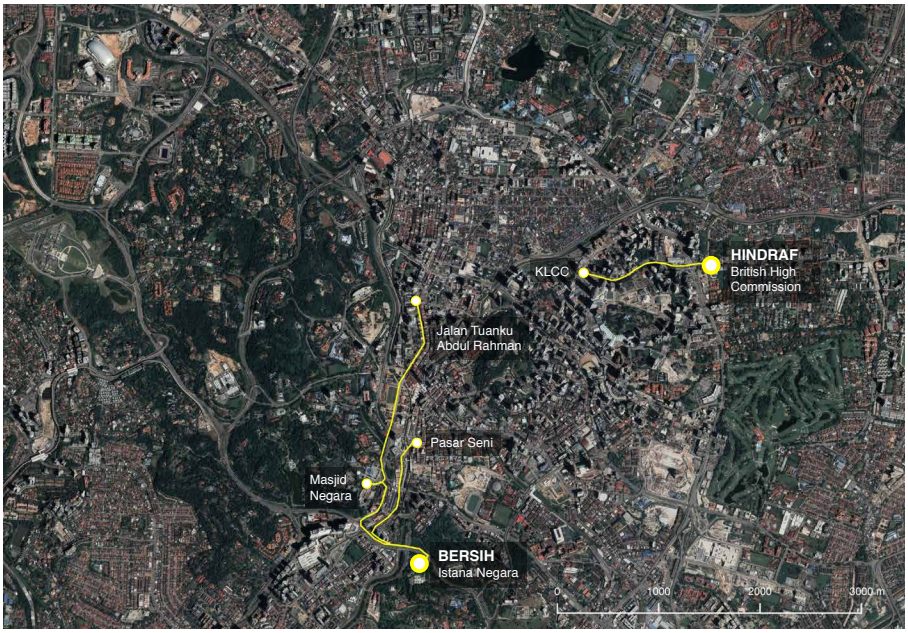

FIGURE 5.3 HINDRAF and Bersih in 2007. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018).

In 2011, another Bersih rally happened in central Kuala Lumpur. By this time, social media had fully been inducted into the infrastructure of protest. Bersih 2 was planned to take place in Stadium Merdeka, after a discussion with the Agong, but access to the Stadium was blocked by the authorities.[22] Clashes with police and the FRU ensued in the vicinity of Menara Maybank and Jalan Pudu, since small streets leading to Stadium Merdeka from the usual gathering places of Masjid Jamek and Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman would pass this way. Bersih 2 sparked a counter protest from a group of red shirted people calling themselves Patriots, led by Khairy Jamaluddin, the UMNO Youth Chief. Congregating in Jalan Bukit Bintang, the group was also planning to march to

22 Agong, from Yang di-Pertuan Agong, is the Malaysian head of state. An elected monarch, the Agong title passes from one Malaysian royal house to another every five years. The Conference of Rulers, made up of the monarchs from the nine royal houses, vote on this matter.

Stadium Merdeka to confront Bersih, but the clash with FRU at the intersection of Jalan Bukit Bintang and Jalan Pudu ensured that the two did not meet. Prior to that, the occupation of Dataran Merdeka had already taken place, although at this point, the Occupy Dataran group conducted their gathering only on Sundays from 8pm to 6am, and the group was mostly made up of students from the middle class (Fahmi Reza, 2014). Inspired by the Indignados movement in Madrid who started occupying Puerta del Sol in May, Occupy Dataran actually preceded Occupy Wall Street by a few weeks, but had mostly escaped attention (Figure 5.4).

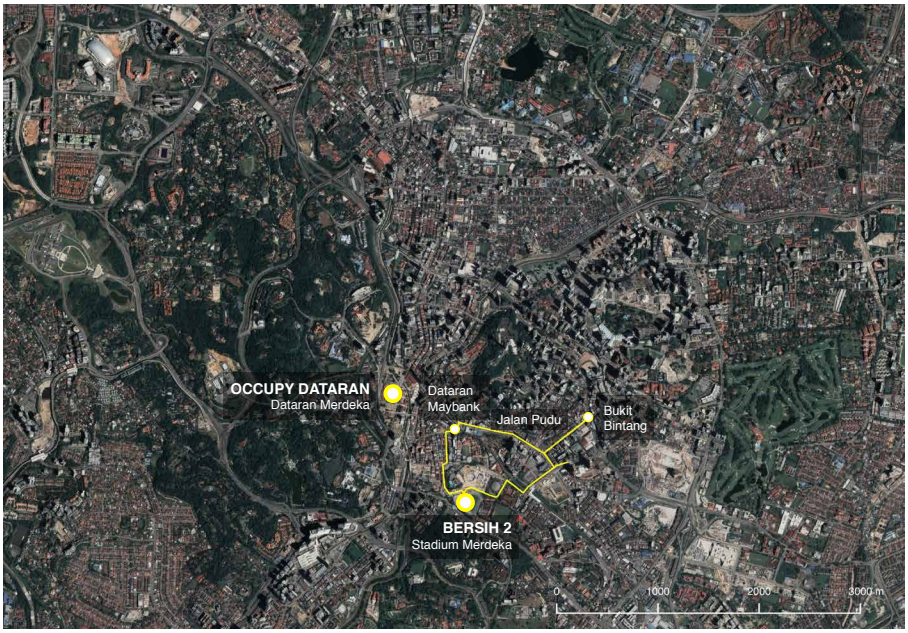

FIGURE 5.4 Occupy Dataran and Bersih 2 in 2011. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018).

2012 witnessed three consecutive protest events centered around Dataran Merdeka. The Occupy Dataran group continued to meet every weekend well into the year, mostly complying with the tight rules that regulated the use of the Dataran. On 14 April, a few hundred students protesting against the PTPTN student loan, started marching on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman from the SOGO shopping centre to Dataran Merdeka. The group proceeded to set up camp, insisting that they would stay put until Bersih 3, due to take place on 28 April. By now Occupy Dataran also stayed put, and together they occupied Dataran Merdeka, albeit still in two distinctive groups. The main driver behind Occupy, Fahmi Reza, expressed his disappointment in the students who in his view replicated the power structure, by maintaining a rigid hierarchy of organisation

and remaining aloof, instead of using the camp as an opportunity to explore and test other methods of organising (Fahmi Reza, 2014). The camp was raided a few times by the DBKL, and Fahmi Reza and Umar Azmi, a student leader, were arrested on 22 April. Occupy continued to stay until DBKL dismantled and confiscated their tents and belongings on 15 May. The Bersih 3 rally, on other hand, was boosted by other causes as well, such as the environmental activists who organised Himpunan Hijau (Green Assembly) around the KLCC area on the same day. Estimated to have been attended by 300,000 people, protesters gathered around the usual venues such as Masjid Negara, Masjid India, and Pasar Seni before marching to Dataran Merdeka. The only difference is the inclusion of Brickfields, which expanded the existing geography of protest (Figure 5.5). While protesters received the usual tear-gas treatment, Bersih 3 is notable for the beatings of those detained during the protest, which took place behind the Selangor Club (SUHAKAM 2013).

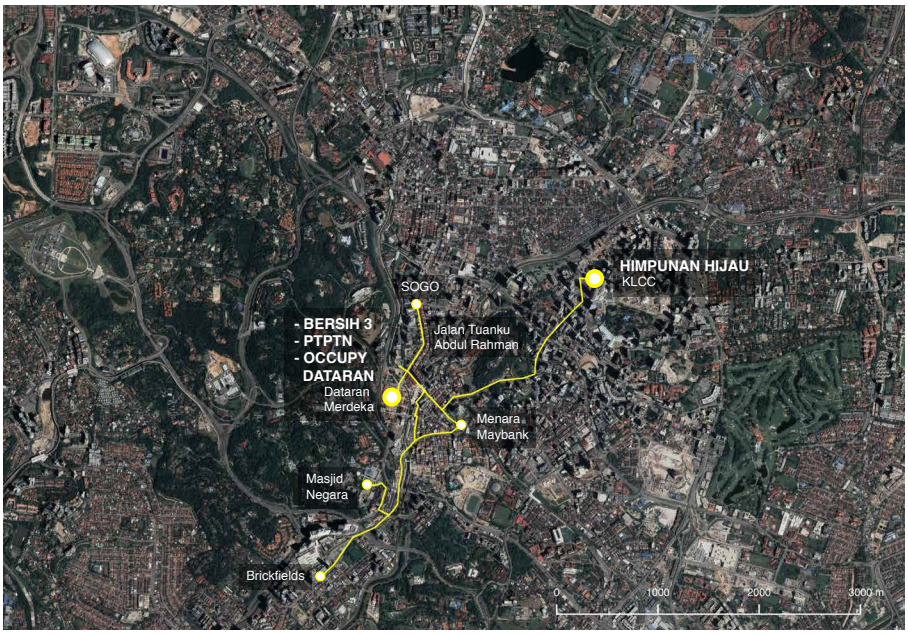

FIGURE 5.5 Occupy Dataran, Anti-PTPTN, followed by Bersih 3 and Himpunan Hijau in 2012. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018).

This trend continued in 2013, with the Himpunan Kebangkitan Rakyat (People's Uprising Rally) taking place in January joined by various protest movements with various causes. Held in Stadium Merdeka, the geography of protest kept on extending south-west into the suburbs of Petaling Jaya, with some protesters gathering in front of Amcorp Mall before beginning the long walk to the Stadium. A series of rallies, called

Black 505, was also held by the opposition who protested against the result of the 2013 General Election, of which they were convinced was wrought with foul play. The opposition actually won a bigger majority of votes this time, at almost 51 percent, but due to the way the constituencies were divided, the ruling coalition managed to win more seats and could set up government. The first rally took place in Stadium Kelana Jaya on 8 May, because of its location within the Selangor state which was governed by the opposition, before touring the major cities in West Malaysia. The final rally took place on 22 June in Padang Merbok, situated between Dataran Merdeka and the Parliament house. The year ended with Ops Turun on 31 December, an anti-price-hike rally attended by 30,000-50,000 people who gathered in the usual spots of SOGO shopping centre, Pasar Seni, and Masjid Jamek before marching to Dataran Merdeka (Figure 5.6).

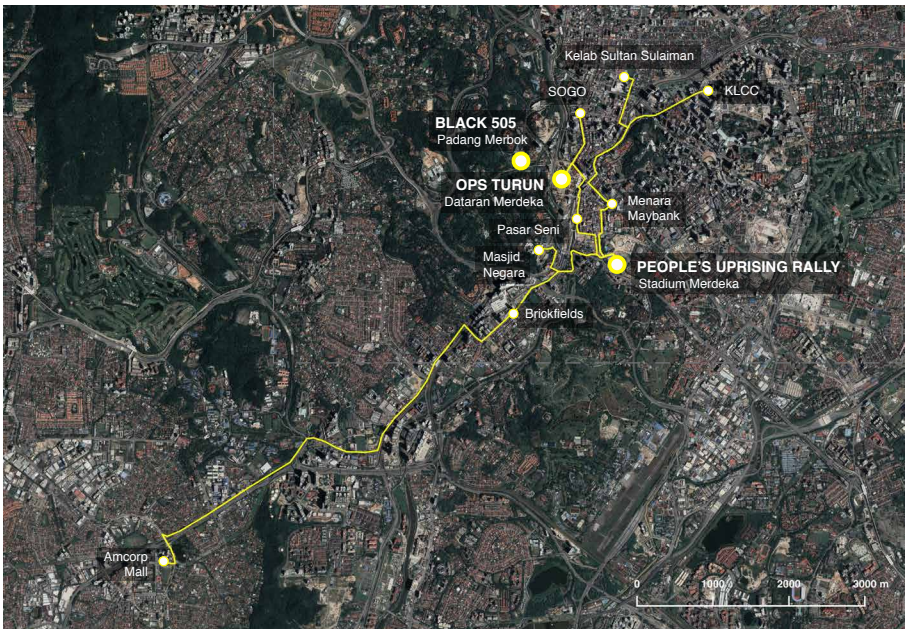

FIGURE 5.6 The geography of protest expanded well into the suburbs of Petaling Jaya in 2013, during the People's Uprising Rally. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018).

After Prime Minister Najib Razak announced during the Budget 2014 presentation that the Goods and Services Tax (GST) would be imposed, anti-GST rallies had been held on May Day 2014 and 2015, and also on 2 April 2016. The rallies traced the existing geography of protest, from KLCC to Dataran Merdeka (2014), from Masjid Jamek to KLCC (2015), and from SOGO to Dataran Merdeka (2016).

The Bersih 4 protest that took place in 2015 was remarkable for a number of things: it was the first Bersih that actually managed to occupy the streets, made possible by the lack of violent response from the authorities, and also faced intimidation from red-shirted counter-protesters, reminiscent of Bersih 2. However, unlike Bersih 2, while Bersih 4 happened at the end of August, marking the celebration of Independence Day, the Red Shirts took to the streets on 16 September, Malaysia Day (Figure 5.7). Events that transpired during Bersih 4 would be further elaborated later, since the empirical data of this research was mostly collected during this protest.

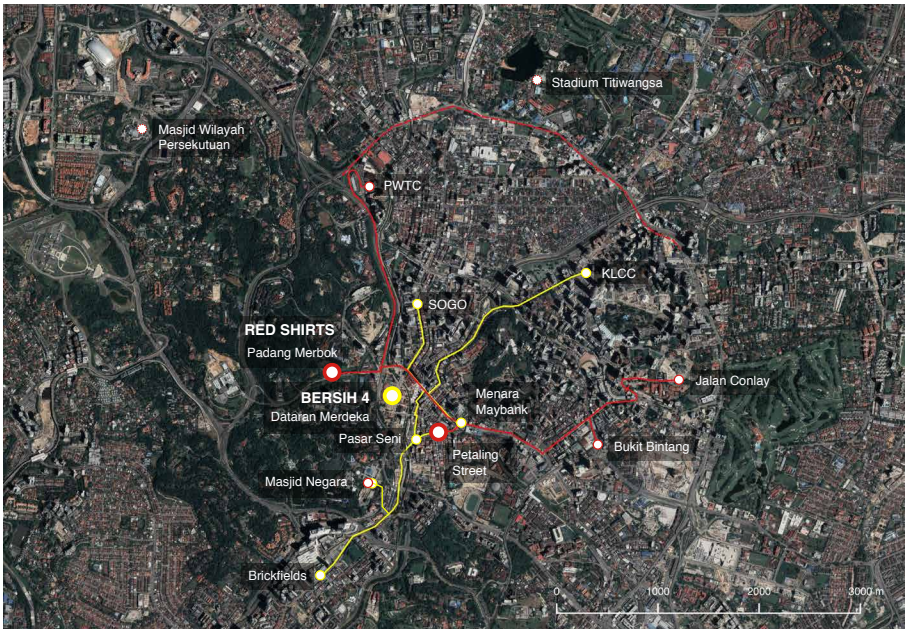

FIGURE 5.7 Bersih 4 in 2015 was met with a counter-protest by the Red Shirts. While Bersih chose the eve of Independence Day (31 August) to occupy the streets, the Red Shirts opted for Malaysia Day (16 September) two weeks after. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018).

Bersih 5 took place in 2016, and again, attempted to congregate on Dataran Merdeka. The authorities, wary of this, started expanding the radius of the road blocks, forcing Bersih to reroute to KLCC. Both Bersih 4 and Bersih 5 marked the appearance of Mahathir Mohamed, infamous for shutting down dissent during his tenure as prime minister, now ironically lodged on the opposing side of the state. While the rally itself was not unusual, the events that transpired before and after Bersih 5 were particularly interesting. While pre-rally mobilisation for previous Bersih rallies had mostly depended on social media, and to some extent, mainstream media, due to the publicity caused by the reaction of the authorities, this time around, Bersih decided to

transcend into the physical space by organising a series of convoys all over Malaysia. On every weekend between 1 October and the actual rally on 19 November, six convoys covering various parts of Malaysia would start traveling from one to city to another, and in the next weekend, they would pick up where they left off the weekend before (Bersih, 2016). While the objective stated was to inform the people by handing out flyers and engaging them in conversation, the spectacle that ensued when they were violently harassed by UMNO members might have actually helped to publicise the actual rally. The arrest of various key persons before the protest, particularly Maria Chin Abdullah, Bersih's chairperson, who was charged under SOSMA and placed in solitary confinement, prompted supporters to rally around her after Bersih 5. Enraged by the arrest, groups of people started congregating outside the police station where Maria Chin was taken to, and vigils were held nightly on Dataran Merdeka despite being chased away by the authorities (Figure 5.8). On 23 November, hundreds of women marched from Padang Merbok to the Parliament, demanding the release of Maria Chin (Achariam 2016). When she was finally released after more than ten days in solitary confinement, Maria addressed her supporters at the vigil on Dataran Merdeka

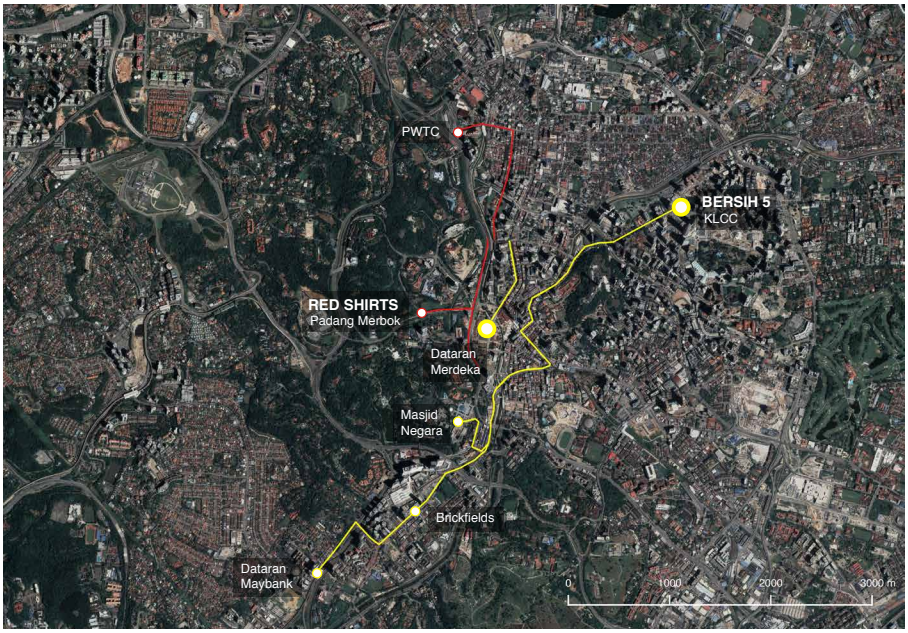

FIGURE 5.8 The gathering points for Bersih 5 were more linear, indicating the organiser's intent to build up the crowd from one point to the next until the reach Dataran Merdeka. They were forced to reroute to KLCC due to the roadblock which started just after Brickfields. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018).

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The description above has demonstrated how the vibrant protest culture in Malaysia before 1974, where students were at the forefront of dissent, coincided with the more global unrest of 1968. This happened again in 2011, with Bersih 2 taking place in the same year as Occupy and the Arab Spring. The brutal response of the state towards protesters, the series of arrests and detention of dissenting voices under the ISA, coupled with the enactment of the UUCA 1971, had produced intellectual containment, and largely, but not completely, quelled dissent between 1974 to 2007. Coincidentally, while the more established universities were typically situated in urban centres, the rapid proliferation of public universities witnessed new campuses built in far-flung areas (Weiss 2011). While the state reasoned that new universities are used as catalysts to speed up urbanisation in rural areas (Zakaria and Abdullah 2017), and this does indeed happen, since the large population of a university would ensure a whole urban system could exist to serve its functions, encounter between students from different universities, or the general public, tend to be limited.

Even though protest culture was revived in 2007, around the same time that social media started appearing thus indicating the inclusion of more sophisticated technology, the geography of protest remained somewhat the same. While certain protests could take place either where the causes or target of protests were, such as squatting communities about to be demolished in 1974 or at the British High Commission in 2011, others would tend to fall back on the existing geography of protest, the same few stretches of streets within a three-kilometre radius of Kuala Lumpur's historic centre (Figure 5.9). Interestingly, the events that transpired around Bersih 5 indicated how this social movement born in the age of social media has now complemented its online mobilisation with old-school methods of engaging people in the streets, and together with the various vigils and rallies prompted by the arrest of Maria Chin, pointed towards a public increasingly emboldened to take their grievances from the online space to the public square.

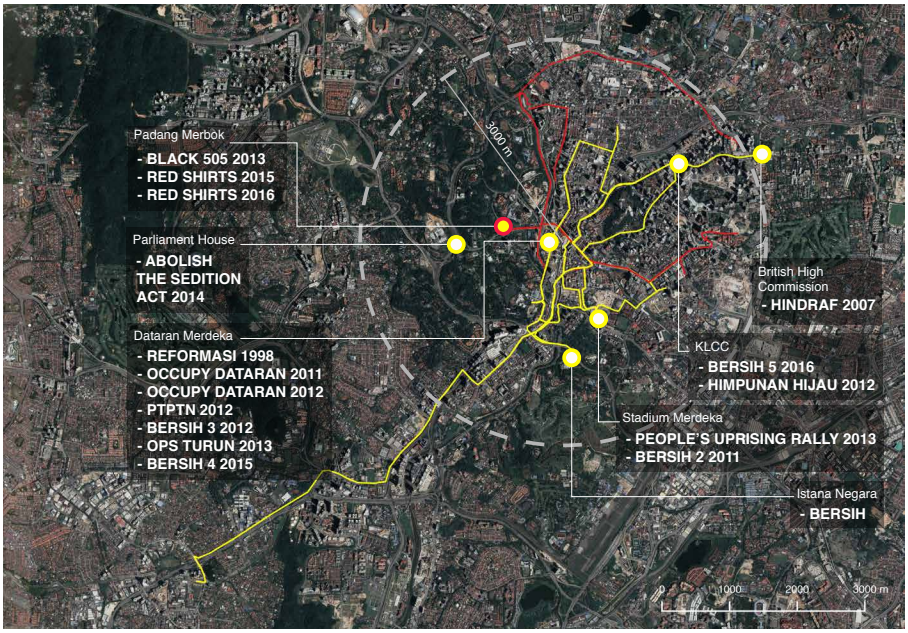

FIGURE 5.9 The geography of protest in Kuala Lumpur. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018).

While Figure 5.9 demonstrates how the geography of protest in Kuala Lumpur revolves around the same spaces, it must be remembered that protesters did not always manage to access the spaces intended. If Figure 5.9 indicates the intended venues of protests, Figure 5.10, on the other hand, reveals the spaces protesters actually used the most. By putting together all the data from Figures 5.2 to 5.8, a heatmap analysis on QGIS visualised the paths most trodden by the protesters. Three main protest nodes are recognised: Menara Maybank, Masjid Jamek LRT Station, and the northern entrance of Dataran Merdeka. These nodes lie on Jalan Tun Perak, a space of everyday life. This analysis is further elaborated in Section 7.2.

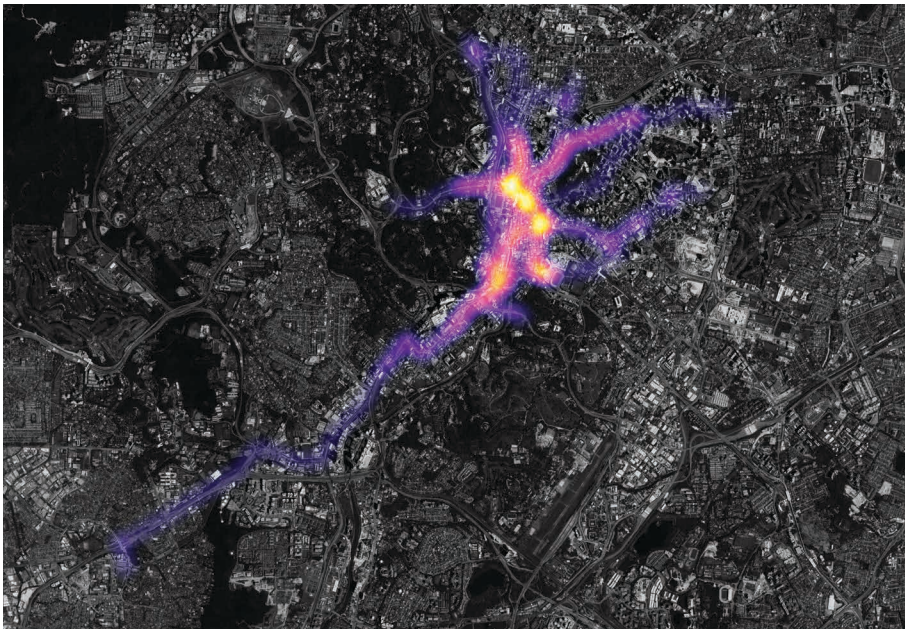

FIGURE 5.10 The heatmap indicates the frequency of protest based on the paths actually taken by protesters, regardless of whether they were successful to reach the space originally intended. The three glowing spots in a linear are Menara Maybank, Masjid Jamek, and the northern entrance of Dataran Merdeka. All three lie along Jalan Tun Perak. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018).

§ 5.2 Urban planning and street protest

Why are protests more prone to take place in Kuala Lumpur, even after the majority of government functions have moved to Putrajaya? According to interviewee A from Bersih, transportation is a major concern, indicating that the logistics of getting people to Putrajaya is complicated. Interviewee B, a member of PAS, the Islamic party, who had participated in a number of protests, explained how a protester would make their way into the city hours before the protest is due to begin. Muslim protesters tend to congregate around Masjid Negara so that they could easily perform prayers and get some rest before the start of the protest. B then claimed that Chinese protesters, on the other hand, would most likely go to Chinatown, so that they could get something to eat. This area is accessible by various transportation modes, all the public-transportation systems mentioned before have stations here (LRT, Monorail, Commuter) — and apart from this intra- and inter-city connections within Greater Kuala Lumpur, long-distance

buses and trains also stopped in Puduraya bus station and KL Sentral respectively.[23] Therefore, it was possible to take the night bus to Kuala Lumpur, arrive in the morning and disappear into the crowd before the protest was due to start, and after the protest had finished take the bus back home. The possibility to melt into the crowd was made possible by the mix of programmes in central Kuala Lumpur, where a wide range of retail activities co-exist with entertainment and service industries, and these are all served by various eateries and restaurants dotted around the city centre. The relatively tight urban form, coupled with meandering streets make this area a hotbed for protest since the network of streets together with the various programs assist protesters to escape from the authorities. Protesters could pretend to be shoppers, adding to the frustration of the police, as the Reformasi rallies had demonstrated in 1998 (Khoo 2002). During Bersih 3, police raided hotels in the vicinity of the protest due to suspicion that some protesters took refuge there. Interviewee C even traced the route that he and his friends took to escape after the violent turn in Bersih 2, when the police tear-gassed and shot protesters with water cannon. He indicated where they were in the compound of Tung Shin Hospital and took the researcher through the small streets they used to get to Bukit Bintang, in order to escape from the police.

A comparison between Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya is made in order to understand why protests have the tendency to happen more in the former than the latter, even though the government functions that were often being protested against had moved to Putrajaya in the late 1990s. Based on the information gained from interviews, a spatial analysis was conducted focusing on accessibility, urban form, and also the land use of the area, although extra care was taken when identifying the different programmes at the individual plot level within the larger category typically presented in land-use maps. Given that these are aspects determined at the planning and design levels, they explain how the architecture of the city, enables or disables the performance of democracy.

23 Long distance buses had stopped service at Puduraya since 2015, apart from a few destinations. Buses now stop at the Terminal Bersepadu Selatan (TBS - Integrated South Terminal) at the periphery of Kuala Lumpur and is connected to the city centre and the suburbs via rail services.

§ 5.2.1 Accessibility

Accessibility is measured according to the time it would take to walk from a light rail transportation (LRT) station to the protest venue. For Kuala Lumpur, the research used Dataran Merdeka as the node to be measured, since Figure 5.9 demonstrates how it was the preferred venue for protest. For Putrajaya, two nodes were assumed as the hypothetical venues, given the function and importance of these institutions. These are the Palace of Justice and the Prime Minister's Office. The analysis was conducted in QGIS using the OSM plugin where the program automatically calculated and drew a radius of how far one could get in ten, fifteen, and thirty minutes of walking from a point determined by the researcher. The results can be seen in Figures 5.11, 5.12, and and 5.13.

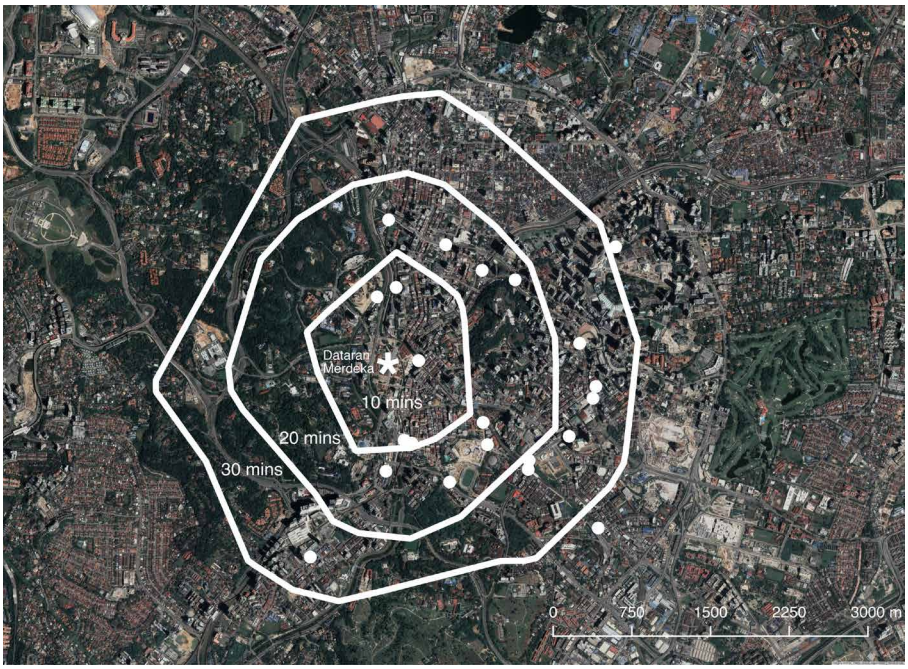

FIGURE 5.11 Walking distance measured in time (10, 20, and 30 minutes) from Dataran Merdeka. There are five rail stations within ten-minutes of walking, eight within twenty-minutes, and the Dataran is reachable within thirty-minutes of walking from seven rail stations. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018)

Figures 5.11 shows how the preferred protest venues together with the favoured gathering spots are accessible by public transportation, specifically rail transit. The Dataran could be reached within ten minutes on foot from five rail stations.

Although three of these belong to the same rail line, and actually cross paths on the station closest to the Dataran (six minutes), the proximity of these stations also offer protesters the option of approaching the Dataran from different directions. Protest organisers, especially those whose causes were usually frowned upon by the authorities, routinely found that access to their intended venue were blocked, so usually other gathering spots (in red) within close proximity were also identified, and protesters would march together to the intended venues together from these spots. Parliament, it could be argued, is the only meaningful government institution still present in the city, and has also been a preferred venue for protest, especially smaller and/or more targeted rallies. For example, the Repeal the Sedition Act protest organised by lawyers in 2014 was held in front of the Parliament because of its legislative functions.

Putrajaya, on the other hand, is only served by one rail transit station, which it shares with Cyberjaya (Figure 5.12). Because of this, the station is situated at the peripheral border shared between the two places. The Express Rail Link (ERL) is built as a speedy connection between KL-Sentral and KLIA, and only has five stations in between. The distance between the Putrajaya/Cyberjaya stop and the stations before and after it is about twenty kilometres respectively, and so potential protesters would not have any other options apart from using this station. From the station, it takes forty minutes to walk to either the Prime Minister's Office or the Palace of Justice, where some protests have taken place. Figures 5.12 and 5.13 indicate how the train station is well outside the reach of both Palace of Justice and Prime Minister's Office, even after thirty-minute of walking. Due to the distance, the most feasible way, other than using the ERL, is to come by motor transportation. According to Syahredzan Johan, a human rights lawyer, before the lawyers marched to the Parliament in Kuala Lumpur in 2014, calling for the Sedition Act to be abolished, they had already tried to carry out a similar protest in Putrajaya in 2007 (Johan, personal communication, 2014). The buses chartered to take the lawyers to Putrajaya were stopped a few kilometres away from the boulevard and lawyers had to walk the rest of the way in the tropical sun, while clad in their customary black suits.

FIGURE 5.12 The Express Rail Link (ERL) station is well outside the thirty-minute walking radius from the Palace of Justice. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018).

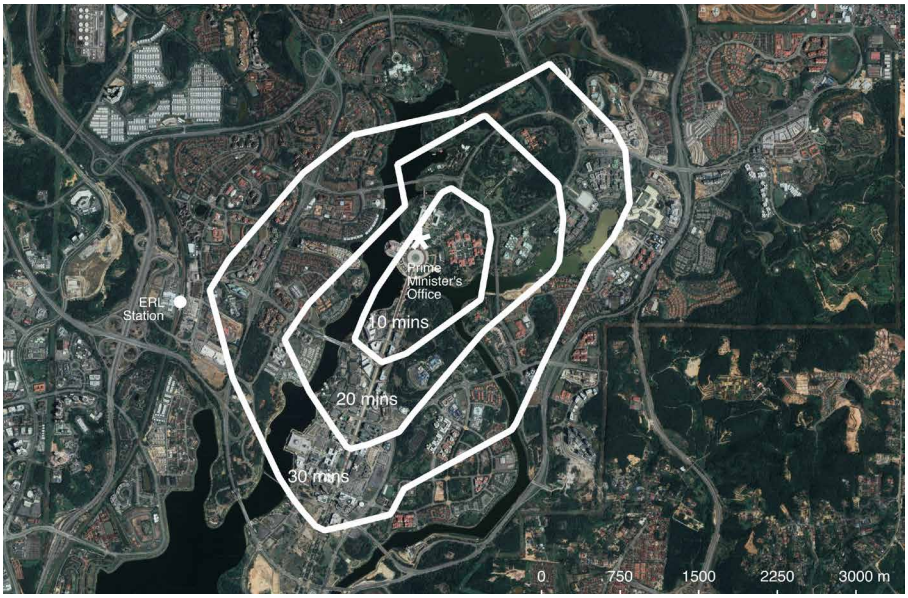

FIGURE 5.13 Walking distance measured in time (10, 20, and 30 minutes) from the Prime Minister's Office. Just like the Palace of Justice, the ERL station is well out of the thirty-minute walking radius from the Prime Minister's Office. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018).

§ 5.2.2 Land-use patterns

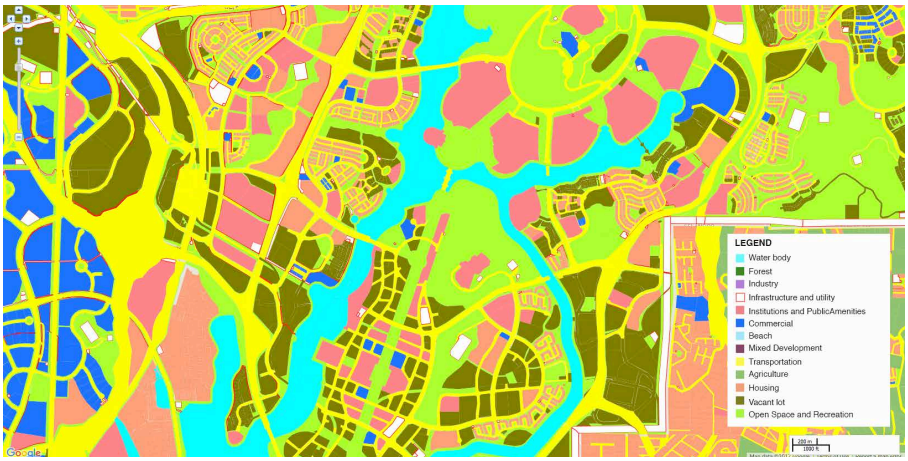

FIGURE 5.14 The strict land-use zoning of Putrajaya, where the separation of functions is well-defined. (Source: www.iplan.townplan.gov.my)

Since Putrajaya is purpose built for administration, and other functions such as housing and commercial activities solely exist to support this main function, the buses transporting the lawyers to Putrajaya in 2007 must have been even more conspicuous due to the rather strict land-use zoning of Putrajaya. As Figure 5.14 shows, the land use of this area which comprise the ERL Station and the main boulevard where the Prime Minister's Office and the Palace of Justice are situated, is overwhelmingly dominated by institution and housing functions, with a sprinkling of commercial functions. While the conspicuousness could be argued as something positive, since it means that the protest is visible, the mono-functional land use also means that the audience of the protest is mostly limited to civil servants, who are constrained from participating. Also, since big protests like Bersih tend to be organised in the weekend to ensure a higher number of participants, this is akin to protesting in a ghost town. On the street level, the strict zoning is also problematic for protesters for two other reasons: the mono-functional land use would mean that should the authorities decide to round up protesters, there would be no opportunities to run and camouflage themselves as say, shoppers, since the commercial functions are extremely limited. Another reason is, although organisers such as Bersih would routinely remind protesters to equip themselves with a bottle of water and some light snacks to sustain themselves during the protest, the lack of commercial functions in this area would mean that there is very little chance for protesters to find emergency provision. Interviewee D also noted the difficulty of buying a bottle of water during protest in Brazilia, the purpose built

Brazilian capital (Interviewee D, personal communication, 2014).

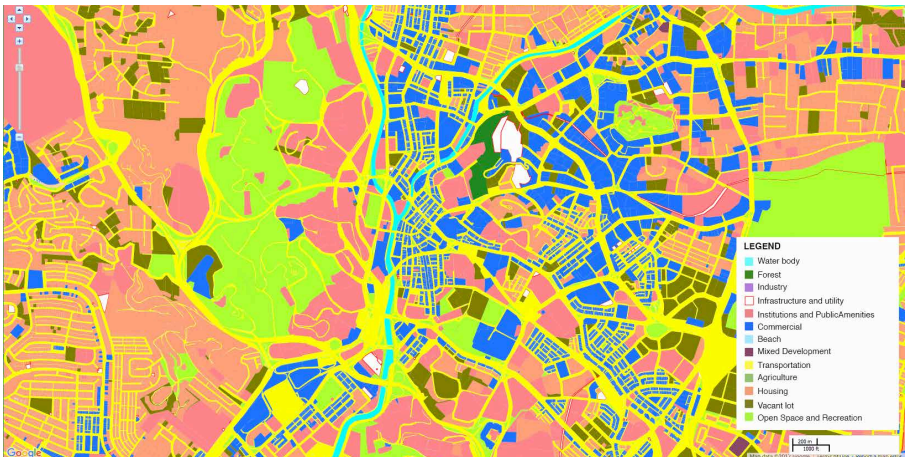

FIGURE 5.15 Land-use distribution of Kuala Lumpur. (Source: www.iplan.townplan.gov.my)

FIGURE 5.16 A more detailed land use map indicating type of program and function according to building plot. (Source: www.iplan.townplan.gov.my)

Kuala Lumpur, being the capital which grew organically, has more mixed functions. In Figure 5.15, while the city centre is mostly dominated by commercial functions, these are interspersed with housing and institutional functions as well. Figure 5.16 shows a more detailed breakdown of the land use. Commercial functions in the city centre are diverse, comprising offices, shopping complexes, restaurants, hotels, and

various retail activities. The diversity of functions would mean that the people present in the city would be there for various reasons, and the city is not dead in the weekend. While this means that protesters could melt into the crowd (Interviewee B, personal communication, 2014) and use other identities such as shoppers to camouflage themselves from the police should the authorities decide to round them up (Khoo, 2002), protests in Kuala Lumpur would also benefit from having a variety of people as audience, whose activities in the city could have been disrupted by the protest. It is this potential disruptiveness that gives protest its power. Since Kuala Lumpur is a much older city than Putrajaya and supports a variety of functions that have been around for a long time, protesters would find Kuala Lumpur more familiar than Putrajaya, since even if they probably do not use the city centre on a daily basis, the chances of them having visited Kuala Lumpur before are higher than Putrajaya.

§ 5.2.3 Urban form

FIGURE 5.17 Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya urban forms. (Source: Google Maps, 2018)

Urban form influences street protests in two ways: the movement trajectory of a protest, and the production of image. Street protest is an activity that requires visibility in order to be noticed, and yet at the same time, the possibility of escape, should there be clashes. While wide and uninterrupted boulevards may seem like a great setting for a protest march, Baron Hausmann cut Paris through with this typology in order to quell dissent, since boulevards enable troops to penetrate the city easier, and at the same time limit the ability of protesters to construct barricades (Lynch, 2014: 164). Mahathir fashioned the boulevard of Putrajaya in the same way, citing the parades in Parisian boulevards as one of the inspirations for Putrajaya in his memoir (Mohamad 2011). In 2014, Mahathir reiterated again this point, specifically mentioning Champs-

Élysées, a ‘shopping and tourist hub’ as a reference, correcting the statement made by a Malay NGO that Putrajaya was based on Madinah, Saudi Arabia (Kanyakumari, 2014). This incident is particularly interesting in a number of ways. One, the aspects of Parisian boulevards that Mahathir cited as inspiring all point to a vision of a vibrant city underlined by consumption, i.e parades, tourists, shopping, etc. Two, the context in which the statement was made: the controversy around the potential opening of a Hard Rock Cafe in Putrajaya, which would sully the image of the Putrajaya as an Islamic city that the Malay NGO claimed was inspired by Madinah. The grand scale of the boulevard in Putrajaya is intimidating to a pedestrian, the feeling is more akin to walking in Brasilia or the Malaysian North-South Highway, than Paris (Sim, 2016). Protesters in Kuala Lumpur on the other hand, evading surveillance, could appear to suddenly materialise from the nooks and crannies provided by the city, all clad in the coloured t-shirt of the protest once it begins (Sim, 2016). The organic urban form and street network assist protesters to escape any clash, using the '*lorong tikus*' (rat alleys) as described by Interviewee C in his experience of Bersih 2. Supported by the mix of programmes, protesters could camouflage themselves into other identities in two or three turns in the streets.

The production of images is essential to contemporary protests, where the images produced in the physical public spaces are transmitted into the public sphere, therefore broadcasting and amplifying the protest (Parkinson, 2011). Images of the event also serve as a powerful symbolic representation of the protest, such as the 1989 Tiannamen Square's 'tank man', or more recently for the Black Lives Matter movement, the Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge image of an African-American woman in a dress facing off policemen clad in riot gear. These images can at times turn into protest avatars, such as how the image of Khalid Said has been used as a 'mimetic signifier' of the Arab Spring (Gerbaudo 2015). Since the production of image is crucial for the impact of the protest, to be broadcasted and go viral on social media, the backdrop is thus important. The connectivity of Kuala Lumpur, as discussed earlier, enable protesters to access the protest venues from multiple points of entry, who then converge into the ten to twenty-metre-wide urban streets, filling them up, and therefore giving the impression that the protest is supported by many. The same number of people, which is already difficult to gain in inaccessible Putrajaya, would have the impossible task of filling up the 100-metre-wide, four-kilometre-long Perdana Boulevard. The scale difference of the urban forms between Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya either amplifies or diminishes the impact of the image. Therefore, the tight urban form of Kuala Lumpur is better as a stage for the performance of public claim making.

§ 5.3 Conclusion

Using street protests as a lens, an urban-planning assessment of both Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya was conducted in order to understand how the design of a city could enable or hinder the performance of democracy. Kuala Lumpur is compared with Putrajaya because while Kuala Lumpur is the capital, most government functions had already moved to the purposely built instant city of Putrajaya since 1999 but protests still take place in the former. Both cities are also spatially very different from each other, further enabling the comparison. While Kuala Lumpur grew organically, is host to different functions, and is defined by a colonial urban form, Putrajaya, built from scratch, is planned, has strict zoning, and a more monumental scale. Kuala Lumpur is more supportive of street protests from an urban-planning perspective because the multiple choice of transits makes it more accessible, the mix of functions provides comfort (food and sleep) to protesters and offers refuge in the form of enabling the camouflaging of identity, and the tight urban form not only facilitates access and escape but is also better at serving as a backdrop for the production of images. While protest in Putrajaya is not impossible, given the very nature of protest which is to defy — the lack of accessibility, strict zoning, and a grand scale of urban form, the organisation of protest in Putrajaya would have to go beyond what is deemed sufficient for Kuala Lumpur. This is a monumental task for a protest organiser in a society only learning how to protest again like Malaysia. Co-presence (the proximity of other people) facilitates participation of protest, while distance hinders mobilisation (Tilly 2003, 221), and this has been demonstrated in the comparison between Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya. Since accessibility, land use, and urban form are determined by city planners and administrators, especially for an instant city like Putrajaya, the architecture of the city can be designed to enable or disable the performance of democracy. The architecture of Putrajaya is not just a mimicry in terms of the jumble of styles borrowed from elsewhere imposed on the structures and urban design, but in disabling the performance of democracy, the planning mimics a colonial attitude towards space. Putrajaya, the seat of the democratic government in this sense is less democratic than Kuala Lumpur, the city that was founded during the colonial period. Thus, while the colonial hybridity of Kuala Lumpur makes it subversive due to the traces of power vacuum created upon the departure of the British, the expression of power is very clear in Putrajaya. The contrast further establishes Kuala Lumpur as a subversive third space, exemplified by the thickening radical layer on its historic core.

6 Bersih 4

The previous chapter provides an overview assessment of the geography of protest based on the trends that had developed over the years. This chapter aims to provide an opportunity to understand this geography from the street level, focusing on the Bersih 4 protest. The space is now three-dimensional. The description of events covering the time when the protest was first announced up until the counter-protest organised by the Red Shirts two weeks later demonstrates the interactive deliberations taking place in public sphere and the streets, revealing the politics of space.

§ 6.1 Background

Bersih 4 was the fourth rally organised by the civil society coalition Bersih 2.0. Taking place over two days from 1400 hours on 29 August to just before midnight on 30 August 2015,there were three official venues: Kuala Lumpur in Peninsula Malaysia, and Kuching and Kota Kinabalu in East Malaysia (Borneo). However, smaller rallies were also held in various places, mostly outside the country, organised by Malaysians who were living abroad – these were loosely coordinated by Global Bersih, an advocacy arm of Bersih 2.0 which is registered in Geneva as a non-profit association.

The protest was triggered by the 1MDB corruption scandal in Malaysia, concerning the mishandling of public funds, implicating Prime Minister Najib Razak when RM2.6 billion (€533 million) was traced to his private bank account. 1MDB (1 Malaysia Development Berhad) is a strategic development company wholly owned by the government of Malaysia. Funds allegedly misappropriated from 1MDB moved globally, and was used to fund things like the film *Wolf of Wall Street*. Even though the 1MDB case is being investigated in ten different countries, the investigation in Malaysia was officially halted by the authorities after the Attorney General cleared it (Adam and Arnold 2018).[24] While the Prime Minister did not deny that the money was in his account, he failed to give a satisfactory explanation about how it ended up there. It was brushed off as a donation from Saudi Arabia. The Public Accounts Committee

24 The Attorney General, Mohamed Apandi Ali, was appointed on 27 July 2015 to replace Abdul Gani Patail, who was heading the task-force investigating the misappropriation of funds.

investigation into the matter was halted due to a cabinet reshuffle, in which the head of the committee, Nur Jazlan, was transferred to the Home Ministry and appointed the Deputy Home Minister. The Deputy Prime Minister, Muhyiddin Yasin, was also fired, along with a few others.

Bersih 4 was significant because it triggered a reaction, with the Red Shirts mirroring Bersih 4 by taking to the streets. While Bersih 4 took place on the eve of the celebration of Independence Day (31 August), the Red Shirts also chose a significant date to organise the Malay Dignity Rally, 16 September, the date Malaysia first formed as a country back in 1963. When the Red Shirts first made its appearance, they protested against Bersih, whom they argued was damaging the country. Later on, the protest was reframed as a Malay reaction against the 'Chinese-dominated' Bersih. The rally was spearheaded by members of UMNO, and was attended by ministers and other prominent UMNO figures, even though UMNO itself denied involvement in the rally. Even though the Malay Dignity Rally also took place in Kuala Lumpur, its path only overlapped with Bersih in a relatively small number of areas. This will be discussed below in further detail.

§ 6.2 Methods

The data regarding this event was collected in two ways: the scraping of social media data and direct observation as the protest unfolded on the streets.

§ 6.2.1 Digital methods

Social media data was collected from 31 July 2015 (shortly after Bersih announced their intention to hold Bersih 4) until 30 October, 2015 (well after both Bersih 4 and The Malay Dignity Rally were held). This means that only data that was produced during this period was harvested — data produced prior to and after this period was not captured.

As already mentioned in Section 2.3 of Chapter Two, the scraping of social media data was conducted by a social media analytics platform, Tag Sleuth (www.tagsleuth.com) which collect data from Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Vine. Unfortunately, Facebook

was not included in this list, because access to Facebook data was not allowed. Data from private messaging systems such as Whatsapp or Telegram was also not included, simply because they are tools for private communication. To collect data, only entries that contain hashtags of the name or catch phrase of the protests were collected. Any entry on social media tagged with the right keywords was collected and would appear in the stream of tweets or Instagrams sharing the same hashtags, ignoring the same keywords not coupled with the sign #. For example, if we typed in #Bersih4, the tweets that appear mostly refer to the protest, but typing in 'Bersih 4' would return tweets that contain the word 'bersih' and the number '4' (see Figure 6.1).

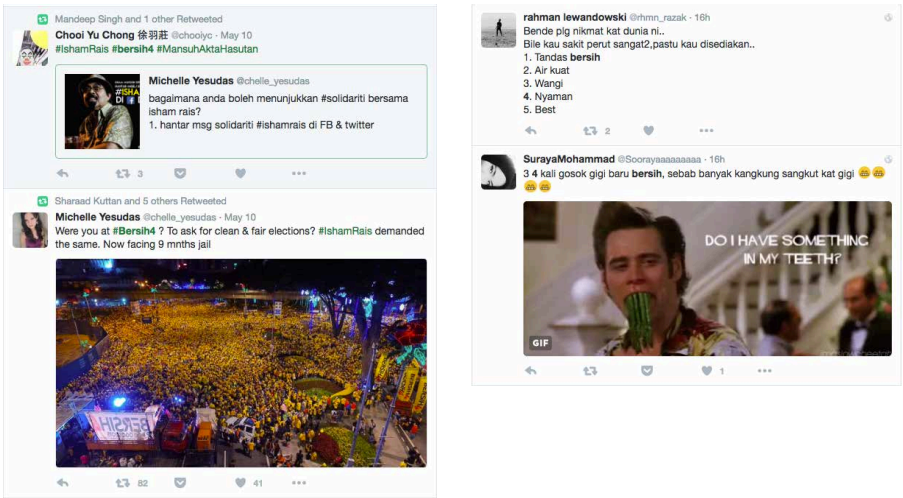

FIGURE 6.1 Data captured using a hashtag is more focused. Image on the right shows how any tweet with the word Bersih and/or 4 appeared regardless of context.

Data tagged with any one of these three hashtags were captured: #Bersih4, #TangkapNajib (Arrest Najib), and #KitaLawan (We Fight). For the Malay Dignity Rally, entries with these hashtags were captured: #merah169 (Red 169) and #himpun16 (Rally 16). A total of 322,164 tweets and instagrams were collected from 30 July to 30 October 2015 with 98 percent of it consisting of tweets. There is only a handful of Tumblr at 1,024 entries, and one solitary Vine tagged #Bersih4. Thus, the research focuses on analysing tweets simply because they make up the majority of the data collected.

Although the number may seem big, at more than 300,000 tweets, 63 percent of these were direct amplifications consisting of retweets. A closer look would reveal that there

is even more amplification, albeit not direct, and this came mostly from those who were against Bersih 4. A detailed analysis of this finding is provided in Section 7.3, 'Control and surveillance over physical and digital spaces'.

How Twitter works

Twitter started off as a micro-blogging text-based platform, with posts limited to 140 characters per tweet (because 140 characters fit an SMS (Short Message System)). It later allowed images to be posted directly in the tweet, and not as a separate link whose url would use up to twenty-three of the 140 characters. At the time of writing, not only does Twitter allow photographs to be taken from inside the app, users can also shoot 'live' videos on Twitter. A Twitter user would have a twitter handle which is a user name preceded by the sign @, for example: @maria, and users can follow others without having to reciprocate the action. Therefore, if @maria were to follow @ali but @ali did not follow @maria back, @maria would be able to see @ali's tweets but not the other way around. Tweets from the handles that we follow would appear on a 'timeline' which is a stream of tweets. If a user does not set their account to 'private' then anybody can see their tweets if they are engaged in a discussion with one of the people being followed by the other party, or if people were to visit their profile. The 'mute' function allows users the option of not seeing tweets from certain people, keywords, or hashtags, either for a particular time period (e.g twenty-four hours, seven days, thirty days) or forever. The 'block' function ensures that particular users cannot see your tweets or interact with you in any direct way.

Twitter later doubled its character limit to 280 characters. Coupled with the ability to create 'threads', where a series of tweets concerning a topic could be released, linked to one another, Twitter has expanded its affordances. A Twitter user can now air their opinions about a particular issue in five threaded tweets, for example, and their follower can see these tweets altogether at once, rather than seeing them all over the timeline, because tweets from other users would appear on the timeline in the time it takes that particular user to write their five tweets. Some journalists and reporters are also using the thread function for the stories they are reporting, adding to the thread they had created days or even weeks earlier as a new development unfolds. This allows them, and also their followers to always be able to trace the narrative of that particular reporting since the very first tweet. Before threads, users sometimes used hashtags to track their arguments about a particular topic, sometimes tweets were also numbered, in order to signal that the thought was not yet finished, that there was more to come. Another recent function is the capacity to create polls, with up to four choices, each afforded twenty-five characters, which would run for a period of time decided by the user before the final result is shown.

When this research's data was collected, Twitter's character limit was still capped at 140 characters, and the thread function was unofficially afforded by replying to one's own tweets. Twitter only allowed directly posting of images via tweets in 2016, meaning that when the data was collected, images were still posted as url links which took up twenty-three of the 140 characters. This had a major implication for the affordances of the platform, which became quite apparent after it evolved into what it currently is. The 140-character limit and the fact that posting images would use up some of that limit meant that users were more economical with their tweets, using a particular form of abbreviation (better known as SMS lingo or text speak). Users were also less keen to tweet in full sentences, and more prone to use hashtags since the hashtags already carried some meanings. Given these evolving affordances of the platform, the research proposes that the findings and conclusions that are drawn would greatly differ if the data were collected in 2017 instead of 2015, since the data would have looked different.

This section has given an overview of the digital methods concerning the research's social media data collection and initial findings in terms of the size of the raw data. A more detailed explanation about the analysis and findings from the Twitter data can be found in Sections 7.1 to 7.3 in Chapter Seven, where the analysis is discussed according to themes that are woven together with data and observation from the material space. It is structured that way because this research is not about the digital space per se, but is more concerned with how the digital informs the material space, in line with the approach of Lim (2014, 2015, 2016) and Meek (2012) who were discussed in Chapter Two.

§ 6.2.2 Observation

A direct observation of the Bersih 4 protest was done by being present on-site during the event. The protest in Kuala Lumpur was observed instead of Kuching or Kota Kinabalu because Kuala Lumpur has been the backdrop of so many previous protests including all of the Bersih ones (see Chapter Five). It would prove interesting to see how this particular rally would confirm or disprove some of the assumptions based on previous protests. Unlike the other protests, Bersih 4 provided an opportunity to collect primary source data instead of relying on secondary data. By observing the protest first-hand, not only could we discern the spatial practices that emerged during the protest, but statements about the protest shared on social media could be verified (at least to a certain extent). The observation commenced a week before the protest was due to take place, allowing the researcher to witness how the city prepared itself for the

protest. During this period, the researcher stayed in a hotel in the city centre, allowing the observation to commence daily as early as possible in the morning and continue until as late as possible in the evening. Apart from plans to take photographs, talk to people, and take notes, the observation took place in a rather organic way depending on the opportunities that were available. The clearest objective was to observe space, in terms particularly in terms of how the different spaces were used and how they were discussed by others. Although the researcher already possessed a yellow Bersih t-shirt before the protest (as elaborated in the Prologue), the researcher chose not to put it on in order to distinguish herself from the protesters, since she was there as an observer.

§ 6.3 Bersih 4

§ 6.3.1 Before the protest

As part of the preparation of the fieldwork, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) and the Malaysian Bar Council were contacted in order to arrange for the possibility of joining them as an official observer of the protest. Both refused the request, the former citing safety reasons while the latter only allowed West Malaysian lawyers to join them in monitoring the rally. Eventually, a contact at the Malaysian Insider, a now defunct online news portal, extended an invitation to join them to monitor the protest. However, before we venture further into how Bersih 4 unfolded, Table 6.1 provides a list of the actors involved in the protest to assist the reader in navigating the narrative.

TABLE 6.1 Bersih 4 actors

Abdul Rahman Dahlan	Minister of Housing and Urban Well-Being
Ali Tinju	A pro-government protester
ANAK	Persatuan Anak Peneroka FELDA Kebangsaan. Association of the children of FELDA Pioneers.
Annuar Musa	UMNO Member of Parliament.
Anwar Ibrahim	Fomer Deputy Prime Minister. Removed from post and currently serving prison sentence for sodomy charges.
Bar Council	Professional body for lawyers
Bersih	Organiser of Bersih 4. A coalition of civil society.
Bersih Global	The international advocacy arm of Bersih
DAP Youth	The Youth branch of the Democratic Action Party. Opposition.
DBKL	Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur. The City Hall.
Fahmi Reza	Activist
Hadi Awang	leader of PAS, the Islamic Party.
Jamal Yunos	Spokesperson of the Red Shirts. Head of an UMNO branch.
Khalid Abu Bakar	Inspector General of Police
Mahathir Mohamed	Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister. Retired in 2003.
Maria Chin Abdullah	Chairperson of Bersih 2.0
Mohd Ali Rustam	Former Chief Minister of Melaka. UMNO member.
Najib Razak	Malaysia's sixth Prime Minister. Still serving the office.
Nur Jazlan Mohamed	Deputy Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security
PAS	Malaysian Islamic Party. Opposition.
PAS Unit Amal	The welfare unit of PAS, operating on a volunteer basis.
Pesaka	A silat organisation. Silat is a Malay martial arts.
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat. The multi-ethnic opposition party set up by the former Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim.
SUHAKAM	Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia (Human Rights Commission of Malaysia)
Tengku Adnan Mansor	Minister of the Federal Territories

Leading up to the rally

Information about the rally had been disseminated weeks before, with Google Maps clearly marked with meeting points making the rounds on Twitter and Facebook. Bersih Global, the international advocacy arm of Bersih 2.0 also encouraged more rallies to be organised around the world in solidarity with Bersih 4 in Kuala Lumpur. They also released a world map marked with participating cities (Figure 6.2).

PAS, one of Malaysia's foremost opposition parties, stated that they would not be mobilising their members to the rally. The opposition coalition (Pakatan Rakyat) had ended not long before Bersih 4 was announced due to internal disagreement between PAS, an Islamist party whose membership is mostly Malays, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), a multi-racial platform perceived to be Chinese dominated, and the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), a more multi-racial platform than DAP. PAS stated that they were not invited to join the rally, and also that the rally conflicted with their schedule. This raised some concerns: one, the issue of Malay turn out, since in previous Bersihs a huge proportion of the Malay participants were mobilised by PAS; two, crowd-management, since PAS Unit Amal did an excellent job at managing the crowd in previous Bersihs. Bersih would have to manage on their own this time around.

FIGURE 6.2 Global Bersih. (Source: www.globalbersih.org)

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A few days before the rally, the youth arm of PKR announced that they would add another demand to the list, that is 'free Anwar Ibrahim,' the leader of both PKR and the Opposition. Twitterjaya was upset over this, since it seemed like PKR was going to hijack the rally again (like previous ones, with Bersih 3 being the most obvious) and make it about them.[25] Abdul Rahman Dahlan, then Minister of Housing and Urban Well-being, who was also the ruling coalition's strategic communications director, published a series of tweets urging Bersih to postpone the rally, citing that it would affect the economy and livelihood of the people, framing it in such a way that Bersih would be responsible for the problems of the country, even though up until now there is still no satisfactory explanation about the 1MDB scandal.

The weeks leading up to the rally were intermittently filled with relevant activities, such as the workshop concerning legal rights in relation to the police organised by Bersih, which coincided with the briefing for Bersih's volunteers. Both of these took place at the Chinese Assembly Hall close to Petaling Street in Chinatown. The workshop, steered by the Bersih legal team, briefed participants on what to bring to the protest and how to conduct themselves, for example, participants should bring a bottle of water and salt to alleviate the effects of tear gas. Participants were reminded to not behave provocatively and what to do if someone were being aggressive (isolate and expose the person), and also to cooperate with the police, armed with the knowledge of their legal rights should they get arrested. Phone numbers provided by Bersih and the Bar Council were circulated for legal aid. All this information was also made available online on Bersih's Facebook and Twitter accounts and was also circulated in small pocket-sized brochures. The organisers kept on reminding the participants that since DBKL had expressly forbidden Bersih from entering Dataran Merdeka and that no structures should be erected on the streets, protesters should abide by these requests.

Space

Through a conversation with the Bersih legal team it was discovered that the protests were always organised to take place in Kuala Lumpur and not Putrajaya because of transportation issues. When Bersih announced that Bersih 4 would take place in Kuala Lumpur together with Kuching and Kota Kinabalu in East Malaysia (Borneo), the Federal Territories Minister, Tengku Adnan, retorted that Bersih should stay away from 'his city', since it would only cause disturbance and anger the people and traders in Kuala Lumpur. On 11August, Bersih announced that the Pesta Demokrasi (Democracy

25 Twitterjaya is what the Malaysian twitter sphere is jauntily called.

Fiesta) would be held for 36 hours from 29 August at 14:00 to 30 August at 23:59. Malaysia celebrates Independence Day on 31 August, and Dataran Merdeka is traditionally the venue for that celebration. Five gathering points were also announced in the press release, from which protesters could march to Dataran Merdeka. These were:

1. Brickfields
2. SOGO
3. National Mosque
4. Central Market
5. Dataran Maybank

As discussed earlier, these spaces have been the usual gathering spots for protests in the city centre, except for Dataran Maybank in Bangsar, which was an odd choice given that it is next to an LRT station, and right beside a very busy road connecting Kuala Lumpur and Bangsar. A few days before the rally the organisers amended their statement: the gathering point was *not* Dataran Maybank (Maybank Square) but Menara Maybank (Maybank Tower) close to Chinatown in Central Kuala Lumpur. Previous protests have seen protesters gathering at Menara Maybank alongside the other four above-mentioned places. This confusion, coming from a relatively experienced rally organiser like Bersih, could stem from the name of the place. Dataran, the closest thing in Malay to indicate 'square', implies a space that works like an outdoor room (as described by Camillo Sitte) — even though like most things built in the 1980s, Dataran Maybank, an office tower, was built in isolation from its context. Menara Maybank, despite being indicated as the preferred spot for gathering, did not become one by design, instead, it happens to be situated close to an important junction close to Dataran, and in this case it serves more as a landmark rather than the actual space of gathering (Figure 6.3).

DBKL cited that the Dataran would not be available due to the preparations for the celebration of Indepedence Day. A few days before the protest the Padang was indeed busy with rehearsals for the celebrations. DBKL then suggested alternative venues, all stadiums — Titiwangsa, National, and Merdeka Stadiums — or postpone the event to the weekend after. Maria Chin, Bersih 2.0 chairperson, stated that they would not change the dates and place, but would comply with DBKL's requirement, hence Bersih 4 would not go into Dataran, instead it would take place in its vicinity.

The police on the other hand, declared Bersih 4 illegal because they did not get the permission from DBKL to use Dataran. Under the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012, organisers of assemblies have to get permission from the owners of the space, and they would have to notify the police ten days before it took place. The Inspector-General

of Police, Khalid Abu Bakar, suggested that Bersih should hold the rally in Stadium Bukit Jalil, built to host the 1998 Commonwealth Games, ten kilometres away from Dataran Merdeka. Bersih contested this by saying that since they did not intend to enter Dataran, then permission from the owner, in this case DBKL was not needed. The Deputy Home Minister, Nur Jazlan Mohamed, supported the police in banning the rally. A coalition of Malay NGOs, led by one Jamal Yunos, proposed that Bersih 4 should be held in Stadium Shah Alam (governed by the opposition), away from the city centre, so that businesses would not be affected.

Federal Territories Minister, Tengku Adnan, again reiterated that Bersih should not be held in Kuala Lumpur. Instead, he suggested a stadium like the Melawati Stadium in Shah Alam, a suburb twenty-five kilometres away (and under the rule of the opposition coalition), where protesters could do whatever they like, even go naked.

FIGURE 6.3 This junction by Menara Maybank is typically one of the main collection points of street rallies in Kuala Lumpur. (Source: Author).

The announcement of Bersih 4 was made on 29 July. A few days before that, also spurred by a similar event regarding the 1MDB scandal, another protest #TangkapNajib

(Arrest Najib) organised by a different party was planned to take place on 1 August, in front of the SOGO shopping mall on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman. Not long after the plans of the protest were announced, discussions about the venue started appearing on social media, mainly about why these protests were not being held in Putrajaya but instead in central Kuala Lumpur (Figure 6.4). This phenomenon was a relatively new one. The spaces where protests usually took place were usually taken for granted, and the organisers of #TangkapNajib, now old-hands at organising such protests, also seemed to have made the decision without giving it much thought. As a result, the #TangkapNajib protest, which took place in front of Sogo, ended up with protesters and activists being hauled away by the police.

In the days leading up to the rally, rehearsals for the Merdeka celebration comprising school children dancing and singing, continued to take place on Dataran. There also seemed to be a 'tagging war' between pro-rally groups and those who did not want the rallies to take place, with hastagged slogans stencilled on columns and walls, although this seemed to be on a small scale (Figure 6.5).

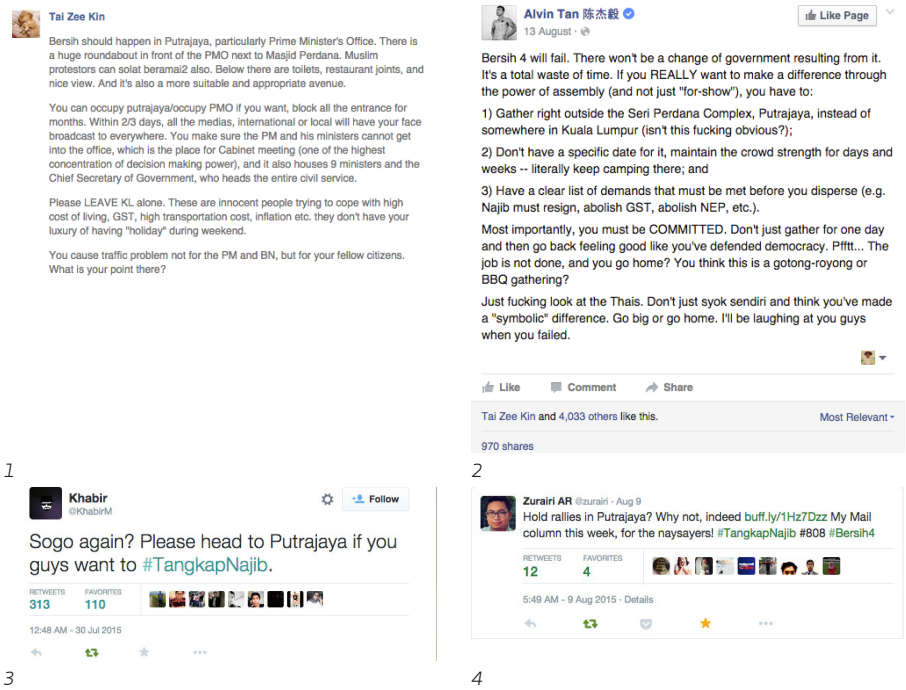

FIGURE 6.4 Facebook posts and tweets discussing the venue of the protests. (Source: Screenshots from Facebook and Twitter)

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FIGURE 6.5 Graffiti and posters about the protests. (Source: Author)

Visualisation of protest

Fahmi Reza, the main driver of Occupy Dataran and a prominent figure in the activism scene, immediately released a poster promoting Bersih 4 after the announcement (Figure 6.6). He also used the image from the #TangkapNajib arrests to make another poster with slogans, and offered to design placards and posters for those who were going to the protest but did not know how to design. His Facebook comment thread was soon overrun with requests, and Fahmi started to enlist other graphic designers who were interested in doing pro bono work for dissent. This collective was called GRUPA. Based on requests, GRUPA started releasing a lot of designs online.

A few months before Bersih 4, Fahmi started making an alphabet colouring book, drawing images of politicians to illustrate words like *Koruptor* and *Opportunis* ('corruptor' and 'opportunist') (Figure 6.7). The project was crowdsourced in two ways, people could suggest and vote which politician should be next, and suggest the caption suitable for them. They also helped financed the printing costs of the book. (The pdf of the book is available for free.)

A day before the rally, the Home Minister released a directive banning yellow t-shirts with the word Bersih on them, deeming them subversive under the Printing and Publication Act 1984. Those wearing the t-shirts could be arrested and charged with sedition.

FIGURE 6.6 Bersih 4 poster designed by Fahmi Reza

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1

2

FIGURE 6.7 Colouring book designed by Fahmi Reza and the crowdfunding campaign to publish it

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FIGURE 6.8 Examples of posters designed by GRUPA

The Red Shirts

On 15 August, about one hundred people in yellow shirts rallied against Bersih 4 on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman. From afar, one would be forgiven for thinking that that they were with Bersih. Jamal Yunos, the leader of the protest, argued that stern actions should be taken against Bersih since previous assemblies affected peace and jeopardised the country's image in the eyes of foreign tourists. Bersih should also provide proof that the Prime Minister was corrupt.

Five days later, on 20 August, they were back on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman. This time they brought an effigy of Maria Chin Abdullah, chairperson of Bersih 2.0 and defaced it before throwing it into a trash bin (Figure 6.9). Jamal Yunos vowed to bring over 30,000 people to the streets on 29 August, to protest against Bersih 4, and that they would not hesitate to gather 6-7000 people to gather and open up stalls in front of her house. This tactic was used by Ali Tinju, another pro-government career protestor, with his Army Veterans group, in front of the house of Ambiga, the previous chairperson of Bersih.

The next day (21 August), Jamal Yunos, now claiming he was from the NGO Bersih 4 Cintakan Keamanan (Bersih 4 Loves Peace) made a police report claiming that Bersih 4 has been luring participants with cash. He claimed that there is an RM30 million fund for Bersih, either from the state of Selangor or the government of Israel. The group, now donning red shirts, then went to perform a *silat* (a Malay martial arts) demonstration in front of SOGO on 25 August. They beat each other with sticks and broke roof tiles with their bare hands, they also used *parangs* (machetes) (Figure 6.9). Jamal Yunos claims that these were closed-door training sessions for members and said that they would not initiate violence unless provoked by the Yellow Shirts. They would wear red and gather in front Low Yat Plaza at 9:00 and march to Dataran Merdeka via Jalan Pudu (a Chinese area) at 10am. In July, a minor skirmish broke out in Low Yat Plaza, caused by the theft of a handphone by a Malay youth from a Chinese vendor. The incident was framed in racial terms, bringing up the underlying racial tension to the surface. Since Low Yat Plaza is well-known as the 'digital mall', the best place to go for electronic gadgets, from laptops to handphones, and which is dominated by Chinese vendors, the solution to counter this problem was to set up a Malay digital mall. Later in the year, in December, the MARA Digital Mall opened two blocks away from SOGO, on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman.

The Inspector-General of Police warned the Red Shirts against criminal intimidation, and on 27 August, the Red Shirts decided to postpone their rally, allegedly heeding advice from the authorities.

FIGURE 6.9 The red shirts protests in the vicinity of SOGO Shopping Complex (source: Malaysiakini).

§ 6.3.2 The rally

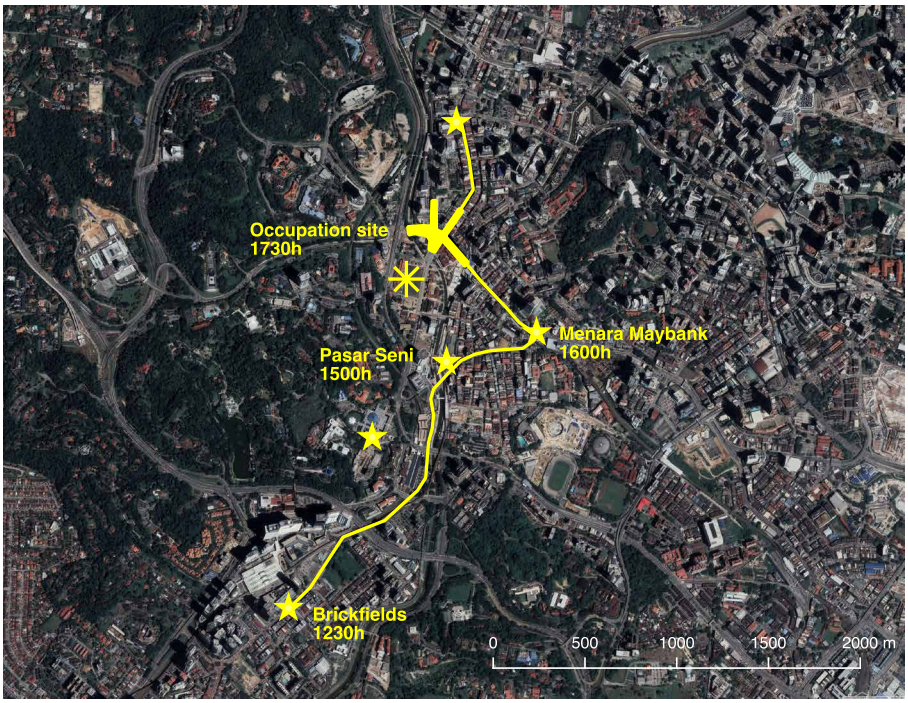

FIGURE 6.10 The map indicates the path taken and the time the researcher arrived at the checkpoints during the Bersih 4 rally. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018)

Although the rally could be joined from any of the five gathering places already mentioned above, this research observed it through participating in the crowd of protesters in Brickfields (Figure 6.10). While the place was chosen on the advice of a local contact and not decided by the researcher, there were some advantages to joining the protest from Brickfields. One, it was the furthest gathering spot from Dataran Merdeka, and in the process of reaching Dataran, two other venues, Central Market and Menara Maybank, would be covered. Therefore, more ground could be observed. Two, the placement of Brickfields, on the periphery of the city's historic core also provided the experience of entering the city on foot, rather than already being in the city when the protest began. Three, it clarified where exactly the gathering would take place in Brickfields, since the neighbourhood had been undergoing massive transformation.

The morning of the protest was quiet. Groups of people started trickling into the city, although most were not wearing the banned yellow t-shirt. On Firechat, the app made popular by Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement, there were warnings not to wear the yellow t-shirt until people had reached their destinations (Figure 6.11). As we already noted before, because Firechat functions through Bluetooth, users would have to be within a certain radius of each other in order to be connected. This was believed to be an aid to evading remote surveillance, and also for maintaining lines of communication should signal jammers be used at this protest.

The meeting point for those who chose to gather in Brickfields was the street entrance of the shopping mall, Nu Sentral. The shopping mall provided pedestrian connection to KL Sentral, and seems to be the only way to access the streets of Brickfields from the train station. The monorail station is situated across the street, and the overhead bridge connecting the station and the first floor of the shopping mall provided extra shade to the growing crowd of yellow shirted protesters. The national anthem was sung, along with some other songs, and speeches were delivered to the crowd. Vehicles passing by honked, seemingly in support.

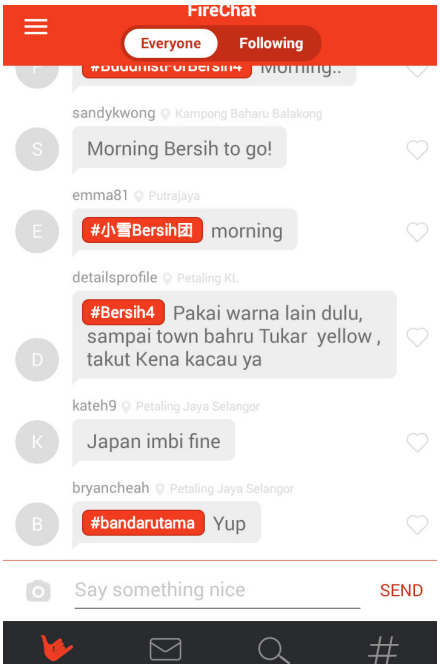

FIGURE 6.11 Firechat app

FIGURE 6.12 The crowd at Brickfields, seeking shelter underneath the overhead pedestrian bridge. (Source: author)

The crowd started marching in the direction of the city centre shortly after 2pm (Figure 6.12). The walk was accompanied by chants of slogans and the din of vuvuzuelas, and people were carrying posters and placards designed by Fahmi Reza and GRUPA. The local contact commented that this was better than previous protests, since people actually moved as a crowd. The relaxed urban form of Brickfields fell behind as the crowd marched for about forty-five minutes on the non-place highway-grade road, before the tight urban form of the old historic core appeared across the river.

Even though Google Maps showed that it should take twenty-six minutes to walk from Brickfields to Dataran Merdeka, because the crowd was moving as one, it took an hour to reach Central Market, one of the gathering points (Figure 6.13). Although in theory it should be possible to take a short cut through the small streets behind Central Market to Dataran Merdeka, a thickening crowd was already visible through the street adjacent to the building. The first police truck was spotted here, with some policewomen sitting inside the truck, seemingly distracted by their phones.

The junction at Menara Maybank was packed with people listening to a speech by an opposition leader (Figure 6.14). From here, the path to Dataran Merdeka was straightforward via Jalan Tun Perak. The restaurant facing the junction was doing brisk business, as were the ice-cream sellers on scooters and ad hoc street vendors peddling water and cold soft drinks. The more interesting characters seemed to congregate here, such as the Yellow Spiderman (Figure 6.15). Bersih volunteers were observed manning rubbish collection points, constantly reminding people to not throw rubbish on the streets. The overhead rail tracks running on the median and the height of the buildings defining Jalan Tun Perak gave the road an enclosed feel with plenty of shade (Figure

6.16). The density of the crowd on this street was the highest, and it did not seem like the crowd was moving. Some had already occupied the street median, sitting down and seemingly settled. There were plenty of speeches given on this street.

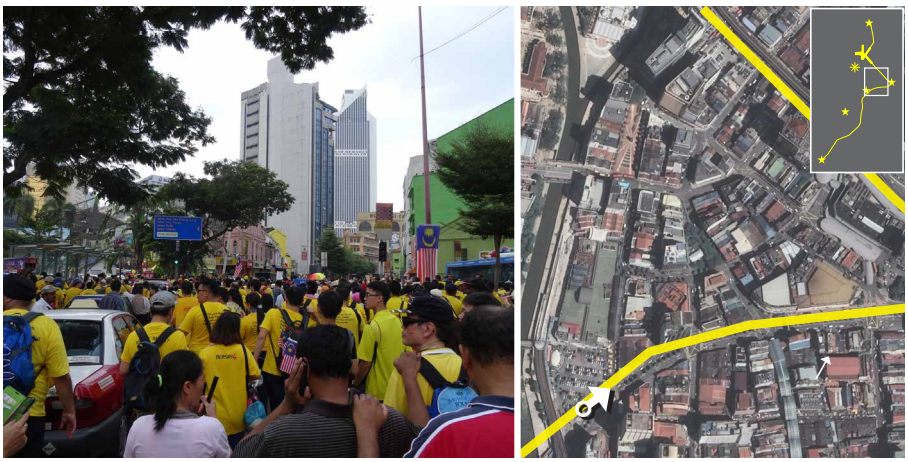

FIGURE 6.13 Entering Chinatown. (Source: Author)

FIGURE 6.14 The crowd at Menara Maybank (source:author).

FIGURE 6.15 The Yellow Spiderman at the Bersih 4 protest. (Source: author).

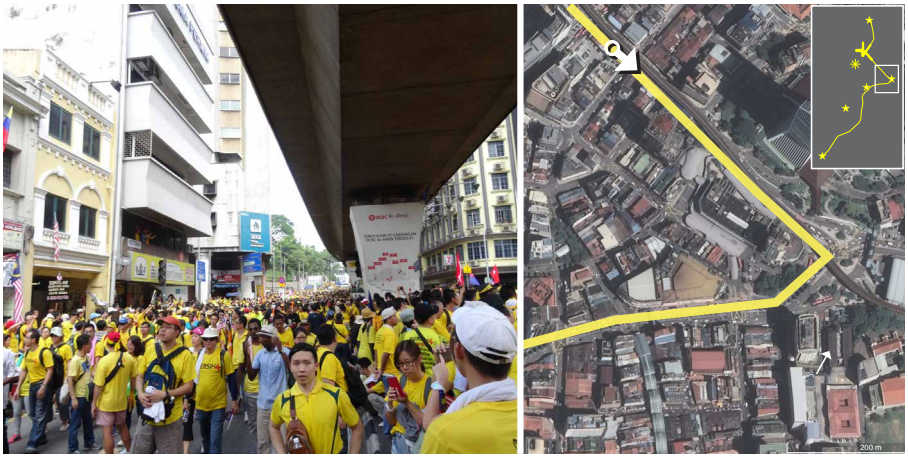

FIGURE 6.16 The overhead rail tracks on Jalan Tun Perak. This stretch of Jalan Tun Perak, between Menara Maybank and Dataran Merdeka was packed with protesters. (Source: Author).

Even though this stretch of road was the shortest relative to the others already covered, it took the longest time to go through due to the density of the crowd. Once the road opened up to the big junction between Jalan Tun Perak, Dataran Merdeka, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, and Jalan Raja Laut, the crowd started spreading out into these fingers. The junction was defined by a mass of yellow-shirted people sitting cross-legged on the tarmac, their attention focused on the back of a truck where the main actors of the protest were, giving speeches, together with the more important opposition leaders (Figure 6.17). Away from the junction, small groups had started forming on Jalan

Tuanku Abdul Rahman and Jalan Raja Laut, claiming space for the evening (Figures 6.18 and 6.19). The smattering of groups petered out until about 100 metres away from the Dataran, where both roads were rather quiet and empty. The restaurants that remained open that day were doing brisk business, the Kentucky Fried Chicken on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman was packed with yellow-clad patrons.

FIGURE 6.17 The crowd settling close to Dataran Merdeka. (source: author).

FIGURE 6.18 Some protesters came prepared to stay the night. (Source: Author).

FIGURE 6.19 Protesters occupying Jalan Raja Laut. (Source: Author).

At around 19:30, Mahathir Mohamed, Malaysia's fourth and longest serving Prime Minister, made a brief appearance at Bersih 4. Even though there were two Prime Ministers after he resigned in 2003, Mahathir is still influential, his often caustic comments sought by the media. Although Najib Razak has been purportedly hand-picked by Mahathir as his successor, Mahathir has been rather critical of Najib's administration, and of the 1MDB financial scandal. Although opposition Members of Parliament had presented evidence in Parliament about 1MDB, it was not until Mahathir actually spoke about it that it became a hot issue discussed across the country. Mahathir appearing at a street protest is however, ironic to say the least, he was infamous for shutting down dissenting voices during his time in government. Nevertheless, given the huge influence he still wields in the public sphere, he was welcomed to the protest. The next day he came again and actually held a press conference, stating that he was not there because of Bersih, but because he really wanted Najib to be accountable for the financial scandal.

The cool evening air provided a much-needed respite for the protesters after the punishing tropical heat and injected a renewed energy to the rally. Workshops, lectures, and speeches were given in small groups on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman and Jalan Raja Laut. A large makeshift stage was also set up with its back to the Dataran, where Bersih had prepared an itinerary of speeches interspersed with performances. The authorities had set up a barrier blocking access to the Dataran, and to demonstrate their seriousness in complying with the requirements, Bersih put up a banner 100 metres from the barrier, which was then fortified with another layer of volunteers taking turns to form a human chain, ensuring that nobody could pass. Apparently, some people had broken through the barrier earlier in the day, but they were apprehended, hence the

extra precautions. As the evening passed, more and more pockets of protesters made themselves comfortable in the streets and settled in for the night.

The protest ended the next evening with the protesters singing the national anthem, *Negaraku*, just in time for midnight, signifying it was 31 August, Independence Day. Maria Chin led the crowd in chanting 'Merdeka' ten times, emulating Tunku Abdul Rahman in 1957. The organisers then asked the protestors to disperse, to avoid trouble since they had expressly stated that the protest would end at 23:59, 30 August.

§ 6.3.3 Incidents

An image depicting Hadi Awang, leader of the Islamic party and Najib Razak locked in an embrace was put on the pavement and stomped upon by some protesters who took photos of themselves doing so. This incident caused an uproar, and police went on a search for the perpetrators. While Bersih 2.0 condemned the rude act, they also stated that legally no laws were breached, and this act by a few irate protesters should not overshadow the rest of the crowd which was well-behaved. (A few days later, a man and a woman gave themselves up to the police.)

Close to midnight, a group of red-shirted counter-protesters tried to breach the barrier to enter Dataran, but the police turned them away and only allowed one person to enter Dataran. They said that it was a tradition to celebrate independence by singing *Negaraku* on Dataran Merdeka, but Bersih had not made that possible because of the rally, and Bersih singing the national anthem did not count, since it was not actually *on* the Dataran.

At around 00:10 there was a loud bang. Firecrackers were thrown at protesters close to DBKL's building. The perpetrator was apprehended by the crowd and later handed over to the police.

§ 6.4 The Malay Dignity Rally: The protest to end all protests

A rally called Himpunan Rakyat Bersatu (People's Unity Rally) was planned to take place on 16 September, Malaysia Day. Although independence was attained on 31 August 1957, Malaysia was actually formed later, on 16 September, 1963.[26] On 8 September, DAP Youth called on the organisers to come forward and not hide behind their provocative posters, one of which depicted a Malay figure decapitating a person in a yellow Bersih t-shirt, with the caption Cina Turun Bersih Sedialah Bermandi Darah (To the Chinese who join the Bersih rally, get ready to bathe in blood), found in Chinatown on 28 August, the day before Bersih took place. Even though Jamal Yunos had been making statements about the counter-rally, effectively acting as its spokesperson, he denied that it was planned by his anti-Bersih group, although he confirmed their attendance. Pesaka, a *silat* organisation was the organiser of the rally, and divisions of UMNO (the ruling Malay party) were allegedly invited to attend. Jamal claimed that Bersih had angered Malays and that non-Muslims should avoid provocations during the Red Shirts' rally. Later on, he invited Chinese and Indians to attend the rally as well. Two NGOs then volunteered to monitor the streets to ensure that no violence broke out during the rally. Ali Rustam, the chairman of Pesaka, claimed that the four Bersih rallies (2007, 2011, 2012, 2015) were a provocation, and hence the rally he was organising was a retaliation. The rally on 16 September, as Jamal called it, Himpunan Maruah Melayu/Himpunan Melayu Bersatu (Malay Dignity/Unity Rally), was supposed to be a rally to end all other rallies like Bersih. Even though, on the second day of Bersih he said that he was confident that one million Red Shirts would take to the streets on 10 October, Jamal later on said that there would be only one rally, which would take place on 16 September.

However, Ali Rustam of Pesaka, the organiser of the Himpunan Rakyat Bersatu (People's Unity Rally) denied that the rally they were organising had anything to do with the Malay Dignity/Unity Rally) although Jamal Yunos seemed to refer to the same event, and continued to make statement after statement on behalf of the 16 September rally. A motorcycle convoy promoting the rally, which Jamal led, even took place through Chow Kit, Dataran Merdeka, and Bukit Bintang on 12 September, four days before the event. One day before the rally, Jamal stated that to avoid a clash, they would gather at Kompleks Kraftangan (Handicraft Complex) on Jalan Conlay instead of at Low Yat Plaza. Jamal also confirmed four other meeting points for the rally:

26 Malaysia Day only became a holiday in 2010, after Anwar Ibrahim, leader of the opposition infamously claimed that they would take over Putrajaya on September 16th. The day came and went, but the opposition remained an opposition. The Prime Minister then declared September 16th a holiday.

Titiwangsa Lake Gardens, Jalan Tun Razak, the National Mosque, and the Federal Territories Mosque (Figure 6.20). The main venue for the rally was Padang Merbok, a playing field close to Dataran Merdeka (whose parking lot was where the lawyers gathered in October 2014 before marching to the Parliament to protest against the Sedition Act).

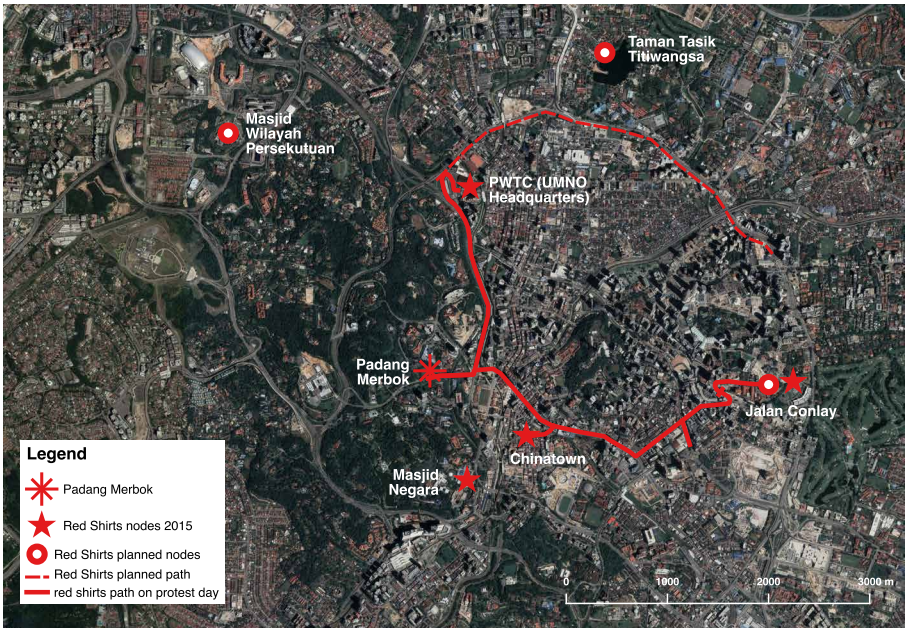

FIGURE 6.20 The Red Shirts' planned locations according to Jamal Yunos and where they ended up going on protest day.

The Kompleks Kraftangan on Jalan Conlay also happened to be where the Himpunan Warga FELDA (Federal Land Development Agency), an event allegedly organised for the Felda farmers to celebrate Malaysia Day, was supposed to take place. ANAK, the association of the children of the settlers, questioned the decision of shipping 20,000 farmers in 500 buses into the city for the event, which seemed to coincide with the Himpunan Rakyat/Melayu Bersatu. Allegedly some of the elderly protestors in red t-shirts appeared lost on the day, and when asked said they were given the red t-shirts, some money, dropped in the city to be collected later in the afternoon. Facebook screenshots of protesters complaining that the money they received was less than promised also started making the rounds on social media, together with those who complained that their parents were transported to Kuala Lumpur without knowing they were going to the rally.

A big stage was set up on Padang Merbok for speeches and performances, since it was the main venue for the rally. Unlike Bersih, Pesaka received permission from DBKL to use the space and hence could set up structures. However, the red t-shirts with Himpunan Maruah Melayu (Malay Dignity Rally) as promoted by Jamal Yunos also have Petaling Street and Bukit Bintang printed on them, together with Padang Merbok. Due to the racial taunts, the Federal Reserve Unit (FRU) stationed themselves at the entrance to Petaling Street in Chinatown to ensure safety.

A group of about 800 protesters pushed through the barricades to enter Petaling Street but was staunchly denied entry by the FRU and the police. Water canon were eventually used to disperse the crowd around 17:00. At the same time, UMNO politicians were making speeches on stage in Padang Merbok on how peaceful the rally was, and Annuar Musa even conveyed the Prime Minister's regards to the protesters.

Upon learning of the incident, rally organiser Ali Rustam said that those who provoked the police must be responsible for their own actions. Annuar Musa also said that they should not be able to access the rally's team of thirty lawyers. An UMNO youth leader tried negotiating with the police. Jamal Yunos then arrived and tried to persuade the protesters to leave, saying that unless the government took action against the traders who sold fake designer goods, he himself would lead a demonstration there. The protesters finally dispersed. Two Malay males were arrested during the ruckus, and two police officers were also injured.

Suddenly the focus of the protest shifted to Petaling Street, and how the street is dominated by the Chinese and how fake and counterfeit goods are sold there. Jamal claimed that he applied to set up business there a few years ago but was turned away. He kept on making statements about Petaling Street, saying that there would be a riot there that Saturday (26 September) if no actions were to be taken. On Friday the 25th, Jamal was arrested on a possible sedition charge because of his statements about the riot. He then said he was not the organiser, he was only a middleman between the organisers and the authorities.

On the same day, Friday the 25th, the Chinese Ambassador visited Petaling Street and said that he was pleased that the Chinese were living in harmony with other races, and that he they did not want the harmony destroyed by people with ulterior motives. His visit was met with a mixed response, with some parties applauding his move and crediting it for the fact that the riot had not taken place the next day, while others viewed it as foreign intervention meddling in Malaysia's internal affairs. Jamal commented that unlike the Chinese who also have China, Malays only have Malaysia, whereas Tajuddin Rahman, a Deputy Minister warned the Chinese not to take their complaints outside the country.

§ 6.5 Reflection

§ 6.5.1 Bersih 4 in comparison with other protests

Bersih 4 can be distinguished from its predecessors for several reasons. The first one is the reason for its inception, and consequently, its list of demands. Bersih's rallies, and their demands had always been focused on the electoral processes, but for Bersih 4, the demands were aimed at the 1MDB financial scandal. Perhaps because of that too, the demands were not as specific as the previous ones, apart from the main objective (not on the list) that the Prime Minister should resign. Bersih 2.0 had been criticised because of this shift of focus. Notable, too, was the demand for the 'right to dissent.'

Secondly, the reduced percentage of Malay attendance at the rally has not gone unnoticed, although there seemed to be relatively more Malays on the second day. This has been attributed to PAS (the Islamic party) pointedly stating that they would not be attending, nor would they be mobilising their members to this Bersih. Previous Bersihs had seen more Malays than Chinese attending the rallies. This, coupled with the stomping incident on the images of Hadi Awang and Najib Razak in an embrace, caused the anti-Bersih group to frame Bersih as anti-Malay, resulting in the Red Shirts using race to validate their cause. This was not the first time that a Bersih rally had been met with counter-protest. During Bersih 2 in 2011 UMNO Youth wing and an NGO headed by an UMNO member organised a counter-protest on the same day as Bersih 2, and the leaders were actually apprehended by the police for failure to abide by their instructions.

Thirdly, occupation as a protest strategy. Although Bersih 3 was called Duduk Bantah (Occupy), it was only in its fourth iteration that occupation as a protest strategy was actually realised. The three previous ones were more like marches. Perhaps its success was due to the explicit statement that it would be held for 34 hours from 14:00 on 29 August to 23:59 the next day, and more importantly, that the authorities actually let them do it. This brings us to the next point.

This particular Bersih was peaceful, with no clashes between the protesters and the authorities. In fact, the presence of the police or the FRU was hardly felt throughout the rally. Bersih 2 witnessed the worst clashes, with tear gas being thrown into the compound of a hospital, while Bersih 3 saw protesters beaten up by men in police uniforms away from the crowd after the protest. The organisers were very careful in

complying with the requests of the authorities. For example they set up their own barriers to make sure that no one from the protest actually breached into Dataran. In their statements they always stressed the point that Bersih 4 was to be a peaceful protest, and that protesters should not bring anything provocative or dangerous to the rally, protesters should not resist arrest, and if provoked they should just walk away and/or isolate the perpetrator. On the other hand, some of those who had attended previous protests felt like the rallies were getting more muted, that joining these protests now felt more like attending political rallies. Protests feel more like choreographed spectacles rather than performing an urgent public duty.

§ 6.5.2 Yellow vs Red

What distinguished this Bersih rally the most is the reaction towards it, namely the Red Shirts' counter-protests. Although, initially, they also wore yellow in their small rallies against Bersih, they then switched to red, and after a few rallies and incidences became known as the Red Shirts. They blamed Bersih for allegedly destabilising the nation, with negative economic consequences, among others. Post Bersih 4, due to the decreased number of Malay participation at the rally and the increased Chinese participation, and also the incident of the stomping of the image of Hadi Awang and Najib Razak embracing, they used race as a platform to discredit Bersih. By stomping on the face of Najib, Bersih 4 and its participants were apparently challenging the leadership and position of the Malays. Never mind that it was an isolated incident and that no mention of race was made in the list of demands or even at the rally. Capitalising on this, the counter-protest of the Red Shirts on 16 September was also known as Himpunan Maruah Melayu (Malay Dignity Rally), although Pesaka, the purported organiser claimed their Himpunan Rakyat Bersatu (People Unity Rally) had nothing to do with the former, but that did not stop Jamal Yunos from acting like a spokesperson of the rally.

Since the 16 September rally, more and more rallies had been planned by the Red Shirts, especially in states held by opposition parties, which is ironic, considering that they first went to the rally on 16 September to put a stop to all street rallies. On his own, Jamal Yunos also organised protests, mostly aimed at the Selangor State government, which is governed by the opposition. He is also getting increasingly creative in his protests, for example in the protest against water rationing in the Klang Valley, he turned up at the Chief Minister's office on 21 December, 2016, clad in white towels and carrying a bucket (Umno division chief Jamal Yunos stages water cut protest clad in towels 2016).

§ 6.5.3 Space

There also seems to have been an increased awareness of the importance of space this time around, or, to be precise, an awareness of the importance of the venues for all the rallies. Since the rallies always take place in the same space there were questions about why these rallies are held in the same space every time, even though none of those whom the rallies are concerned with, or are directed at, were there. For example, the rally #TangkapNajib has been criticised for taking place in front of the Sogo shopping centre, instead of in Putrajaya, where the Prime Minister is. The preferred venue for small rallies are the steps by the entrance to Sogo. While the Yellow Shirts occupy the road junction at the entrance of Dataran, demanding institutional reform, Dataran was supposedly prepped for the state-sanctioned spectacle of Independence Day celebration. Now that Bersih 4 had also sparked a reaction in the form of protest (a protest against protest), it is useful to note the differences between the choice of spaces of these two movements.

§ 6.5.4 Technology

The most obvious new piece of technology this time around were the drones used to surveil the protest. News portals like Malaysiakini released aerial photos of the rally, and these were used by some punters to estimate the size of crowd, although they have been careful to note that the crowd was fluid, and over the course of two days many people came and went as they pleased. People did not stay in one place, even though the strategy of the protest was occupation.

Firechat was touted as the primary app for communication for Bersih. In the past, there were rumours of the authorities using signal-jammers to block mobile connection. This, coupled with the authorities' stating that Bersih 4 was illegal and also the ban on the yellow t-shirt, made people wary of communicating via social media. Hence Firechat, which uses Bluetooth instead of mobile data connection.

Given that access to the Bersih 2.0 website was threatened to be blocked, an app for Bersih 4 was created and hosted by Malaysiakini. Bersih 2.0 continued to broadcast instructions and announcements via their Facebook page and Twitter accounts. For example, warnings to stay away from the barrier at the Dataran, and also pleas to stop the din of vuvuzuelas.

§ 6.6 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to provide an understanding of the geography of protest from the street level. This was achieved primarily via directly observing the protest on-site, by walking together with the protesters from the furthest gathering point, Brickfields, to the northern entrance of Dataran Merdeka. Apart from that, social media data was also collected, although the analysis and findings of these will be explained in further detail in Chapter Seven. From the observation of the Bersih 4 protest it became apparent how the relatively good multimodal transportation connecting the city centre of Kuala Lumpur enabled protesters to access the city on the day of the protest, the mix of functions such as restaurants and hotels supported the ability of protesters to stay in the city by meeting their needs, and how the configuration of the urban form supported the ways in which protesters could produce their own space. This analysis will be discussed in further detail later in Section 7.1. The counter-protest, The Malay Dignity Rally, provided an excellent contrast to Bersih, mostly because they were both coming from opposite ends of the political spectrum.

The previous chapter demonstrated how urban form and the infrastructure of the city can be planned to disable the performance of democracy in Putrajaya, while this one has indicated the subversiveness of Kuala Lumpur through its ability to support protest activities. It has also provided an example of how public sphere became an arena of debate and negotiations between the state, activists, and also citizens around the Bersih 4 street protest. It exemplifies the colonial mimicry explained in Chapter Four, where the state's attitude towards public space echoes the colonial masters'.

7 Bersih 4 Analysis

Chapter Seven presents the empirical analysis based on the events that transpired during Bersih 4, complementing the analysis of the geography of protest in Chapter Five, which was based on the layering of past protest events since the mid-1960s. The analysis is derived from data collected based on the observation of the Bersih 4 rally together with the social media data harvested around the protest. There are four themes: one, the production of space from the perspective of constructing a collective identity; two, symbolic and non-symbolic spaces; three, the control of both digital and physical spaces; and four, digital and spatial divide. The first three themes are derived from Chapter Two, where existing research that dealt with protest in relation to physical and/or digital spaces were reviewed and sorted according to their relevance and potential in revealing the postcolonial ambivalence embedded in these spaces. The final theme, on the other hand, organically emerged from the examination of the data. The literature that produced the themes will be used to discuss and contextualise Bersih and its relevance to the respective discourse. As such, the chapter can be read laterally, since it is not chronologically organised and each section is separately concluded.

§ 7.1 The production of space

This section discusses how protest produces space, from the perspective of space as a social construct that was elaborated in Section 2.2.1 (della Porta and Fabbri 2016; della Porta, Fabbri, and Piazza 2016). In their analysis of the Dal Molin protest, della Porta and Fabbri (2016, 37) argued that sites of protest produces space amongst protesters by creating a sense of belonging through frequent and emotionally intense interactions.

This analysis of how protest produces space is extended to the digital space as well. In the case of Bersih 4, since it was already the fourth rally organised by Bersih, some semblance of a collective identity was already formed, which Bersih could tap into in order to mobilise people to come to the rally. However, the numbers and breakdown of demographics tended to fluctuate from one rally to another, as exemplified by how earlier rallies used to have more Malay attendance but the fourth one was more defined by the presence of Chinese. Therefore, mobilisation is not something to be taken

lightly. While Della Porta et. al. (2016) focused their analysis on how collective identity could be produced through occupation of physical space, Tufekci and Wilson (2012) analysed how social media played a role in influencing protesters to converge on Tahrir Square in Cairo. Researchers have also attempted to measure the degree of on-site participation in the Umbrella movement by linking it to digital media activities (Lee and Chan 2015). This particular analysis, on the other hand, shall attempt to illustrate how collective identity is formed fluidly in both digital and material spaces, demonstrating how physical space depends on the digital for mobilisation, while the digital then broadcasts and amplifies materials like images produced in the physical space.

§ 7.1.1 Before the protest

As a social movement that first went to the streets in 2007, around the time that social media emerged, Bersih has been adept at incorporating new media into their protest repertoire. Eluding surveillance, Bersih used email, blogs, and also text messages to disseminate information in the first protest in 2007 (Liow 2012, 303). Despite the limited affordances of Web 1.0 — facilitating dissemination and sharing of information — a collective identity that pushed the people to the streets was nevertheless formed, therefore resulting in that first rally. Web 2.0, on the other hand, afforded the generation of content by all users which could also be seen by many people at the same time, and therefore was better at enabling the creation of a collective identity. Social movements like Bersih were quick to capitalise on this,something that was compounded by the inability of authorities to shut down the platforms, even though they were open to surveillance on these public fora.

Even though Bersih 4 exemplifies Bersih's nimble use of social media for a particular protest event, it has to be stressed that Bersih maintains a presence on social media at all times. @bersih2 has 76,500 followers on Twitter while 269,385 people 'liked' the Bersih 2.0 (Official) page on Facebook. While these social media accounts only post content intermittently during 'normal' periods, Bersih's key people such as Mandeep Singh are quite active on their own personal accounts. This constant presence on social media is crucial for the maintenance and cultivation of a collective identity — especially in this age of social media where attention span tends to be short — but Bersih is also astute enough not to flood their followers' timeline with content, since followers could easily 'unlike', 'unfollow' or 'mute' the accounts should they feel annoyed. While various new media platforms keep emerging, our attention capacity remains the same, therefore these platforms are competing for our limited attention throughout the day.

On 28 July, 2015, Bersih announced that the fourth rally would be held from 29-30 August on their social media platforms. While their announcement on Twitter was concise:

#Bersih4 is on! 29-30th August. Mark your calendars. Bring a sleeping bag. :),

the announcement on Facebook was lengthier; Bersih actually used Facebook to issue their media statement, where they explained the reasons for holding the fourth rally together with their list of demands. An official press conference was also held where Maria Chin Abdullah, together with the steering committee of Bersih, announced their intention to organise the Bersih 4 protest to mainstream media.

As evident in the announcement on Twitter, Bersih 4 has been presented as a hashtag by the organisers from the very beginning. In this instance, the hashtag worked as meme that supports the spread of ideas (Tonkin, Pfeiffer, and Tourte 2012, 50; Yang 2016) and by extension the formation of an adhoc public (Bruns and Burgess 2015; Burgess, Galloway, and Sauter 2015). However, 28 July was not the first time that the hashtag #Bersih4 was used. As early as 6 July, Bersih has tweeted the possibility of a #Bersih4 in relation to the Prime Minister's alleged inaction over the 1MDB financial scandal. While the hashtag was subsequently intermittently used to discuss the possibility of the protest happening, it was not until Bersih made the official announcement on 28 July that the hashtag started trending on Twitter. In total, 257,997 tweets were sent out with that hashtag from 31 July to 30 October, 2015.

The #Bersih4 hashtag thus played a role in fomenting the construction of a collective identity due to the hashtag's affordance which aggregate social media posts (Bruns and Burgess 2015; Giglietto and Lee 2017). While 'Bersih 4' passes as text, attaching the hash (#) sign turn the phrase into a clickable link on Twitter, taking the user to other posts also tagged with #Bersih4. Hence hashtags function as placeholders that concentrate the discussion or change of information (Gerbaudo and Treré 2015, 865). This allows users to access discussions and information beyond those they already follow on social media, people who are not necessarily engaged with the discussion they are interested in (Tsur and Rappoport 2012). Since the same keyword without the hash will not be captured, this indicates an awareness and desire on the part of the user to allow others beyond their own follower list to engage with their content. Needless to say, hashtags are not limited by geographical boundaries, although topics that use hashtags can be very local and personal indeed. Although the point of the hashtag is to concentrate discussion, there is still some 'noise' due to users latching onto trending hashtags even if their content is irrelevant to the topic, in order to get more hits. The popularity of hashtags had led Facebook to also allow this function, thus allowing hashtags to hold a similar degree of influence on different platforms (Wang, Liu, and

Gao 2016, 862). However, hashtags remain mostly associated with Twitter. Just as the #wearethe99percent hashtag of the Occupy Wall Street movement was adopted by internet users everywhere, manifesting a collective identity (Milan 2015, 7), hashtags also enable self-motivated supporters to participate in enhancing the visibility of the movement, granting 'the achievement of a symbolic power' (Bonilla and Rosa 2015; Bruns et al. 2016; Rambukkana 2015).

The fluidity of movements in manouvering between the digital and physical spaces is also evident in how hashtags are reproduced in images produced in the physical space, or even in speech.

Besides hashtags, the more visual Bersih 4 'twibbon' also allow social media users to participate in the formation of a collective identity. 'Twibbons', like Twitter badges, are images temporarily overlaid on social media users' profile pictures. To promote the Bersih 4 twibbon, Bersih tweeted the profile picture of Nurul Izzah, an opposition leader, who had overlaid the Bersih 4 twibbon on her profile picture (Figure 7.1). According to the Twibbon website, the campaign managed to garner 6283 supports. Given that a total of 48,728 unique users sent out tweets with the hashtag #Bersih4, the twibbon campaign could thus be read as a supplementary online strategy to boost the visibility of the protest.

FIGURE 7.1 Bersih 4 Twibbon to indicate support for the rally. (Source: Twitter).

§ 7.1.2 During the protest

The campaign in the public sphere where a collective identity was cultivated culminated in the appropriation of public space between 29 August and midnight of 30 August, making visible the discontent that had been circulating in the public sphere. To summarise, protesters were instructed to gather in five different spots around the city center of Kuala Lumpur before marching to Dataran Merdeka, where they ended up occupying the northern entrance of the square, since access was denied by the authorities. While the Dataran could be entered from four directions, the northern entrance is accessible from three roads, and the junction where the three roads meet became the central node of occupation (Figure 7.2). This exemplifies how the materiality of space shapes the nature and possibility of contention and how activists take advantage of space or overcome spatial constraints (Auyero 2006, 572; Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziartot 2008, 161; della Porta and Fabbri 2016, 187). As already demonstrated in Chapter Five, the configuration of space could affect mobilisation, since the spatial routine of everyday life influences the availability to participate in protest as well as its forms (Sewell 2001; Wolford 2004). While protest is shaped by the materiality of space and the meanings and symbolisms of place, protest also produces space, either through contesting the use of public and private spaces, or through a direct manipulation of space and the production of new ones in action (della Porta and Fabbri 2016, 188; della Porta, Fabbri, and Piazza 2016, 28). The proximity of protesters mostly clad in yellow on the streets for a shared purpose had the 'affective result' of promoting a sense of belonging, visualising the collective identity in a very explicit way, evidently beyond the capacity of the digital sphere. Even though a collective identity could also be forged through territorial disputes, such as conflict with the police (della Porta and Fabbri 2016, 191), and may have been applicable in previous Bersih protests, in Bersih 4, the collective identity was formed through the forbidden appropriation of space.

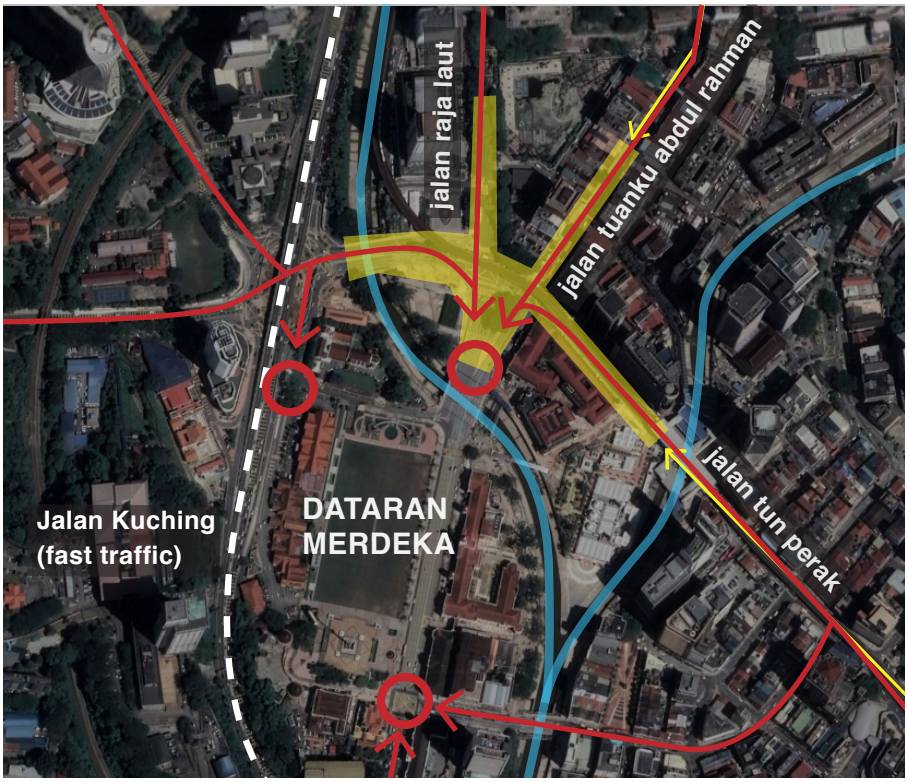

FIGURE 7.2 While there are three entry points to Dataran Merdeka, the northern entrance is the most accessible and close to shops, hotels, and eateries. Protesters ended up occupying this junction. (Source: Author. Basemap: Google Maps, 2018)

The claiming of space in Bersih 4 could be discerned through three types of spatial practices/ choreographies/activities (which could then affect the representation of space) particular to the event: one, marching, where protesters moved in unison to Dataran Merdeka; two, knowledge-sharing, where small groups were formed as sites of knowledge; and three, appropriation, where protesters settled down either to participate in the main program or to be on their own. Although these activities could be read as sequential, protesters were also coming and going throughout the whole protest, hence the spatial choreography was more fluid than static.

Marching — Protesters marched from the five gathering points to Dataran Merdeka. Given the layout of the city, it could be argued that the observed route, from Brickfields to the Dataran via Central Market and Menara Maybank, had the profound effect of building solidarity due to Brickfields being the farthest point of gathering, therefore protesters spent a longer time together on this route as opposed to others (Figure 7.3). Protesters from Brickfields also joined the crowd already forming in Central Market, and

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together, this burgeoning crowd marched together to Menara Maybank. This sequential building up of the crowd from the multiple gathering spots resulted in the dense mass of protesters on Jalan Tun Perak leading to the Dataran (Figure 7.4). Throughout the march, protesters carried placards and chanted slogans. A group of disabled protesters in wheelchairs posed together in front of Central Market to be snapped by dozens of cameras, and this act of coming together to pose for cameras were noticeably practiced by various protesters throughout Bersih 4.

FIGURE 7.3 Protesters who gathered in Brickfields marching towards Dataran Merdeka. (Source: Author).

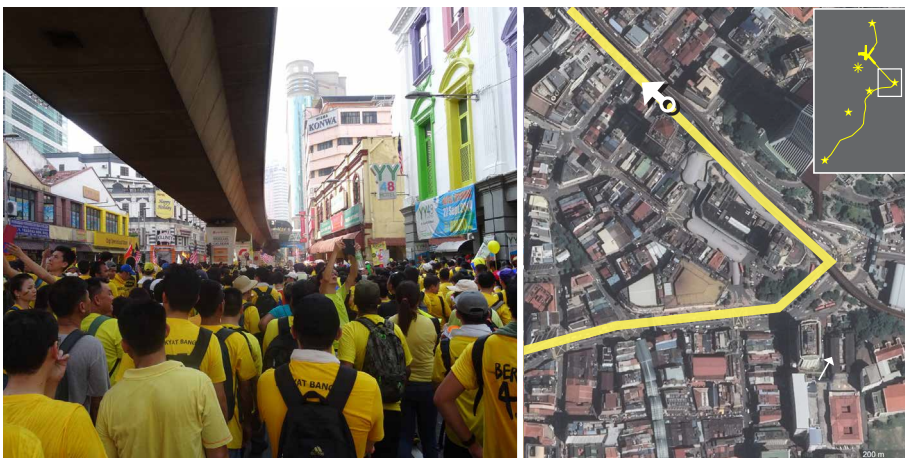

FIGURE 7.4 The packed crowd on Jalan Tun Perak (source: Author)

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Knowledge-sharing — The small groups where lectures, exhibitions, and sharing sessions were formed close to the central node of occupation, mostly on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman and Jalan Raja Laut. Since the former is narrower, the sharing activities took place right on the street, while on Jalan Raja Laut, the groups tend to occupy the pavement and half the street width. While these groups were close to the central node of occupation, there was enough distance from the din of activities so that these groups could construct their own spaces of knowledge-sharing. The space was defined by the spatial arrangement and also the voices of those speaking to, and within the group. Drawing on Peter Sloterdijk's Spheres cycle, Schuilenburg (2017) noted how making sound is one of the oldest and most efficient means of creating space.

FIGURE 7.5 A sharing session organised by 'Kuliah Jalanan' (Street Lecture/Discourse). (Source: Author)

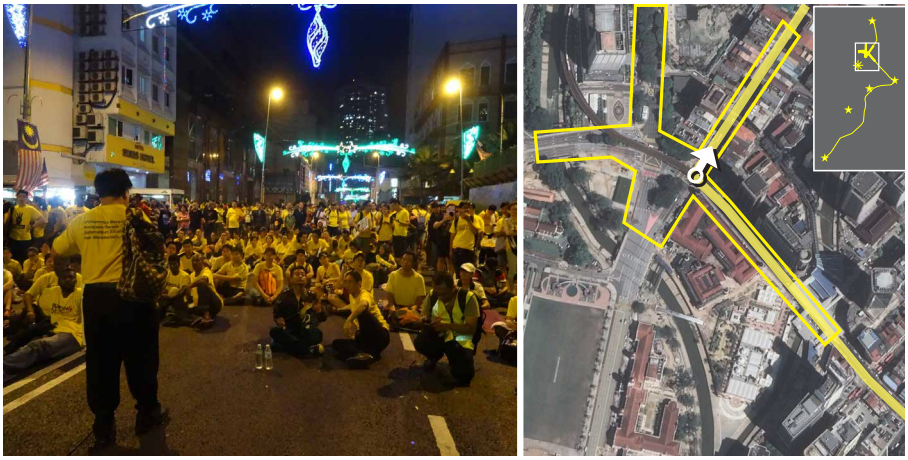

FIGURE 7.6 Wong Chin Huat, an activist, promoting activism beyond Bersih 4. (Source: Author)

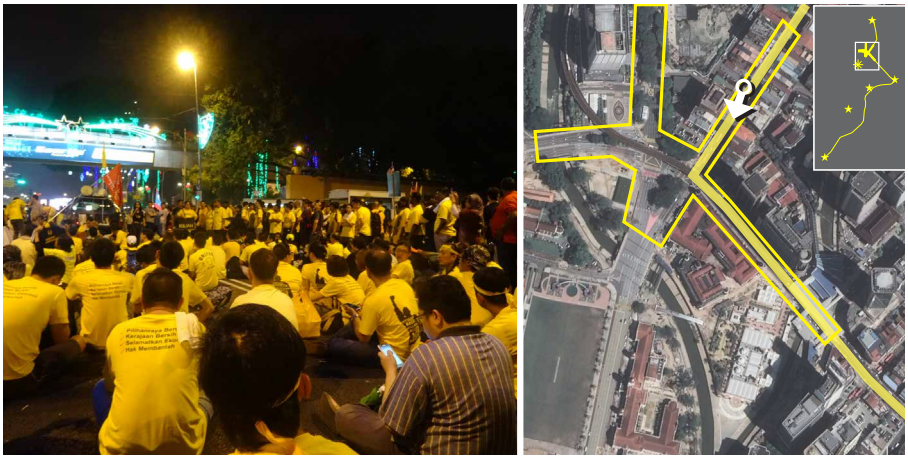

FIGURE 7.7 Azira Aziz, an activist, briefing protesters about other forms of activism they could join beyond Bersih 4 (Source: Author)

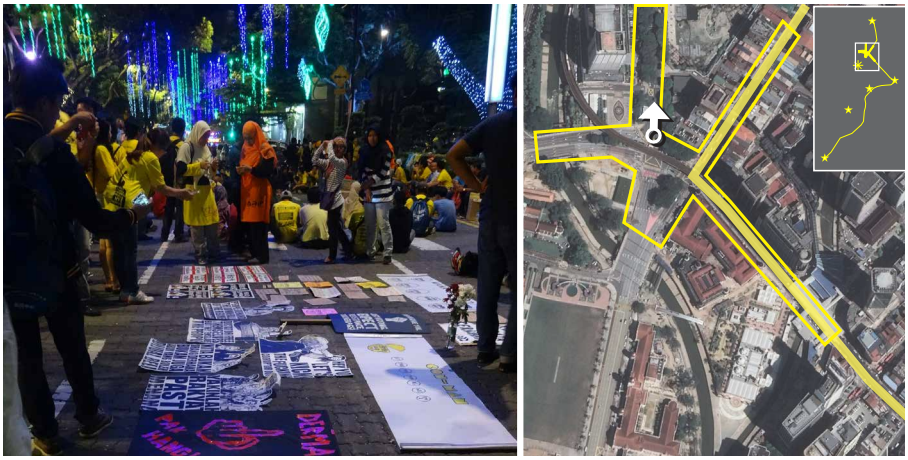

FIGURE 7.8 An impromptu exhibition of the more elaborate placard designs. (Source: Author)

FIGURE 7.9 A group of protesters posing with their homemade placards which take a playful and sometimes even flirty jibe at the authorities. (Source: Author)

Appropriation — The streets were appropriated by protesters either participating as an audience for the main event or settling in for the night. The central node of occupation was mostly appropriated by those partaking in the main event, and this crowd was mostly sitting cross-legged on the tarmac or standing in the back, their attention trained towards the main stage set against the Dataran. While some protesters had appropriated the raised space underneath the LRT tracks on Jalan Tun Perak during the march, most settled closer to the central node for the evening. Given that Jalan Raja Laut is wider than either Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman or Jalan Tun Perak,

many protesters chose to settle there, either lined up on the sidewalk or on the road itself. Most interestingly were the volunteers who formed a human chain as the first line of barrier to prevent protesters from breaching the police line into Dataran.

FIGURE 7.10 Protesters occupying Jalan Raja Laut. (Source: Author)

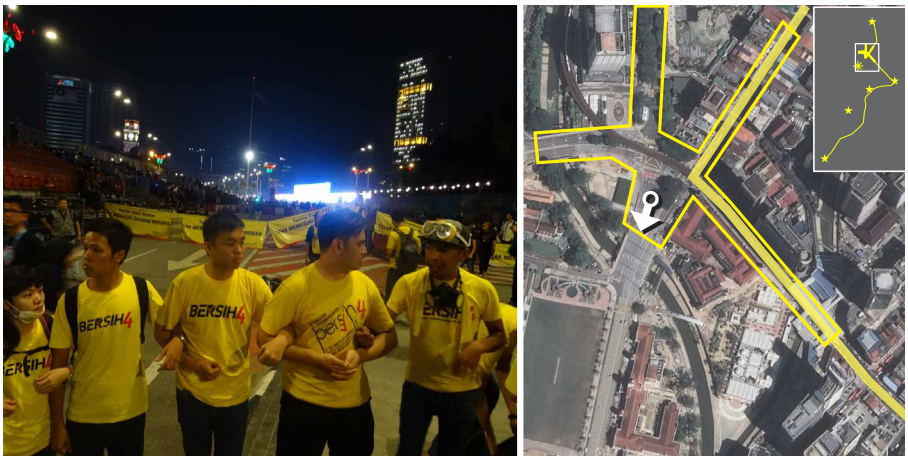

FIGURE 7.11 Volunteers forming a human chain as an extra layer of barrier to prevent protesters from breaching police barricade. (Source: Author)

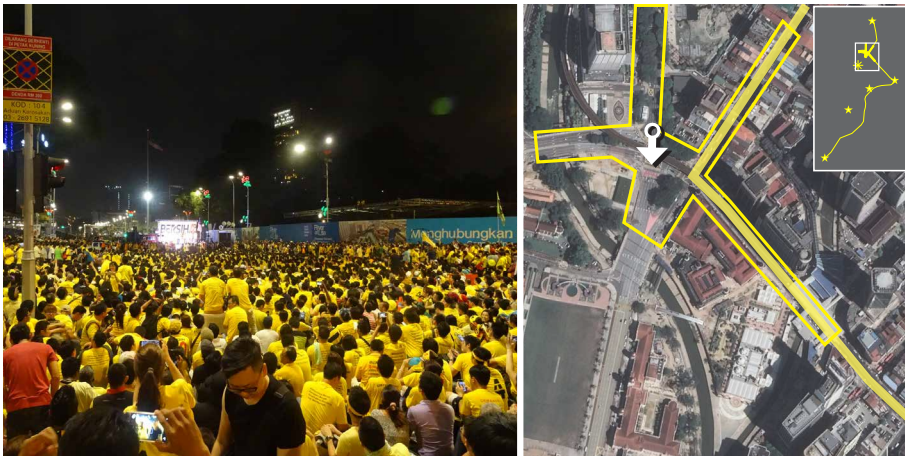

FIGURE 7.12 The crowd sitting cross-legged on the road watching and listening to the speeches on the main stage. (Source: author)

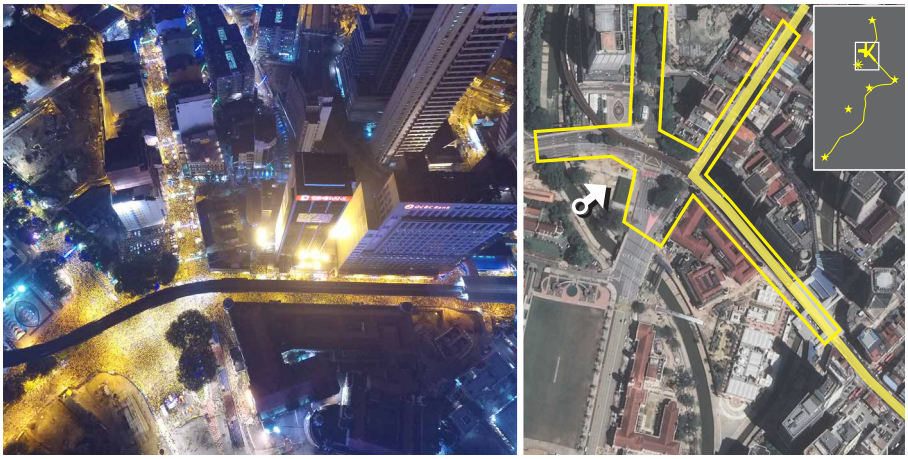

FIGURE 7.13 The junction between Jalan Tun Perak, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Jalan Raja Laut, and Dataran Merdeka filled with yellow-clad Bersih 4 protesters. (Source: Malaysiakini)

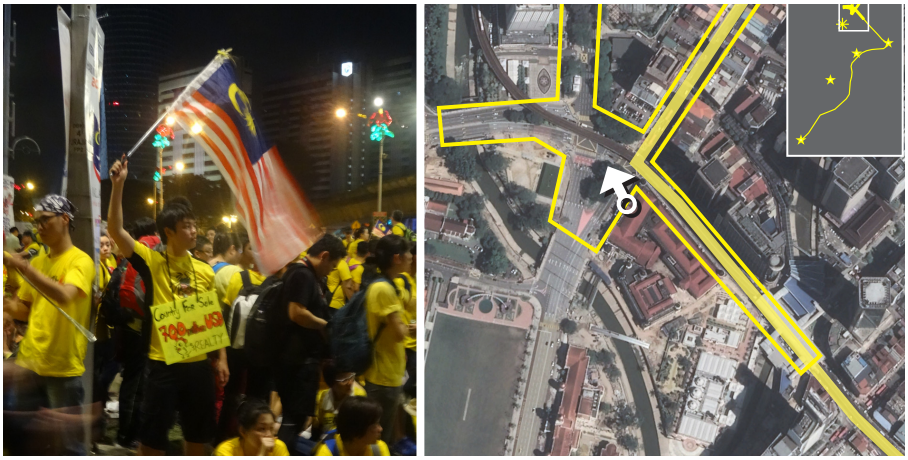

FIGURE 7.14 A protester waving the Malaysian flag while wearing a sign stating 'Country for Sale: 700 Million USD. "Image of a chicken" Realty.' Chinese protesters carried a lot of signs showing chicken at Bersih 4. Apparently 'Najib' (Prime Minister's name) sound like 'chicken' in Mandarin.

§ 7.1.3 After the protest

The sense of a collective identity forged during the protest was particularly galvanising, especially since the event concluded with the crowd of yellow-clad protesters singing *Negaraku*, the national anthem, just before midnight on 30 August, ushering in Independence Day. Without any coordination, this sense of solidarity flowed back into the digital sphere, via the images, slogans, and also the thoughts about the protest shared on social media. However, this is not to say that protesters only started posting them on social media after the protest, rather, the process of sharing was happening simultaneously with the protest. As already mentioned, protesters were actively taking photographs and videos of the protest, and this feed of events taking place in the streets was continuously streamed into the digital sphere (Figure 7.15). The affordances of social media where posts could be re-shared over and over again made certain images went viral. The hashtag #Bersihstories also emerged so protesters could share their experience of the event.

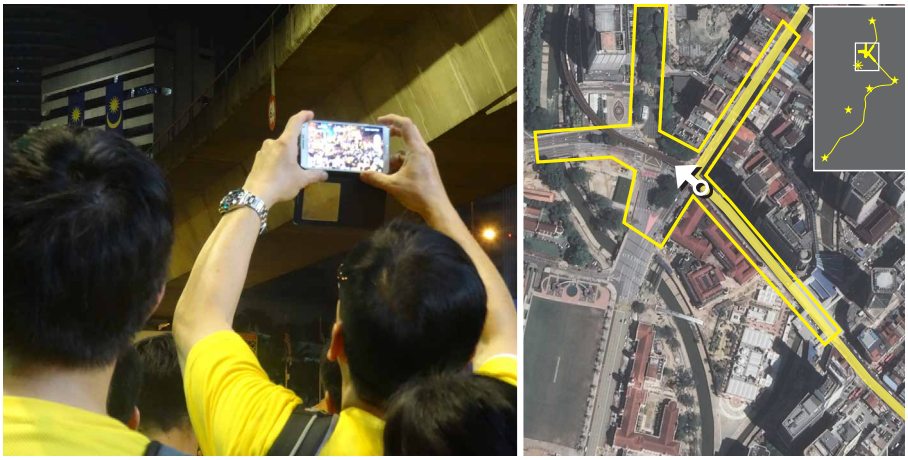

FIGURE 7.15 Protesters were taking photos and recording videos of the protest. Some of these images and footages were then uploaded on social media, where they were further shared and amplified. In this sense, protesters were citizen journalists (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). These images provide content on digital media for the continuing formation of collective identity of the movement.

Images showing non-Muslim protesters aiding their Muslim counterparts to perform prayers in the streets were posted on social media, particularly on Twitter. During the protest, the main program was halted and the crowd was asked to tone down their activities while the prayers were taking place. Chinese protesters held up signs indicating that it was time for prayer and also where Muslim protesters could do their ablutions. Images of a Chinese man helping a Malay man do his ablution were officially retweeted 2,295 times on Twitter (Figure 7.16).

1

2

3

4

FIGURE 7.16 Screenshots of tweets showing the diversity of the protest

These images were important in countering another image that had been circulating on social media: a Bersih protester stomping on the photoshopped image of Prime Minister Najib Razak embracing Hadi Awang, the leader of PAS, the Islamic party (mentioned in Chapter Six). This image was picked up by the media and caused a furore with various groups demanding action against the perpetrators. PAS demanded an apology from Bersih, while Bersih denounced the incident (Bersih 2.0 denounces

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stomping on Hadi-Najib pictures, says not part of rally programme 2015; Pijak gambar Abdul Hadi boleh cetus ketegangan 2015). Given that there were noticeably more Chinese protesters than people of other races, especially with Malay attendance notoriously low at Bersih 4, this image further strengthened the narrative peddled by the Red Shirts, that Bersih 4 was a Chinese protest against the government. This race-tinted framing thus gave them the excuse of mobilising the Malays (Dhillon 2015), since the leaders whose images were stomped upon were Malays, therefore reframing Bersih 4's aim as taunting and challenging the Malay majority. The reader may recall how racial segregation structurally runs through the organisation of Malaysian society.

The counter-protest organised by the Red Shirts managed to keep Bersih in the spotlight for longer than expected, since the event which took place two weeks (16 September) after the Bersih rally was referred to in relation to Bersih 4. Tweets about the Red Shirts' rally would sometimes use the #Bersih4 hashtag, while the Red Shirts' rally itself would be void of one.

§ 7.1.4 Conclusion

As a protest movement that challenges the procedures of democracy in Malaysia, Bersih has the potential to affect change because it transcends the communal identities that define the social, economic, and political divide (Pepinsky 2013) through the construction of a collective identity that did not just stay online, but actually culminated in action in the real world (Weiss 2013, 607). Section 7.1 has demonstrated how Bersih's strategic approach to media, both new and mainstream, has cultivated a sense of collective identity that fluidly flowed between digital and material spaces. As Della Porta and Fabbri (2016) suggested, sites of protest become the sites where protesters produce their own space through interactions.

Seemingly aware of the pitfall of digital mobilisation and the peril of 'slacktivism' — where the quick mobilisation enabled by social media is paired with the lack of staying power since participants are not emotionally invested in the cause — in the past few years, Bersih has started organising workshops and events in-between rallies to maintain and build the momentum of collective identity. For example, Bersih set up the Delineation Action and Research Team (DART) where they educate voters on how to object to the redelineation exercise by the Election Commission which might result in gerrymandering and malapportionment.

Despite the potential to transcend communal identity by raising issues that concern the whole citizenry — hence promoting a collective identity — expanding the shift between the former and the latter, especially in rural settings, remains a challenge for Bersih. Thus, casting Bersih 4 as a Chinese protest aimed at destabilising Malay power was indeed a shrewd move, since it forced Malaysians to fit Bersih into an already familiar communal divide. Therefore, the collective identity must not only move fluidly between the digital and the spatial, but should also be geographically expanded between the urban, the rural, and what lies in between.

§ 7.2 Symbolic places vs spaces of everyday life

Protest not only socially produces space in terms of the collective identity fostered through different people coming together for a shared purpose, but it also has the potential to alter the meanings and symbolism of the place it occupies. Meaning and power are also embedded within space, where symbolic cues signal appropriate behaviours and ownership (della Porta and Fabbri 2016, 187), and for places that have a central role as 'lived space, resistance space, or counter space', protest could change the symbolic meaning of places (Martin and Miller 2003). In discussing the occupation of places, Drainville (2005, 40) defined a sense of place as a 'political construction, created from concrete, contingent practices, in particular circumstances', hence disruptive events such as protest could alter this politically constructed meaning (della Porta, Fabbri, and Piazza 2016). In the case of Bersih 4, it could be argued that the activists took advantage of the spatial constraints (access blocked by authorities) by occupying the node most accessible by the spaces of everyday life, and while the meanings and symbolism of the Dataran were not directly challenged, since the square could not be accessed, the occupation of a space of everyday life served to further highlight the contrast with the highly symbolic space of the Dataran (Figure 7.17). Previous protests also mostly ended up either treading upon or occupying the area in front of Masjid Jamek and Menara Maybank the most, apart from the northern entrance of Dataran Merdeka (Figure 7.18). All three spots are situated along Jalan Tun Perak.

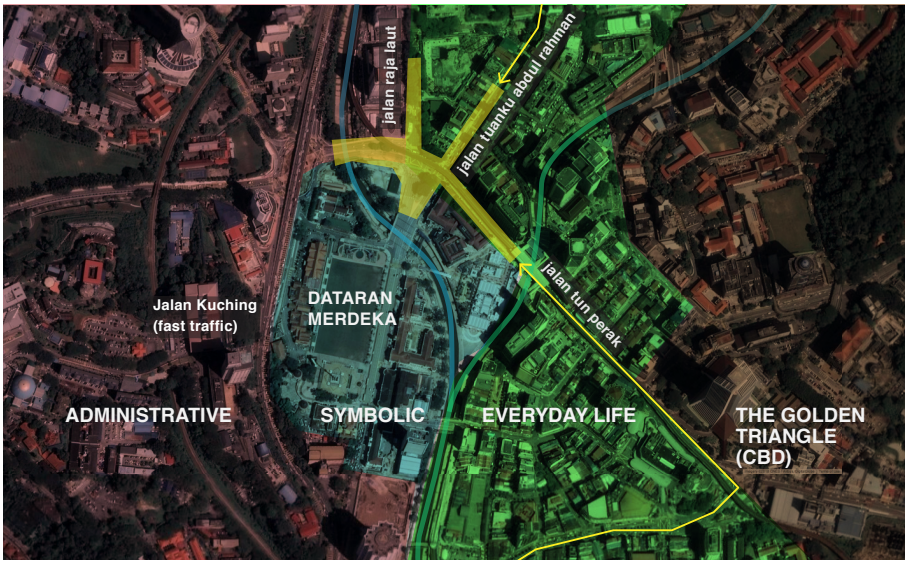

FIGURE 7.17 Bersih 4 occupied the intersection between spaces of everyday life and administrative and symbolic spaces. (Source: Author).

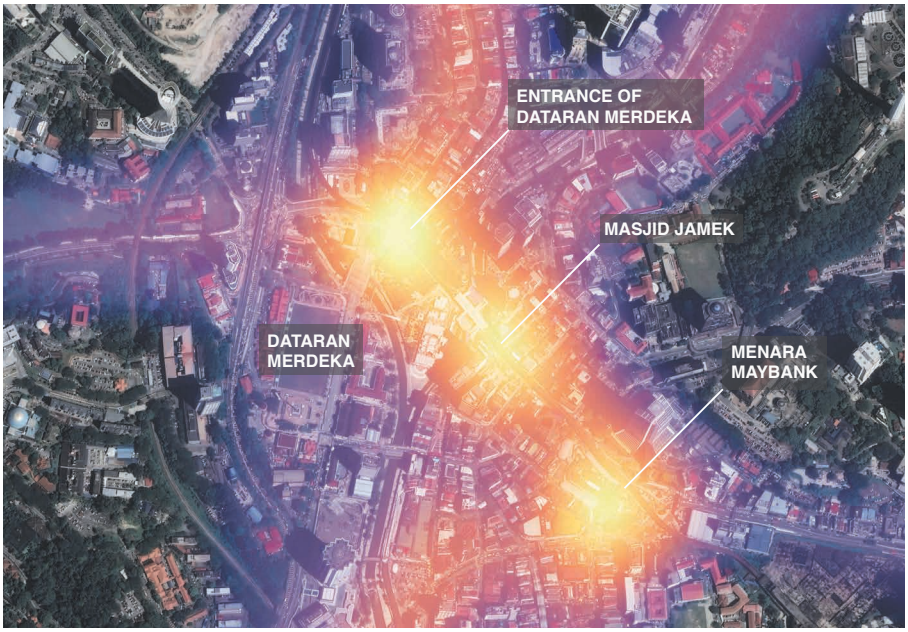

FIGURE 7.18 A heatmap analysis where paths of previous protests were put together. The heatmap indicates that apart from the northern entrance of Dataran Merdeka, two other spaces of everyday life, Masjid Jamek and the junction in front of Menara Maybank, often hosted protests as well. (Source: Author).

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The particularly symbolic nature of Dataran Merdeka has also made it a highly contested space. Chapters Three and Four explored how the state has carefully crafted the image of Dataran Merdeka as a symbol of emancipation from the colonial masters, while in practice actually mimicking them with stringent laws that regulate access and use of the square. As a 'padang' — the hybrid colonial planning tool — the Dataran has been an expression of power and discipline since its conception. The special position of Dataran Merdeka has merited its own set of laws spelled out in the Local Government (Dataran Merdeka) (Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur) By-Laws 1992. The list of nineteen activities that cannot be conducted on the Dataran without the consent of the Commissioner include such banalities as eating, drinking, and stepping on the grass, indicating the state's desire for control over every aspect of the square. The Mayor refused to allow Bersih 3 to gather on Dataran Merdeka in 2012, stating that they only allow cultural and sporting events to take place there, but not political gatherings (Martin 2013). The deliberate choice of activities, where leisure takes precedence over political expression, strips the space of its democratic potential. After the government's move to the purpose built administrative city, Putrajaya, Dataran Merdeka remains as an avatar of the State in the radical city of Kuala Lumpur, a constant reminder of the power and discipline it desired.

On the other hand, the spaces around Dataran Merdeka are spaces of everyday life. Chapter Five has shown an overview of the variety of functions afforded by the mixed land use in central Kuala Lumpur. The central node of occupation is effectively a road junction connecting Jalan Tun Perak, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, and Jalan Raja Laut with the northern entrance to Dataran Merdeka. In the section 'Production of Space', various spatial practices were discussed to demonstrate how protesters constructed a collective identity through being in close proximity to each other on the streets.

This section aims to complement that analysis by revealing the everyday life of these spaces, where different activities tend to be concentrated. Chapter Three revealed how the morphology of Kuala Lumpur developed along racial cleavages, agreeably fitting within the larger colonial British policy of divide-and-rule. While the Chinese settled on the eastern part of the river and the Malays on the northern part of the confluence of Gombak and Klang rivers, the Indians who came later settled towards the western part of the river, albeit further south and north. Most of the western part of the river became known for administration since the British administration occupied this area after Kuala Lumpur started becoming prosperous. Traces of this segregation can still be found today. Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman and Jalan Raja Laut, on the northern part of Dataran Merdeka are in the traditionally Malay enclave, even though most of the traders here are Indian Muslims — most shops and services here cater to a Muslim clientele. During the month of Ramadan, this area, especially towards the eastern part of the enclave would be filled with street traders plying attire and food

for Eid-Fitri. Jalan Tun Perak, Menara Maybank, and Central Market on the other hand, are situated within the Chinese enclave. Although the original hub was Medan Pasar (Market Square), a square right next to the confluence of the Chinese side of town, today the centre of activities in Chinatown is Petaling Street, a bustling street characterised by busy stalls and teeming with local and foreign visitors — Petaling Street was synonymous with fake designer goods. Even though Kuala Lumpur is mostly a Chinese city, the Chinese identity is primarily focused on Chinatown (King 2008, 31). Arguably the oldest part of the city, the tight urban form in this area is defined by the shophouse typology. Brickfields on the other hand, where the farthest gathering point of Bersih 4 was situated, is known as an Indian enclave. Between 2003 and 2010, an urban renewal exercise was conducted in the central nodes of these three enclaves, where architectural stereotypes of the three ethnic groups were utilised as urban design strategies to strengthen the cultural identity of each enclave. Even though the five gathering points of Bersih 4 were scattered across this segregated geography, the protesters all came together in that central node of occupation just outside the northern entrance of Dataran Merdeka. By not breaching the police barrier into Dataran Merdeka, the occupation thickens the already present radical geography of these streets, while amplifying the contrast between the highly symbolic Dataran Merdeka and the spaces of everyday life. The deepening contrasting meanings and symbolisms between the two serve to increase the distance between the state and the protesters.

Zooming out, the contrast is not just prevalent at the street level but is also applicable at the city scale. While Bersih has organised five rallies in various places, the constant venue was Kuala Lumpur, and never Putrajaya where the federal government sits. Geographically designed to be inaccessible, as the epicentre of federal power, Putrajaya remains untouched, whereas Kuala Lumpur, where the everyday life is, is increasingly being associated with Bersih through the constant layering of radical actions.

§ 7.2.1 Streets within the tweets

The analysis of how protest could alter the meaning and symbolism of place is not just limited to the material spaces utilised and occupied during the protest, but also the presence of these physical places on Twitter. The concept of 'place-framing' is applied here, where instead of the researcher's gaze, which is typically trained on analysing the spaces utilised by the groups they are studying, this gaze turns towards the geography embedded within the contention as communicated by the activists themselves (Martin 2013). 'Place-frames' identify the formulation of a collective identity in relation to the common place that people share, through the shared experience of a place and also

by imagining an ideal of how a place should be (Martin 2003). Martin exemplifies how place-framing is used as a conceptual framework by analysing the activism around particular spatial transformations (Martin 2013) or place- or area-based activism (Martin 2003). In both instances, Martin organised her analysis of how place is communicated or used as a communication tool into three themes developed from collective action frames: motivational, diagnostic, and prognostic. However, since this research is not about activism concerning any specific place, but activism that is concerned with democratic procedures which happens to manifest in particular places, the same analytical frames would not be applied to the research. Instead, the research attempts to analyse how places mentioned in the tweets sent during the Bersih 4 protest were framed through a reading of what the tweets were conveying. Since places mentioned are not always directly addressed in the tweets (findings from the first round of coding), this analysis situates the places within the general connotations of the tweet, rather than specifying that these are how spaces were communicated on Twitter during the protest. This is also related to the syntax of tweets which was limited by Twitter's affordance of 140-characters per posting, during the time the protest took place (Twitter now allows 280-characters per tweet at the time of writing). The limitation in the number of characters meant that people had to be economical and sometimes did not form full sentences in their posts.

Sentiment analysis

The first step of the analysis was to sort the sentiments of the tweets hashtagged #Bersih4 that mentioned physical places during the event. Sentiment analysis attempts to categorise the attitude or opinion expressed by the writer or speaker within the context of particular topic (Batrinca and Treleaven 2014). A significant majority, 63 percent of the tweets that mentioned place in these four days support the protest, only 28 percent were against Bersih 4, and the balance is made up by tweets which are reporting the protest, and only 3 percent are irrelevant (Figure 7.19). Mapping the result of this sentiment analysis in QGIS demonstrates that while most tweets that mention places outside of Malaysia tend to support the protest, almost a quarter of the tweets that mention places within Malaysia were against the protest (Figure 7.20). In the next section, we would go deeper into who were using these place names in their tweets.

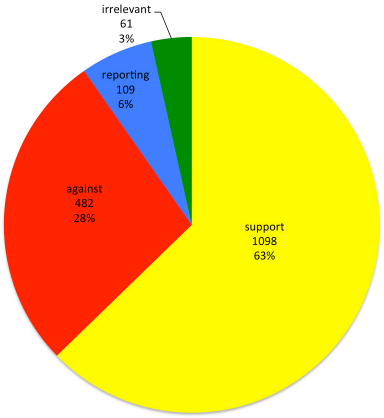


FIGURE 7.19 Sentiment analysis of tweets that mention place

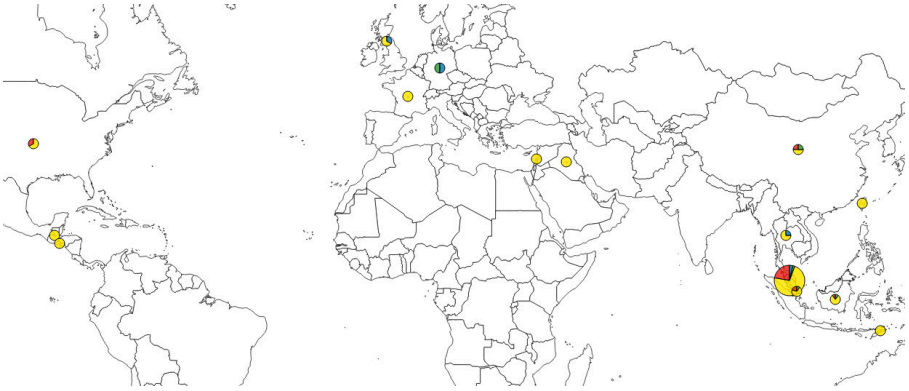


FIGURE 7.20 The map indicates the distribution and frequency of place mentions and the breakdown according to sentiments.

Content analysis

A content analysis was conducted in order to frame the place within the message of the tweet. Researchers have used similar methods to analyse tweets about particular protests and also disease outbreaks (Ahmed et. al. 2018; Earl et al. 2013). Two rounds of coding were conducted. The first round revealed that the wording of a majority of the tweets (552) did not directly address the mentioned places. This was coded as 'irrelevant.' Then, tweets that mentioned places were mostly used to inform what was

happening there or to describe the atmosphere of the place. These two descriptive variables form the vast majority of how places are embedded in tweets. They are followed by sentiments about place and also place-based identity and, together with the first two, these four categories: 'irrelevant', 'description', 'sentiment', and 'identity' are largely the ways in which places are mentioned in tweets. Surprisingly, categories such as 'logistics' and 'mobilisation', assumed as the primary way that Twitter would have been used to communicate space in protest, rank quite low (Figure 7.21).

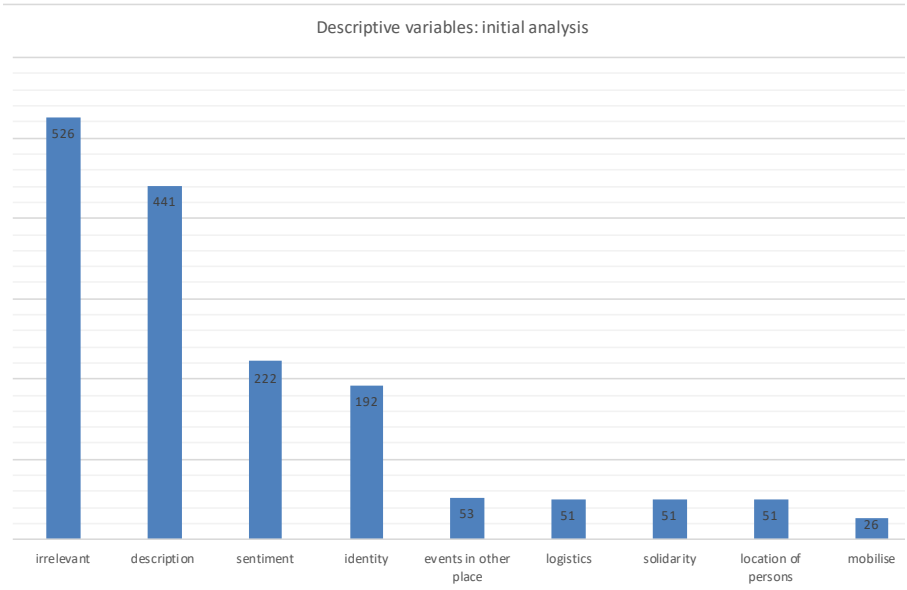


FIGURE 7.21 Strict categorisation about the position of places within the tweets resulted in most tweets coded as irrelevant. This prompted a second round of coding.

On the other hand, it could be argued that some of the tweets that fall under 'description' could also be read as relaying logistical information or mobilisation by the reader, since a reader could decide to go to or avoid certain places, depending on how it was either depicted in the text or through the image within the tweet. Some of the tweets that communicate sentiment about place could also be read as mobilisation, since by tagging a tweet with sentiments such as #SaveMalaysia, it could arouse sympathy or raise anger and spur people to go to the streets.

The first round of coding was done in a very strict manner. Only codes which explicitly address logistical matters, either in the form of instructions or comments about logistics were coded as such. Likewise, only tweets that were clearly asking people to join the protest were coded 'mobilise'. The small numbers of explicit communication

about logistics or blatant mobilisation could mean that direct and urgent logistical communication happened through other channels, and more direct mobilisation had already taken place before the protest. Another possibility, which is more tenable for mobilisation than logistics is that tweets that urge people to go to the streets are more nuanced in their persuasion and never blatantly forceful. Unlike logistics, mobilisation is also more likely to happen without having any mention of place at all.

The high number of 'irrelevant' mention of places in tweets resulted in a further examination of this batch. This was done in various ways. Firstly, hashtagged places were reexamined — focusing on hashtags that are sentiment-free such as #dataranmerdeka or #kualalumpur and also places which occurrences are low in the count such as Ipoh with hashtags such #roadtripipoh and #bersihlightsipoh. The second focus is on tweets that contain URLs to see if there was a connection between the websites and the place mentioned in the tweets even if the text does not directly address the place. Thirdly, the research focused on mentions of places which were actually venues of the protest to reexamine how the places are embedded in the tweet.

After reflecting on the results of this coding exercise, the objectives of conducting a content analysis focusing on the mentions of places in tweets became clearer. Since the objective of the exercise was to determine how places are situated within the discourse of protest, the strict coding exercise which yielded the codes 'irrelevant' and 'description' as the top two categories would drive the conclusion that geographical places were mostly used for tagging and thus place-holding threads of conversation on Twitter, or when the tweets did actually address the places they mention, they tend to describe the place, either by stating what was going on in that place at that particular time, or describing the atmosphere of the place as affected by events taking place. These findings, though valuable, also brought into question if this strict coding exercise did not end up in a case of missing the forest for the trees, since such strict coding could end up ignoring important messages, since the nuances embedded in the tweets was lost.

TABLE 7.1 Categories of tweets

CODE	CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
0	Irrelevant	Tweet is completely irrelevant to the protest	#bersih4 #changepenang Cook Islands win first ever World Cup qualifier
1a	Logistical information: access to protest venue	Information regarding access to the protest	- Dataran Merdeka is blocked - trains are not running
1b	Logistical information: Position of persons/ services	Whereabouts of notable persons or location of services around protest area	- Mahathir has arrived at Central Market - Restaurant XYZ on Jalan Tun Perak is open
2	Instructions	Instructions to protesters	- Stop playing vuvuzuelas - #Bersih4 participants: Please do not breach the barriers towards Dataran Merdeka. Gather peacefully, guys.
3	Description: ambience / activities / situation	Tweets that describe what is going on at the protest	- 11am and it is still a sea of yellow at Dataran Merdeka. - The walk from Brickfields to town
4a	Mobilisation: location	Urging people to go to a place	See you at Dataran Merdeka
4b	Mobilisation: event	Urging people to go to the event	Let's go to Bersih
4c	Mobilisation: inflammatory	Inflammatory posts about other events before the protest or relevant issues	- Activists were arrested in Ampang two days before Bersih - BN was able to garner almost 51 percent of the parliamentary seats in the peninsula and 87.3 percent of those in Sabah and Sarawak. #Bersih4
4d	Mobilisation: Solidarity / sentiment / Opinion	Statement of unity or emotion	#BersihRally in #Toronto. 30 - 40 Malaysians showed up for #Bersih4 Sending our support to those back home.

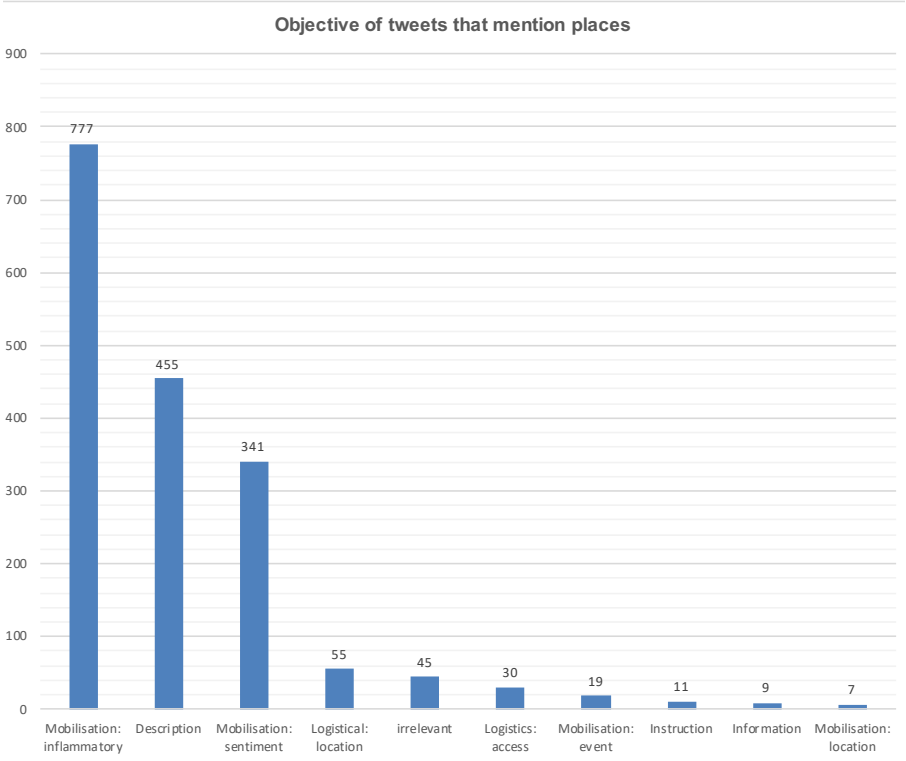


FIGURE 7.22 Most tweets fall under the category mobilisation: inflammatory

Most tweets that mention places sent between the day before the protest (29 August) until the day after the protest (31 August) are of the mobilisation kind, specifically coded 'inflammatory' and 'sentiment' (Figure 7.22). Descriptions of the situation at the protest also ran high. Arguably, potentially helpful information could be gleaned from the tweets, especially from ones coded 'descriptions' which relayed the situation in terms of what was happening and also the ambience at that particular moment. Table 7.1 shows the final list of codes derived from the exercise.

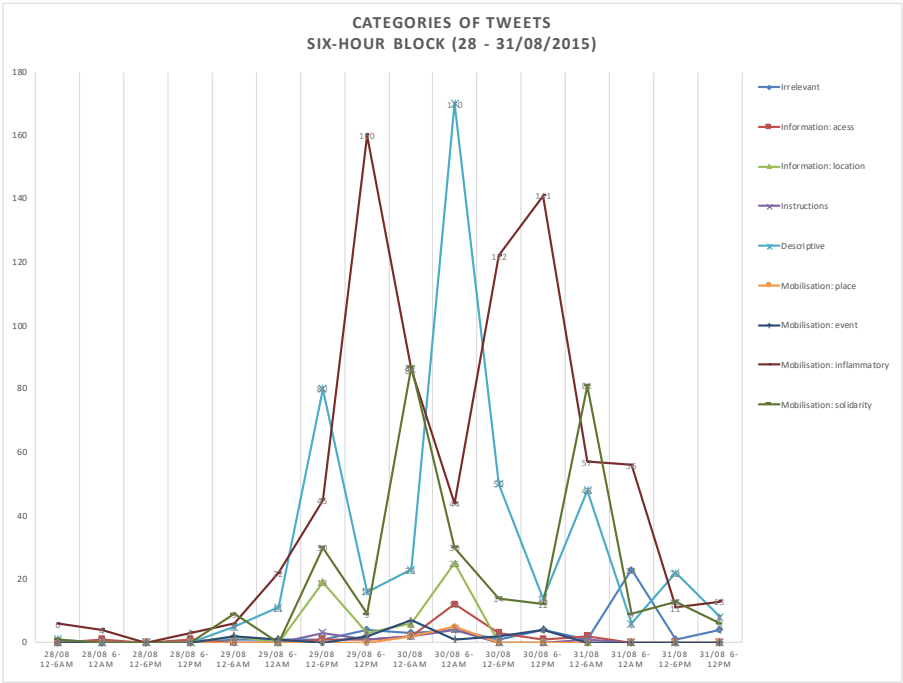


FIGURE 7.23 The chart indicates the pattern of tweets sent over four days between 28.08.2015 (before protest) to 31.08.2015 (after protest)

Figure 7.23 demonstrates how the number of tweets that mention place started building up in the morning of the first day of protest (29.08 — time block 6-12am) and different kinds of tweets peak alternately in the subsequent time blocks. Mobilisation tweets that mention places peaked twice at a similar amount (140 and 160 respectively), in the time block of 6-12pm on the first day of the protest (29.08) and again in the same time block on the second day of the protest (30.08). Tweets that describe the activities or situation on the other hand peaked the most in the time block of 6-12am on the second day of the protest with a count of 170 tweets. The first time it peaked is on the first day of the protest between 12 and 5 pm at 80 tweets, and again, at a much lesser count, less than 50 descriptive tweets in the time block of 12-5am on the day after the protest (31.08) which happened to be Independence Day. The following tables (7.2-7.5) show some examples of the tweets according to the assigned codes:

TABLE 7.2 Examples of mobilisation tweets from the peak time block (29.08: 6pm-12am). Sorting at this level does not distinguish whether the tweets supported or were against the protest.

USER NAME	DATE & TIME	TWEET
miss_ija	2015-08-2918:36:08	Praying for a safe and powerful second day of #Bersih4 in Kuala Lumpur.
waqirazak	2015-08-29 20:22:17	Tun M pun turun padang, hidup Malaysia! #Bersih4 *[Even Tun M (Mahathir Mohamed, former Prime Minister) turned up. Long live Malaysia!]*
Razali_04	2015-08-2923:53:04	Jangan sesekali terikut dgn perhimpunan yg bodoh dan tidak bermoral #Bersih4 kerja gila #Melakamajuf2 #MalaysiaSelamat [*Do not be influenced by a stupid and immoral gathering like #Bersih4 #Melakamajuf2 #MalaysiaSelamat*]

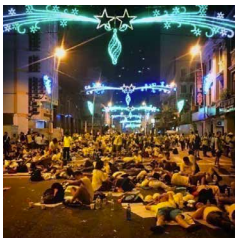
TABLE 7.3 Examples of mobilisation tweets from the second time they peaked on 30.08 from 6pm to 12am.

USER NAME	DATE & TIME	TWEET
jamunah_velu	2015-08-30 18:04:3	We are always proud to be a Malaysian. We will never let down our country in any situation. That's why we needed #Bersih4. #sehatisejiwa
Panlusi	2015-08-30T18:45:25	Kenapa polis tak tahan orang kat #Bersih4? Sebab depa dah capai KPI depa dengan tangkap 100 lebih kawan-kawan di #RumahApi! [*Why aren't the police arresting people at #Bersih4? That's because they've reached their KPI by arresting more than 100 friends at #RumahApi!*]
JohnLim92	2015-08-30 23:14:19	Learn to appreciate what they're trying to do. It's baby steps for a country like Malaysia. We can do this, change. #Bersih4

TABLE 7.4 Examples of descriptive tweets sent in the first peak (29.08: 12-6pm)

USER NAME	DATE & TIME	TWEET	MEDIA
simonroughneen	2015-08-29 13:23:47	Crowd at Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur now for #Bersih4 #Malaysia http://t.co/fNGFtIVlyj	
Jaskirath	2015-08-29 15:52:19	Massive crowds buses fr kedah arrived, speeches going on but can barely hear 2 much honking by participants! #bersih4 http://t.co/guXZ43Cbqs	

TABLE 7.5 Examples of descriptive tweets sent in the second peak (30.08: 6am-12pm)

USER NAME	DATE & TIME	TWEET	MEDIA
Myhorng	2015-08-30 06:47:12	The heroes #bersih #bersih4 #KualaLumpur #Rally @ Dataran Merdeka,Kuala Lumpur https://t.co/AWc1wFr2RR	
pualdidan	2015-08-30 11:21:19	It was done all day long .. Every Rakyat Malaysia 'bersih' up d area #Bersih4 https://t.co/AZVn3S7KPp (quoting Suanie's tweet of her Instagram - These youngsters were distributing free coffee, bread and collecting rubbish at 6am. #bersih4 https://instagram.com/p/6_FseQO8-S/	

As is evident from the examples above, most descriptive tweets are accompanied by pictures depicting activities at the protest. It is also not uncommon for tweets to only mention hashtags denoting that they are relevant to the discussion, with the words not really forming a coherent sentence, but the message is relayed by the image attached to the tweet.

Now that we know the pattern of tweets according to time, it would be interesting to examine the places that are mentioned in the different categories of tweets. For example, which places were more likely to be mentioned in 'descriptive' tweets? Are they any different from the places mentioned in tweets which are categorised as mobilisation? Which places are mentioned in most, if not all, categories? A network graph visualises these connections well, since it reveals how places are connected to the different categories of tweets. The advantage of this graph is that rather than seeing a one-to-one connection, we can see how places are connected to more than one category, and also the clustering of places in relation to the categories of the tweets (Figure 7.24). It is worth stressing again that the places in this graph are places mentioned in tweets, and not the places where tweets were coming from. The network graph is produced using the application Gephi. Two columns indicating the relationship between two nodes, in this instance place-codes (example: Dataran Merdeka-inflammatory) which is based on the coding exercise, and place-place

(Dataran Merdeka-Kuala Lumpur), based on the mentions of these two places in a tweet, were read by the application to produce the network graph below.

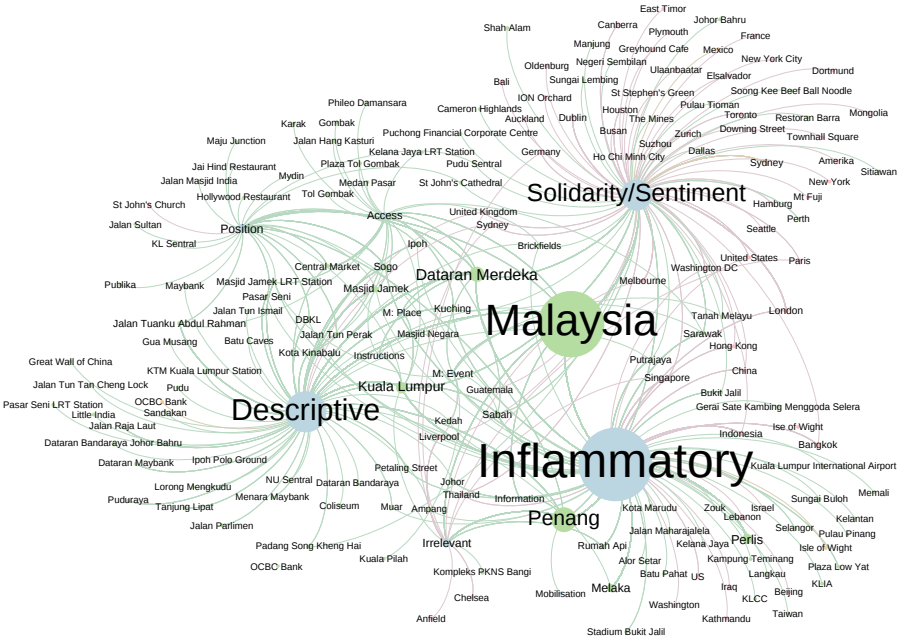


FIGURE 7.24 Network graph illustrating how places are connected to different categories of tweets sent between 28 August, 2015 (the day before the protest) and 31 August 2015 (the day after the protest). Places which are most connected to the different categories are situated in the middle of the network, whereas places which tend to be mentioned in a particular category are clustered as such.

Where places mentioned in descriptive tweets tend to be the location of people during the protest event, (mostly in streets around where Bersih 4 was taking place in central Kuala Lumpur), the places mentioned in inflammatory tweets are more diverse, and some of these spaces are even situated outside Malaysia. Due to the nature of the tweet, where the intention is to report the situation in terms of the activity or the atmosphere, places mentioned in descriptive tweets tend to be at the street/building level, unlike inflammatory tweets that vary from street/building level such as Kuala Lumpur International Airport to nation-state level such as Israel. Most places outside Malaysia, such as New York City or Paris, tend to be mentioned in solidarity with Bersih 4, and though these tweets sometimes also come with photographs, which means that they are also reporting from the ground (descriptive), the places they mention tend to be at the neighbourhood or city level, unlike the descriptive tweets which tend

TOC

to mention street/building level places. The exception is when the street is well-known, such as Downing Street. In the three major categories, we also found that 'inflammatory' tweets mention places in a more discursive way, while 'descriptive' and 'solidarity/sentiment' tweets refer to places as locations where things were happening.

The fifty-five tweets that are categorised as 'position' in terms of logistical information include some restaurants as well, since the category informs where services or persons can be accessed. This of course, includes access to food. Another category which relates to logistical information, 'access', yielded thirty tweets. The places mentioned in these tweets tend to be situated in Malaysia and mostly at the street level. There are only eleven 'instruction' tweets that mention place.

As already explained before, the initial result of the coding reveals that tweets that mention places during this protest period very rarely directly communicate practical information regarding logistics or instructions for protesters. Bearing in mind that the criteria of the dataset are defined by hashtags, time, and also mentions of places, this means that only tweets that meet those criteria are taken into consideration. This does not mean that 'instruction' or 'logistics' tweets do not exist. The small number suggests that these kinds of tweets are produced by trusted sources, such as from the account of the movement itself, @bersih2. As Figure 7.25 suggests, tweets from this account tend to be instructions to protesters present in Kuala Lumpur, and because they come from the organiser, they do not need hashtags or even to mention the places since it was taken for granted that they were tweeting instructions to protesters attending Bersih 4 in Kuala Lumpur. Given that Bersih rallies have always been organised by the Bersih movement, and there were several key people on Twitter as well, protesters could rely on them for practical information regarding logistics and instructions. Therefore, protesters may not need to rely on each other for such information although some may choose to share information based on their own experience and knowledge. This may well explain why the volume of tweets sharing practical information about places is low. Protesters were keener to share their own experience of the event and also their opinion and sentiment about the protest and depend on 'leaders' for practical information and instructions. This extended to their mentions of places as well.

FIGURE 7.25 Screenshot of Bersih's tweets from the first day of Bersih 4

Dataran Merdeka

While the network graph illustrates how all the places mentioned in the tweets are connected not just to each other but also to the various codes, this analysis focuses on how Dataran Merdeka is situated within the framework. Within the city centre of Kuala Lumpur, Dataran Merdeka was the most mentioned place with most tweets supporting Bersih 4 (Figure 7.26). The tweets were mostly used to report the situation or the atmosphere there, where protesters were hovering just beyond the boundaries of the historical square, or in relation to Dataran (Figure 7.27). This is followed by 'sentiment' and 'identity', which, just like the earlier analysis where we got an overview of the descriptive variables, reveal that both these variables are of similar amounts. Only one tweet which mentioned Dataran Merdeka does not address it directly (irrelevant). Figure 7.28 indicates how Dataran Merdeka was connected to other places via the objectives of the tweets.

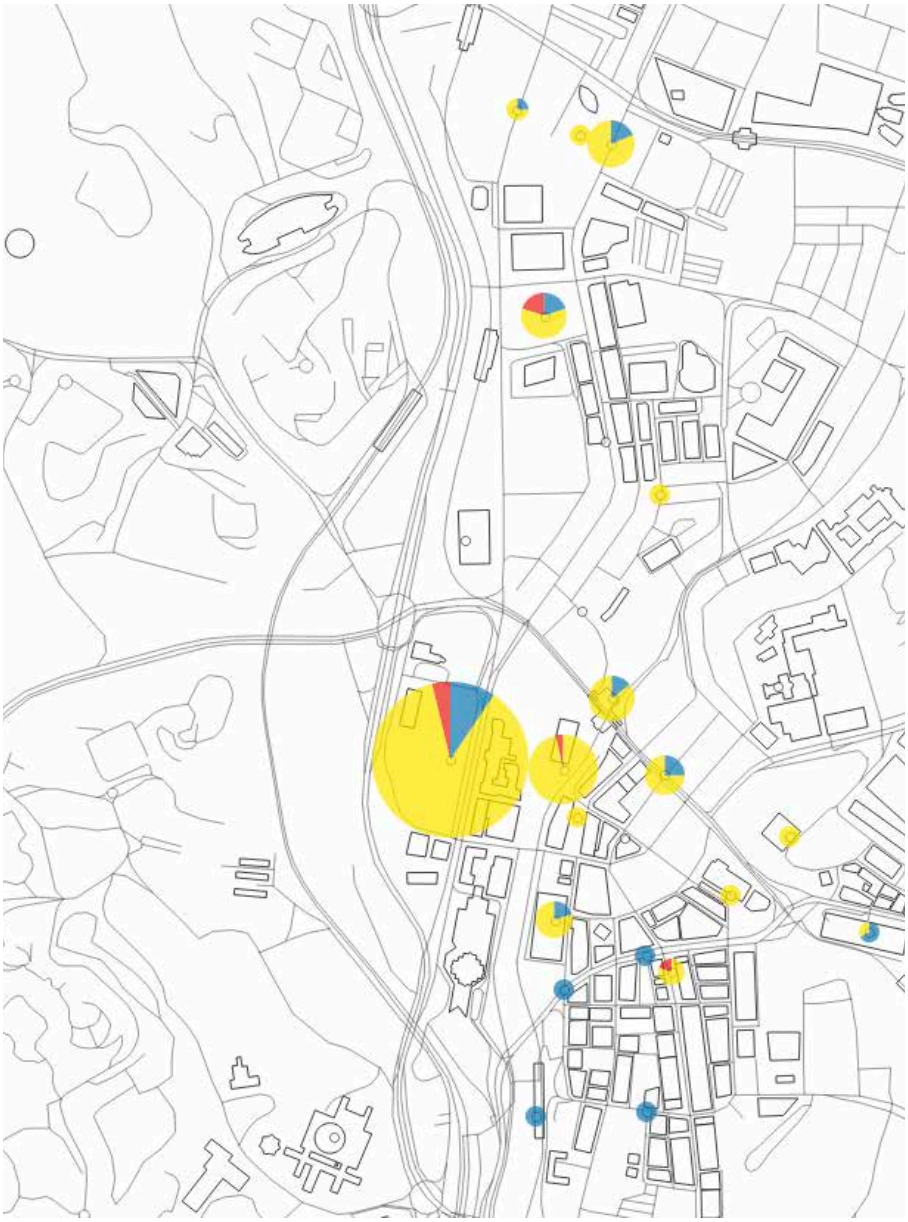


FIGURE 7.26 A map of the area in central Kuala Lumpur. The size of the pie charts indicate the volume of tweets, whereas the colours indicate the sentiments. See Figure 7.20 to see what the colours indicate.

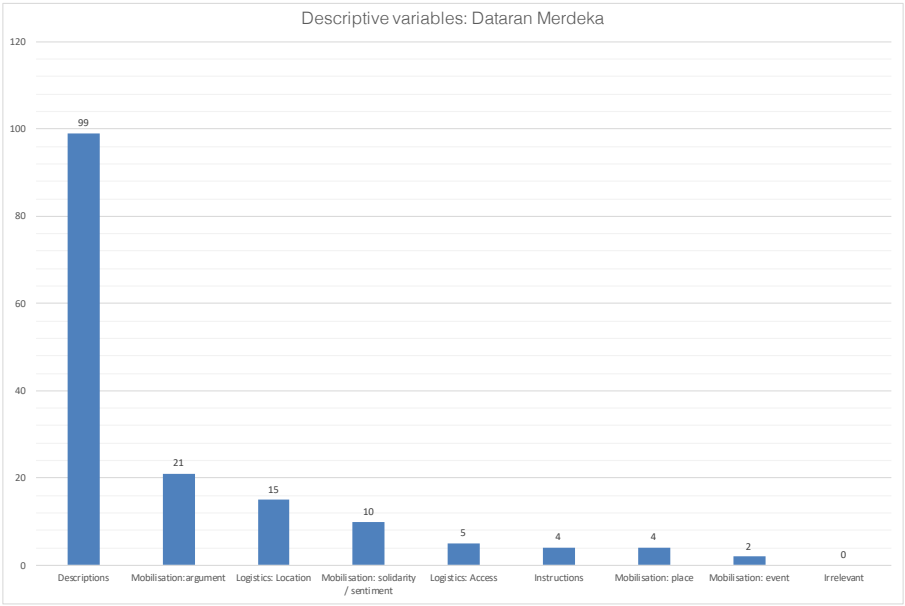


FIGURE 7.27 Most tweets that mention Dataran Merdeka tend to report the situation and/or describing the atmosphere around the area.

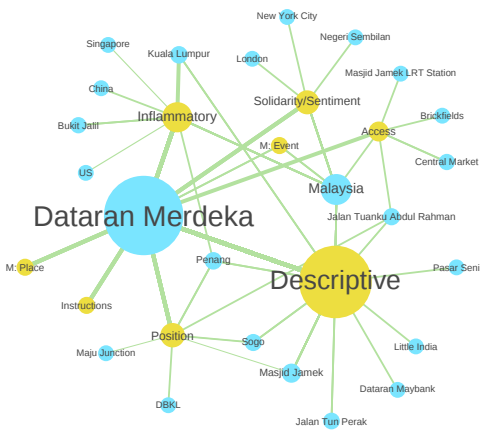


FIGURE 7.28 Categories of tweets that mention Dataran Merdeka together with other places. (Source: Author)

TABLE 7.6 Examples of tweets that mentioned Dataran Merdeka.

USER NAME	DATE & TIME	CONTENT	MEDIA	CODE
eryrahim	2015-08-29 14:21:47	#BERSIH4 #BERSIH Now I'm getting closer to Dataran Merdeka. Closer than my previous position in #BERSIH3 before they fired tear gas.		1b - logistical information: position of persons/services
bongkersz	2015-08-29 21:54:49	Masjid Jamek - top, bottom - Dataran Merdeka. #bersih4 #fb https://t.co/IAhnFzavSh		3 -descriptive
chuckysemiwaras	2015-08-29 23:21:26	Abang jual patches,roti,mi siput dan ayaq. Mai lah dataran merdeka. Depan 7e jalan tar ni. #BERSIH4 *[I sell patches, bread, mi siput, and water. Come to Dataran Merdeka. In front of 7-11 Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman. #Bersih4]*		1b - logistical information: position of persons/services
aaron_crispin	2015-08-30T 04:43:13	With the Ringgit falling, we can't go to US or Singapore. So where do we go ? Dataran Merdeka #BERSIH4		4c - mobilisation: argument
sybreon	2015-08-31T 02:39:35	Scene right after dispersal at midnight. Merdeka! #bersih4 #bersihpics		3 - descriptive

The tweets in Table 7.6 provide a glimpse into the time aspect, i.e when tweets were posted on the Internet. Social media, and its accessibility on mobile devices, together with the constant updates, give the impression that postings are often made on the spot, as the event is unfolding. However, the tweets by @chuckysemiwaras and

@sybreon demonstrate that there is a disjuncture between the local time stamp of when the tweet went online, and the image/message posted. @Chuckysemiwaras' tweet was sent at 23:21 hours, close to midnight, but the picture he attached to his tweet was taken in daytime. @Sybreon on the other hand described his tweet as the 'scene right after dispersal at midnight' but the timestamp indicates that the posting was made at 02:39 hours. This could be caused by several factors: the tweeter might be on the move and did not have the time to upload it on the go, external factors such as lack of signal or a dying/dead device, or they purposely chose to send it later when they had had reflect upon the event and/or can send the tweet over wifi instead of using their phone data.

§ 7.2.2 Conclusion

Even though Dataran Merdeka remained beyond the reach of Bersih, the occupation of the streets by its northern entrance served to amplify the meaning and symbolism of both places and highlight the contrast between the two. The state cultivates the symbolism of Dataran Merdeka as an icon of emancipation from the nation's colonial past while simultaneously positioning itself as the arbiter of heritage and guardian of national consciousness, through the careful curation of activities allowed on the square made possible by special by-laws specifically written for the place. While Dataran Merdeka could not be physically entered, it was mentioned 160 times in the 2,096 unique tweets sent during Bersih 4, and most of these tweets were in favour of the protest. While the number may seem insignificant (7.6 percent), it was the third most mentioned place in the tweets, with Malaysia being the most mentioned place at 42 percent. Close to a hundred of these tweets that mentioned Dataran Merdeka were describing the atmosphere or what was going on in the protest, therefore indicating that most of the people who tweeted about Dataran Merdeka were present on-site during the occupation. While the state is mimicking the colonial masters through the rigid framing of the Dataran as a national heritage, the symbolism of this space is challenged not by the physical occupation of the square, but through how the space is framed on Twitter during the protest. While Wallach (2013) observed that the use of the space of everyday life unburdens the protest from symbolisms invested in more established places, the findings from the Bersih 4 protest supports this further by showing that it emphasises the distance between the state and the movement.

Through an examination of the tweets, we also get a glimpse of how Twitter was used for protest in 2015. Tweets that were hashtagged #Bersih4 mentioned Malaysia the most and were categorised as 'inflammatory'. Communication concerning logistics was

minimal, indicating that protesters received information either from specific accounts on Twitter, and/or also from other sources. This indicates that those who tagged their tweets with #Bersih4 during the protest were more interested in sharing their sentiment about the protest, rather than actually using it as a logistical tool.

§ 7.3 Control and surveillance over physical and digital spaces

In Chapter Four, the control of space from the perspective of production and governance of space was touched upon when we discussed Malaysian public space. This section aims to provide empirical examples of the control of space through the events that unfolded in relation to and during Bersih 4, focusing on both digital and physical spaces. As already discussed in Section 2.2.1, the control of space is crucial (Graham 2010; Mitchell 2003; Parkinson 2012), either through the construction of physical barriers (Fregonese 2013) or by ensuring that protest is silenced before it takes place through the regulations of space (Mitchell 2003).

§ 7.3.1 Roadblocks

The streets and squares (physical spaces) were mostly controlled through two ways during the Bersih 4 protest: firstly, at the regulations level, denying permission to use the space; and secondly, the construction of barriers manned and guarded by the police force, which was justifiable as a necessary measure since the first requirement was not complied with.

As outlined in the previous section, Bersih's application to protest on Dataran Merdeka was denied by DBKL, the custodian of the space, who stated that the space was unavailable due to the preparations to celebrate Independence Day. DBKL recommended alternative venues, all stadiums, indicating their preference for protests to be contained within the confine of walls rather than flourish in the streets. This was however not without precedent, the People's Uprising Rally in 2013 was held in Stadium Merdeka, and Bersih did actually try to hold a rally there in 2011. Bersih's insistence to hold the rally in the streets while promising to stay off the Dataran was used by the police as an excuse to declare Bersih 4 illegal, even though this was countered by SUHAKAM and also Lawyers for Liberty together with Pusat KOMAS

(Pusat Komas and Lawyers for Liberty 2015; Spykerman 2015).[27] Since this politics of appropriation was broadcasted in the public sphere via online newspapers and later on amplified on social media, which unwittingly granted Bersih free publicity, the antagonistic attitude of the administrators might have also pushed those sitting on the fence to stay there.

On 25 August 2015, four days before the protest, the police announced that eighteen routes would be temporarily closed from the 26th to the 31st to make way for Independence Day preparation and celebrations. Since Bersih 4 was also due to take place in this period, some questioned if the road closure was motivated more by the protest rather than the Independence Day celebration, while others counter-argued that the practice was typical. Indeed, road closures are the norm for events like this. Regardless of the motive of these particular closures, the notion that the city could actually be prepped for certain events over others reveals the preference for passive consumption over active citizenship in the streets. However, come protest day, the presence of the police in the city was not overtly visible, and though newspapers did report roadblocks, these were mostly on the periphery. The most visible, and also symbolical barriers were placed at the entry points of Dataran Merdeka. This performance of power was however matched by Bersih who added two extra layers of barricades, indicating their seriousness about not breaching into the compound of the Dataran.

§ 7.3.2 Cybertroopers

Parallel to blocking access to the streets and squares, the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) were also monitoring and blocking websites. While the Minister of Information admitted to this, he also reassured that signal jammers would not be used to choke communication during the protest. The anxiety over the use of signal jammers was driven by the difficulty to make calls and access the Internet during past protests, although this allegation was without concrete proof. Some argued that the difficulty to get a signal was caused by the density of mobile users concentrated in a small area, akin to the experience of being in a stadium during sporting events. The concern about the possible use of signal jammers led to the use of the Firechat application, made popular by the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong. This

27 Pusat Komas collaborated with Lawyers for Liberty to produce a series of Youtube videos explaining why Bersih 4 was not illegal and also what to do in case of arrest during the protest.

exemplifies the transfer of tactics and strategies between protest movements across political boundaries, which dissemination could have taken place through media coverage, possible even without protest movements being in contact with each other.

Even though Bersih websites were blocked, Bersih could still disseminate information through their social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. While blocking websites was a top-down approach, the difficulty of selectively shutting down specific accounts on social media platforms without shutting down access to whole platforms — see Zuckerman's 'cute cat theory of Internet activism' (2013) — and also the impossibility of conducting a media black-out since content was user-generated, led to the emergence of Cybertroopers.[28] As already explained in Section 4.2, Cybertroopers are social media users whose actions are allegedly coordinated and possibly paid for their posts. Since Cybertroopers used social media in the same way as others, meaning they were also generating content, they gave the impression of an uncoordinated bottom-up initiative, meaning that it was not immediately apparent that they were coordinated. However, through examining the tweets harvested around the Bersih 4 protest, some patterns started to emerge with how certain users tweeted that it was possible to identify them as Cybertroopers.

One method of countering the discussion online is to drown it with content, which is why the Cybertroopers' tweets that were captured were tagged with #Bersih4. The tweets were mostly retweets, although not always retweeted properly, but more likely copied and pasted and sent as original tweets. Charting the timeline of the protest also revealed that tweets that were against the protest tend to peak alternately with tweets that were supporting the protest, indicating a coordinated attempt to drown the conversation (Figure 7.29). This however, did not prove that these tweets against the protest actually came from Cybertroopers.

28 The 'cute cat theory of Internet activism' denotes that activists would be more immune to reprisal by the state since shutting down a popular platform that some use to look at cute cats may provoke a public outcry against the state.

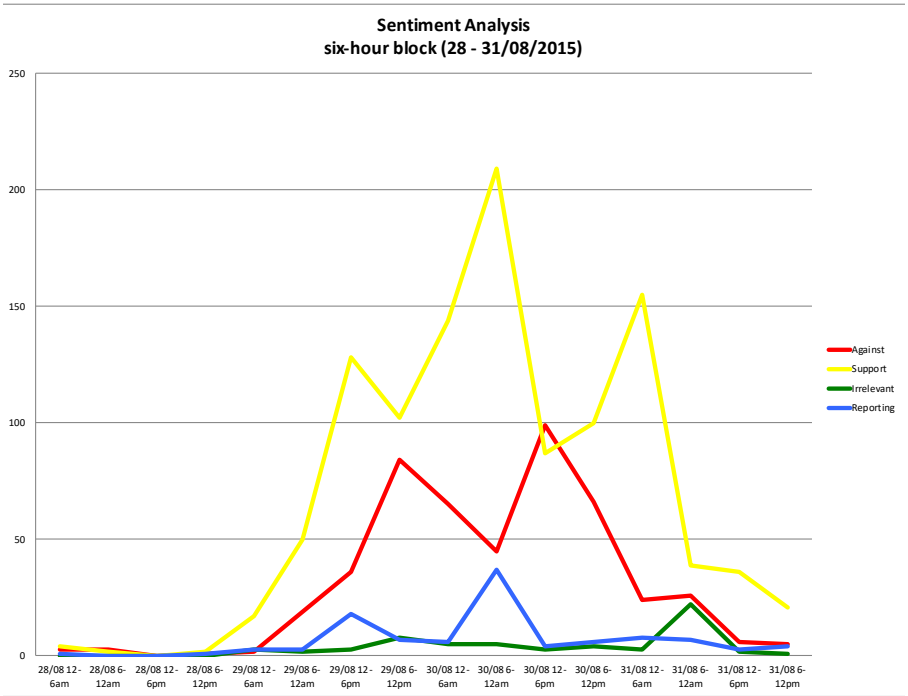


FIGURE 7.29 Sentiment analysis of tweets that mention place projected over time, over six-hour blocks, from 28 August 2015 (before the protest) up to 31 August 2015 (day after protest).

Since one of the aims of collecting social media data is to reveal the connection between digital and physical spaces during protest, one of the ways this is achieved is to examine how places are communicated in social media, and it was through this filtration of tweets that the Cybertroopers were identified. While the total number of tweets tagged #Bersih4 sent out between 28 August (before the protest) to 31 August was 56,890, from which 12,896 tweets mentioned 167 places ranging from Song Kee Beef Noodle Restaurant in Kuala Lumpur to St Stephen's Green in Dublin. Figure 7.30 shows the distribution of places mentioned in the tweets, where the places most mentioned (indicated by the size of the bubble) are predictably situated within Malaysia. There is also diversity in scale, places mentioned are not always at the level which is quite precise like the two mentioned before, but often neighbourhoods, cities, region or state, and country names were mentioned as well, and the tweets were coded as such to reflect the level of the scale it mentions. Since there were only 167 place names found in 12896 tweets, it was obvious that some names are mentioned more than others.

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FIGURE 7.30 Places which are mentioned in the tweets hashtagged Bersih 4. Size of bubble indicate frequency of mentions. Map produced in QGIS. (Source: author)

The findings reveal that Penang was mentioned the most after Malaysia and then followed rather predictably by Dataran Merdeka which was the venue of Bersih 4, and also Kuala Lumpur as the city where the protest took place (Figure 7.31). Since Penang was not an official venue for Bersih 4, and there was no pressing issue related to the state close to the protest, the tweets that mentioned Penang were examined in further detail.

FIGURE 7.31 Word cloud indicating frequency of mentions

Examining the tweets that contained 'Penang' revealed that most of them were against the protest, and were tweeted in similar styles, methods, and languages. Most of the tweets also comprise of amplification, either direct retweets or similar or the same tweets posted over and over again. After these patterns were recognised, the dataset was examined again to find similar tweets. Once the unique tweets were identified, the word cloud was generated again (Figure 7.32), revealing Malaysia as the most mentioned place (880), followed by Penang (295), Dataran Merdeka (160), and Kuala Lumpur (109). Penang was mostly used as a placeholder by the Cybertroopers, who tagged their tweets with #changepenang.

FIGURE 7.32 Frequency of mentions based on unique tweets

There were 168 hashtags that contain place names, and these mostly came from the Cybertroopers, who coupled the place names with sentiments such as Perlis Boleh (Perlis Can), Melaka Maju F2 (Melaka Develops Phase 2), and Change Penang. These sentiments reflected their allegiance to the ruling party, since Penang is governed by the opposition party, DAP, hence Change Penang indicated that the government of Penang needed to be changed. On the other hand, the ruling party won the election in both Melaka and Perlis and so the sentiments for both places were more positive in nature. The places that they used to tag their tweets are also usually at the level of 'state', instead of 'country', 'city', or 'street'. Hence after a while it became apparent that a large majority of the tweets that contained the three hashtags above, or use

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standalone state names as hashtags, mostly came from Cybertroopers. Hashtags of standalone places at other scale, such as city or street, on the other hand, were more prone to support Bersih 4. The vast difference between the two word-clouds (figures 7.31 and 7.32), where state names are no longer prominent in the second one, indicate the high level of amplification by the Cybertroopers.

While hashtagged places are at times used to indicate the location where events are taking place, from the word cloud we can see that it is mostly coupled with either sentiments or events (Figure 7.33). One tweet that exemplified what was described came from user Piscean_J_07:

#Bersih4 berdemo di KL, Sabah, S'wk dan Johor..kenapa tak demo jgk di Penang?? Pelik kan?? #AgendaYahudi #changepenang

[#Bersih4 demonstrating in KL, Sabah, Sarawak, and Johor.. Why not also demonstrate in Penang? Weird isn't it? #JewishAgenda #changepenang]

Unfortunately, the original tweet is no longer available on the website.

FIGURE 7.33 Place names as hashtags

§ 7.3.3 Conclusion

Based on the evidence above regarding the control mechanisms of space in Bersih 4, it can be concluded that the control of physical space is almost symmetrical with the control of digital space. The symmetry can be explained in three ways: regulations, blocking access, and also the bottom-up disruptions. To explain this, the analysis is expanded to include events and phenomenon beyond this strict category of control in relation to Bersih 4, but still applicable to the Malaysian context at large.

Regulations — This category refers to the top-down approach of regulating access and use of space. While Section 8 of Local Government (Dataran Merdeka) (Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur) 1992 Act dictates that any kinds of assembly shall not take place on the Dataran without consent from the Commissioner — and this Act has already been used to block Bersih 3 from taking place on the Dataran (2012) Bersih's request to use the Dataran for their fourth protest was denied by the DBKL on the grounds that the Dataran was being prepped for the celebration of Independence Day. In terms of digital space, while no specific arrests were made based on social media postings in relation to Bersih 4, Section 233 of the Multimedia Communications Act 1988 has been used before to arrest people based on their Twitter and Facebook postings, and even Whatsapp messages (see Chapter Four).

Blocking of access — Another way of controlling space made possible through the laws and regulations, is to directly block access. The road closures and erection of barriers by the police were matched by the blocking of websites that provided information about Bersih 4 by the MCMC. Therefore, while the regulations described above allow for the control of space in a more abstract manner, meant to instil self-policing and self-censorship — with the implicit notion that failing to adhere by the regulations could lead to arrest and criminal charges — the road closures and blocking of websites manifested the control of space in a very direct way, which in turn complemented the more abstract regulations shrouded in legalese.

Bottom-up disruptions — Even though the regulations and blocking of access were a top-down approach to controlling space, the Red Shirts and Cybertroopers operating at the same level as the protesters could be read as a bottom-up initiative to control space. While the Red Shirts were organised by UMNO members and the UMNO New Media Unit admitted to coordinating bloggers and cybertroopers — and UMNO is indeed the biggest party in the ruling coalition, BN — the state has not taken ownership of these efforts, hence why they are categorised as bottom-up disruptions. Although to some extent the existence of the Red Shirts as a group protesting against Bersih could already be read as curbing them at the same level, the appearance of the Red Shirts on

Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman and its vicinity — a site where layers of radical defiance had been building up for about fifty years (Chapter Five) — which has also been one of the meeting points for almost all Bersih rallies, indicated an attempt to neutralise and rewrite the meanings and symbolisms of the space. They even wore yellow t-shirts on their first appearance on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, but later on changed to red t-shirts, perhaps driven by the confusion that arose about their position. The encroachment of the Red Shirts on the well-established geography of protest is matched by the Cybertroopers flooding the #Bersih4 Twitter timeline with disruptive content. While gangs mark their territories in the urban space by tagging walls with grafitti, the Cybertroopers mark their presence on Twitter by tagging their tweets with real places.

The symmetry of how physical and digital spaces are controlled could be a coincidence and not directly the result of a grand plan to ensure that both spaces are controlled in a similar way. Regardless, it complements the literature discussed in Chapter Two, where scholars like Merlyna Lim (2014) and David Meek (2012) investigated how social movements and how protesters navigated through, and were also impacted, by both places and digital spaces simultaneously. Therefore, it could be argued that the 'existential spatiality' (Meek 2012) and 'intermodality' (Lim 2014) are not just inherent in social movements and protesters who utilised the limited space and technology available to them, but perhaps, not surprisingly, are also an intrinsic feature of how authorities wield control over space.

§ 7.4 Digital/spatial divide

While Bersih 4 has provided many interesting insights into both the geography of protest and the use of digital media in dissent, the counter-protest Himpunan Rakyat Bersatu, on the other hand, is valuable for offering potentially alternative perspectives on similar themes. Given that the Red Shirts went to the streets to protest against Bersih, positioning themselves as supporters of the incumbent government, would the way they use the city and digital media confirm the existing patterns of dissent, or would their utilisation of both physical and digital spaces be different?

In contrast to the Red Shirts, Bersih had an organised digital campaign. Bersih 4 was announced well over a month before it was supposed to take place, and Bersih 2.0 launched a very organised campaign to mobilise people to take part in the protest. The hashtag #Bersih4 was constantly used across different platforms since the first days.

Information and announcements were released on the Bersih 2.0 official website, Facebook page, and Twitter, and disseminated and amplified by activists who were followed by the public. The demands of the protest were stated early on, and Bersih 2.0 also published cards containing information and explanations about the protest. Small events were organised leading up to the rally, such as educating the public about their rights if confronted by the police, and Bersih either invited or organised these events with other parties such as SUHAKAM (The Human Rights Commision of Malaysia). Bersih also kept on reminding protesters not to provoke the police and released guidelines of what to do in case protesters were arrested by the police. These also contained the phone numbers of lawyers supplied by the Bar Council.

The Red Shirts, on the other hand, had neither a coherent digital campaign nor clear leadership up to the day of the protest. Their lack of a central hashtag stemmed from the very simple problem of the rally not having a 'tag-able' name, which could have been remedied by the organisers had they assigned one. This could also have been hampered by the unclear name of the rally, due to the change of leadership to Pesaka, the National Silat Federation who suddenly emerged into the scene (Azhar 2015). While Jamal Yunos referred to the rally as Himpunan Maruah Melayu and Himpunan Melayu Bersatu (Malay Dignity Rally and Malay Unity Rally), thus centering it on Malay identity, Ali Rustam, the Chairman of Pesaka, called the rally Himpunan Rakyat Bersatu (People Unity Rally) (Reporters 2015b). The confusion is exacerbated by the denial by Ali Rustam that their rally had anything to do with the Malay Dignity Rally, indicating that they are two separate rallies, although both would take place on 16 September. Jamal Yunos on the other hand denied that he was organising a rally but would be attending the rally organised by Pesaka (Anti-Bersih group leader denies organising Sept 16 rally but confirms participation 2015; Azhar 2015). His continuance of issuing statement after statement about the rally even after denying he was the organiser did not help to clarify the leadership nor the name of the rally (Anti-Bersih group leader denies organising Sept 16 rally but confirms participation 2015; Buang 2015; Reporters 2015a). The lack of attempt to control the narrative in digital space indicate two possibilities: either the organisers lacked the requisite savviness to navigate through digital space, or they did not feel they needed the digital as much since they operated in different ways.

In observing this counter-protest, the researcher have had to rely on statements made by Jamal Yunos and other key players in newspapers to get the necessary information, unlike Bersih, where information could be gained by visiting their website or social media platforms and also directly addressing the activists on social media. However, this does not mean that the Red Shirts were absent from the digital public sphere altogether, instead, rather than directly addressing the public on social media, they

communicated through their actions and activities in the urban space which social media users then picked up, broadcasted, and amplified.

Unlike Bersih, the Red Shirts made their way into the public sphere through a series of spectacles. In total, they made five appearances in the public space, as reported in the media. They first burst onto the scene on 15 August on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman (Anti-Bersih group protests against Bersih 4 2015; Hasli 2015), and again on 20 August, where they defaced Maria Chin's effigy (Khor 2015). On 21 August, they made a police report at the Dang Wangi station against Bersih (Joibi 2015; NGO coalition alleges Bersih 4.0 funded by Selangor or Israel 2015; RM30m fund allegedly used to pay Bersih rally participants 2015). Up until this point, they were still wearing yellow. By the time they held the silat demonstration in front of SOGO shopping complex on 25 August, they were already wearing red, and even distinguished themselves from Bersih by reffering to the latter as the 'Yellow Shirts' (Rahmah Ghazali 2015). Three days before their own rally on 16 September, Jamal Yunos led a motorcycle convoy through several areas in Kuala Lumpur (Chow Kit, Dataran Merdeka, and Bukit Bintang) (Reporters 2015a).

Even though the spectacles before the protest took place within the existing geography of protest, the Himpunan Rakyat Bersatu Rally itself on 16 September was starkly different (Figure 7.34). While Bersih seemed to stick with spaces they have already used in the past and thus already known, the Red Shirts, on the other hand, apart from the main venue of Padang Merbok, made race a consideration by choosing Petaling Street and Bukit Bintang, perceived as Chinese enclaves, as their aim. The choosing of Dataran Merdeka by Bersih just before the Independence Day celebration also seemed strategic. Perhaps because they wanted to draw a distinction between Bersih and themselves, the spaces that Jamal Yunos mentioned as collection points seemed a bit odd. Interestingly enough, although the protest was purportedly about Malay dignity, none of the Malay enclaves in the city, such as Kampung Baru, the traditionally recognised radical space, were designated as collection points. Instead, the places he announced seemed quite random: Titiwangsa Lake Gardens, Jalan Tun Razak (Kuala Lumpur's ring road, and thus very busy), the Federal Mosque (situated by a hill outside the city centre, accessible by collector roads/expressways). The only overlap with Bersih is the National Mosque (Figure 7.35).

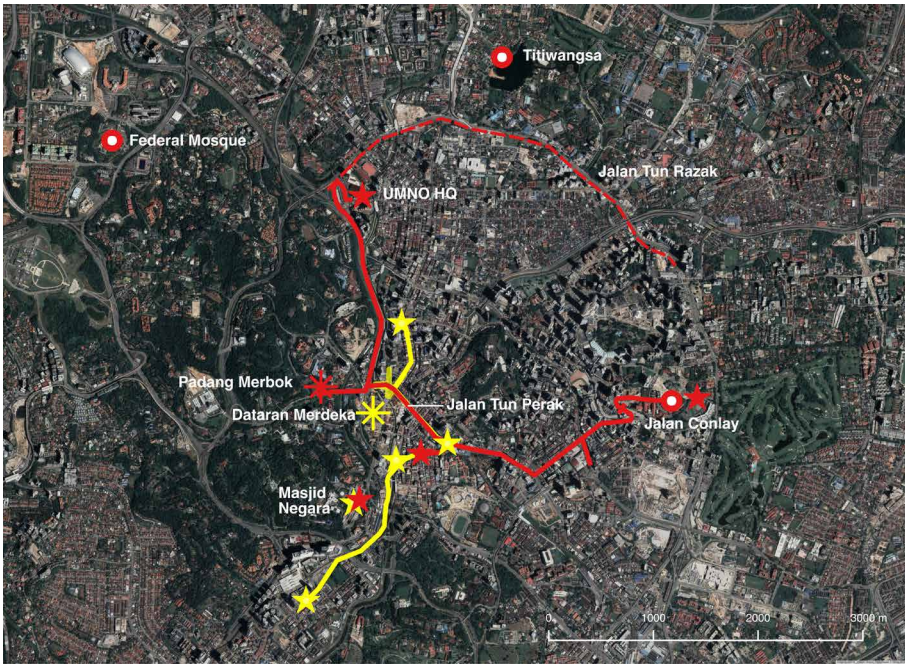

FIGURE 7.34 The geography of the Red Shirts, at least in communication, is more spread out than Bersih 4. The two overlapped in two places, Masjid Negara which was designated as one of the gathering places, and Jalan Tun Perak.

Based on the above, it may be concluded that the digital divide is not about differing degree of savviness, rather, it reflects a different logic of operation based on the availability of media which then extends to the kinds of public that these media outlets or platforms could reach. As an UMNO member, Jamal Yunos had at his disposal the party's social media engine, which was well-developed. While the Cybertrooper's were active tweeting during Bersih, no discernible similar patterns could be traced for the Red Shirts. This is probably because UMNO did not officially back Himpunan Rakyat Bersatu, although it was organised by members of their parties and also attended by their MPs and ministers and booklets about the protest were also distributed at the Annual General Meeting. Up until recently, mainstream media has also been more open to reporting events and statements from those who support the regime. Mainstream media are also still consumed largely by those in rural, non-urban parts of Malaysia which make up the majority of the ruling party's support base. The organisers of Himpunan Rakyat Bersatu thus did not need social media to mobilise supporters, or communicate with them, since the supporters could be accessed through different means. Besides mainstream media, support was also garnered through the more traditional word of mouth or tapping into existing organisations. The latter is

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exemplified by FELDA organising their own celebration of Malaysia Day on Jalan Conlay, which was incidentally one of the gathering spots of the Red Shirts.

Although social media could also be used for dialogues and debates, the organisers of Himpunan Rakyat Bersatu did not directly engage the Bersih 4 organisers to voice their dissent against the protest. Since the organisers could not be reached directly and did not use social media to issue statements, their digital footprint was thus considerably smaller than Bersih 4. Their presence on social media was marked by other users who talked about them, hence the lack of a central hashtag denotes the lack of need to shape and keep track of the conversation.

§ 7.4.1 Conclusion

This analysis is relevant to the discussion about the Malaysian public sphere (Chapter Four), where the high Internet penetration in Malaysia is defined by the mismatch between urban and rural patterns of usage (Liow 2012; Postill 2014, 87) further aggravated by communitarian divide (Weiss 2014, 100). Bersih 2.0 is a social movement led by the urban middle class which has always relied on the Internet as a way of reaching out to the public. Himpunan Kebangkitan Rakyat on the other hand was organised by an UMNO grass-root leader, Jamal Yunos, who operated in a more traditional way of mobilisation. The contrasts between Bersih 4 and Himpunan Rakyat Bersatu not only manifest the digital and spatial divide which is defined along communal lines, but also how this cleavage could be extended to politics as well.

§ 7.5 Summary

Chapter Seven presents the analysis based on the fieldwork around the Bersih 4 protest, putting together the observation from the streets during the event together with the social media data that were simultaneously collected. The analysis was organised into four themes, and since each theme was rounded off with a conclusion, this section aims to provide a summary, before an overall conclusion is drawn in the next chapter. Section 7.1 demonstrated how the streets accommodated the development of a collective identity that were cultivated in the digital spaces of social media and how these images travelled back from the streets into the tweets to

strengthen the sense of a collective identity. In Section 7.2 we saw how the symbolism of Dataran Merdeka was challenged not by directly contesting the space, but the occupation of the everyday spaces of life just beyond the borders of Dataran Merdeka served to amplify the distance between the state and the protesters. The reclamation of the symbolism, however, took place in the digital space of Twitter. Section 7.3 revealed how the control of digital space was found to be symmetrical with material space, with the state regulating and blocking access to both spaces, and the 'bottom-up' Red Shirts' spectacles in the streets were matched by the cybertroopers who drowned online conversations by hijacking the relevant hashtags. Finally, Section 7.4 showed how the Red Shirts' logic of mobilisation and pattern of movement in the streets also contrasted Bersih. Where Bersih had a strong online presence and did a lot of mobilisation in digital space, the Red Shirts' digital presence is marked by newspaper reports or posts about them, indicating that their mobilisation was conducted offline. The spaces they ended up using on 16 September also differ, while overlapping with Bersih only in two places (Masjid Negara and Jalan Tun Perak). The next chapter will discuss these together with insights from the earlier chapters in order to draw overall conclusions.

8 Final Conclusion

This research started out as a concern over how the postcolonial public space accommodates or hinders the performance of public claim-making as a function of democracy in Malaysia. The research argued that both physical and digital spaces, as well as protests themselves, are manifestations of the particular postcoloniality of Malaysian society. On the one hand, protest provided a telling window since it indicates a rupture in the narrative constructed by the regime. The negotiations that arose around it and also the discussions it generated in the public sphere complemented this glimpse into this postcolonial politics of space. On the other, examining how the built environment is produced, governed, and used, with a postcolonial lens, revealed the amnesia and mimicry embedded within the Malaysian built environment. The research also proposed that Kuala Lumpur as the colonial capital serves as a subversive third space, due to the thickening layer of radical manifesting on its streets, despite the absence of the national government institutions which moved to the purpose built city of Putrajaya in 1999.

§ 8.1 The postcolonial city

To answer that main question the research first examined how these spaces are produced and governed by the post-colonial state. Here it was found that the political economy of Malaysian public space is shaped by the colonial legacy of surveillance (Chapter Four). The concepts of amnesia and mimicry in this instance helped to understand how power was mapped onto the built environment by the post-colonial state. Colonial mimicry could be seen not only in how the post-colonial state reflect the colonial masters in their rigid governance of space, but also in how people approach public space, where the concern for comfort and security drive the middle class to avoid the Other, achieved through the avoidance of public space and spending most of their time in air-conditioned private spaces. This is amplified by the neoliberal production of space, where growth is prioritised over other concerns such as welfare, thus reproducing colonial spatial patterns, since both neoliberal and colonial ideologies prioritise production and consumption. In this space, consumer identity is prized over citizenship.

Amnesia is also evident in the architecture and urban design favoured by the postcolonial regime who selectively remembered and amplified the Malay-Muslim identity, while conveniently forgetting other ethnic and cultural identities also present in the multicultural state, in order to construct a hegemonic vision of society (Chapter Three). Other ethnic identities are only amplified when it serves the narrative of multiculturalism, which the state, via the Ministry of Tourism, uses as a selling point, with the tagline 'Malaysia Truly Asia.' Spatially, this translated into Chinatown and Little India in Kuala Lumpur, where the traces of colonial segregation are transformed into a tourist attraction, therefore made productive. Here the research argues that the Malaysian case demonstrates how neoliberal planning parallels the colonial condition so much since both aim to maximise capital through the spaces they create and destroy. Even though they may seem contradictory since the colonial ideology was based on extraction, while neoliberal planning prioritises growth, the growth that neoliberal planning produces functions and results on a similar logic of extraction as the colonial ideology.

§ 8.2 Material public space

Protests took place mostly in Kuala Lumpur, the capital, instead of Putrajaya, the seat of government since 1999. The urban planning assessment comparing these two cities revealed that Kuala Lumpur is more accommodating of protest activities because it is more accessible, the mixed functions provide support and audience for the protests, and the tight urban form aids the accessibility and also provides a better setting for protest. The research found that the colonial city is a subversive third space because of the vacuum of power created by the departure of the colonial masters, leaving the space open for the meanings and symbolisms to be re-interpreted.

Dataran Merdeka exemplified how the post-independence authorities mimicked the colonial masters in their treatment of this space, via an expression of legitimacy as the guardian of Malaysia's symbol of emancipation from independence. This shows two things. One, since accessibility, mixed land-use distributions, and also a compact urban form are the requirements of a good city life, and since protest seems to flourish in Kuala Lumpur over Putrajaya because of these factors, indicates that the spatial requirements of protest and a good city life are similar. Protesters were also able to produce their own space where their collective identity is strengthened, and this was made possible because they were able congregate due to the factors mentioned above. Since collective identity is important to ensure mobilisation and the durability of social

movements, space where it can be fomented and nurtured is important. This cements the role of protest as integral to public life. Two, the independence of Dataran Merdeka only in name and not in practice shows that for a space to be democratic, it goes beyond spatial qualities only, but must be governed to also allow for different publics and activities to flourish.

While the carefully constructed symbolism of Dataran Merdeka could have been challenged by Bersih should they insist on contesting the space in their fourth rally in 2015, their elaborate avoidance of the square while utilising the spaces of everyday life on its borders, is also effective in emphasising the disconnect between the state and the people (Chapter Seven). Therefore, the potency of symbolism of space in protest does not always lie in its alteration found in appropriation, as proposed by Donatella della Porta (2013), but could also be useful in the symbolism remaining unchallenged. This means that space can be taken into account actively as a protest strategy, not just as a stage where democracy is performed, but the meanings and symbolisms embedded in space can be actively deployed and not always through direct contestation.

While temporal, and thus ephemeral, after five times (and possibly counting) of flooding Kuala Lumpur with yellow-clad protesters, Bersih is adding an extra layer of meaning in the already thick radical geography of Kuala Lumpur, leaving Putrajaya, where the government actually is, to the state. The constant use of Kuala Lumpur for protest leaves Putrajaya bereft of any meaningful expression of democracy, a result of urban planning that makes protest in Putrajaya a tall order. The city is seemingly planned to be protest-repellent, since its accessibility, urban form, and also land-use, all aspects determined by urban planning especially in an instant city like Putrajaya, are not favourable to public claim-making (Chapter Five). The clearing of agriculture land to make way for the construction of the city, about thirty kilometres from Kuala Lumpur also made Putrajaya more of a tabula rasa where the state could project its aspirations without interruption, rather than a palimpsest where layers of meaning have been building through time. Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya thus illustrated the duality of Malaysian political landscape by demonstrating the distance between the populace and the state. The duality was further illustrated via the protest and disruption tactics between Bersih and the Red Shirts together with the Cybertroopers.

§ 8.3 Digital public space

The research also examined Twitter data, acknowledging that contemporary social movements would include digital spaces such as social media as their infrastructure of protest. Bersih is no exception. Social media has also been argued as potentially replacing the more traditional public sphere. The research found that instead of superseding the material public space, the examination of Twitter data from the Bersih 4 protest demonstrates how social media could play a role in amplifying public space. The way the geographical places were communicated on Twitter revealed how it provided an alternative space where meanings and symbolisms of geographical places can be rewritten or reclaimed, even when the material public space is cordoned off. It has been shown how social media provided the space for Bersih to foment the collective identity that would galvanise the protesters to take to the streets, and the conduit for images produced from the protest to be broadcasted during and after the protest, indicating the potential of social media beyond mere aggregation, but for a more durable mobilisation. Other social movements can also learn from Bersih in their continuous attempt to keep the collective identity alive and possibly engaging new supporters via programmes that aimed to educate people about the electoral system. This continuous engagement with the public ensured that Bersih's function went beyond mobilising people to the streets every other year to air their grievances. The use of the #Bersih4 hashtag as a space where the collective identity could be fomented indicated the need for social movements to be familiar with the affordances of the platforms they are using.

§ 8.4 Limitations of research

One unexpected limitation from the social media data was the small number of geo-referenced data. The research anticipated insights from geo-referenced tweets, since this is one direct and obvious way in which digital space is connected to the physical space, but the yield from the data collection indicated that only 0.9 percent of it was geo-referenced. Even though the data was always analysed (see Appendix 1), the result was not included in the main body of research since the yield was too low. One particularly interesting finding is how the data for Bersih 4 and other protests came from all over the world, while data for the Red Shirts' protest were generated solely in Malaysia. While pursuing this line of questioning could be worthy, the research question has to specifically set out to investigate geo-referenced data, hence treating

the data as a population not as a representative. This also brings up another limitation of the research. As discussed in Section 7.2, while the use of hashtags could help to ensure that the relevant data was collected, this could also mean that potentially important and meaningful data was not included, as the tweets from the official account of Bersih 2 have shown.

§ 8.5 Future work

Future work interested in linking the digital and the spatial could potentially benefit from scraping not only data filtered through keywords, but also around spatio-temporal boundaries, such as collecting all the tweets from Kuala Lumpur on the day of protest alongside tweets mentioning Bersih 4 — although this also comes with its own set of challenges since determining where tweets come from is not a straightforward undertaking as shown above. The focus on one platform, Twitter, part of a richer communication ecology, would also mean the potential loss of insight which a more holistic approach might have been able to bring. Even though Twitter is attractive for use in time-sensitive events such as street protests due to its affordances, more Malaysians use Facebook than Twitter, but retrieving data from Facebook would have been more challenging. Future work could look into tapping other platforms as well, both online and offline. As for public space, a long-term observation of how public space enables the performance of democracy in Malaysia might be fruitful to see if changes in government would result in a democratisation of public space, or it would just be business as usual.

In terms of methodology, the research has shown how the postcolonial perspective can be further grounded by more empirical research methods. The use of thematic analysis on tweets regarding the protest also reveals a systematic way of how content analysis can be conducted on social media data, providing a richer examination together with the metadata. The research has also shown how GIS can be used to aid the analysis of spatial data gained from archival search and interviews, and how applications such as Google Street View can be used to corroborate the accuracy of the data.

§ 8.6 Decolonising the city

In conclusion, the research has demonstrated how attempts by the post-colonial hybrid regime to construct a hegemony through the production of public space is ambivalent. While the regime is durable, this ambivalence provides the space through which resistance could slip through, since while the regime regularly violates democratic principles, it also has to maintain the appearances of a working democracy. Whereas the attempt to launch Malaysia into the knowledge economy had the unintentional result of opening up Malaysian public sphere, the treatment of public space on the other hand, was heading into the opposite direction with neoliberal planning practices. Thus, it is ironic how spaces produced in the colonial period are now more accommodating to democracy than the seat of the democratic government constructed by the supposedly democratic post-colonial hybrid regime. Digital space such as social media could expand public sphere and supplement the material public space, especially in a hybrid regime such as Malaysia. On the other hand, the urban planning decisions of Putrajaya inform us how democracy could spatially be designed out. However, the fact that the erstwhile colonial city is now more accommodating to democratic expressions because it meets the spatial requirements, indicates that public space can have democratic qualities on its own, divorced from the ideology of the regime. Therefore, the subversiveness of the designer could manifest in ensuring that the spaces they produce within the neoliberal economy meet the requirements of a good city life, even if at the moment it is packaged as an apolitical selling point. Democracy is spatial. Design is politics.

Epilogue

Delft. 24 April 2018.

It is two weeks before the fourteenth Malaysian General Election. Bersih's campaign about redelineation of electoral boundaries and the potential gerrymandering and malapportionment that goes with it went unheeded. The redelineation report prepared by the Election Commission (EC) was passed in Parliament with 129 against eighty votes on 28 March. The EC chairman admitted that the redelineation exercise redrew boundaries along racial lines, arguing that it was done in the interest of voters.[29] An analysis in the Financial Times argued that the redrawing of electoral boundaries put the incumbent into a position of advantage, since Malay voters were redistributed to marginal seats, while other ethnic groups were packed into opposition strongholds.[30] The EC then announced that the general election would take place on 9 May, a Wednesday, prompting dissent on social media since a mid-week Election Day would deter a lot of people who would have to travel back to their hometowns to vote. Where people vote is determined by the address they have on their identity card, which they receive when they turn twelve. Even though Regulation 15 of the National Regulations 1990 (Ammendment 2001) states that the holder of the identity card have to change their address if they moved to another place of residence for more than ninety days, not many people do this because it does not have any real impact on their day-to-day life. In Malaysia there are no local elections and there is no collection of council tax, which may prompt the need for getting people to change their address to where they are residing. As a result, a lot of people vote in their hometowns, which might require extensive travelling. Thus, a Wednesday Election Day is not helping. The Deputy Prime Minister stated that those working in Singapore do not have to come home to vote if their employers do not give them the day off. His statement fuelled the sentiment that the Wednesday date was put in place to hinder people from voting.

The uproar about the Wednesday Election Day merited its own hashtag on Twitter #UndiHariRabu (Vote Wednesday). People started urging each other to vote nonetheless, and some started offering financial help to those who have a long way to travel. Some even offered to carpool. A prominent Twitterer, @klubkiddkl (165,000 followers) started the hashtag #PulangMengundi (Going Home to Vote in Malay) on

29 https://bit.ly/2vObwYr

30 https://on.ft.com/2vT8kuM

the same day the announcement was made, in order to enable people to find help that would enable them to return to their hometown to vote. Even though this happened sporadically in the beginning, with those offering asking those who needed help to send them a direct message, it was not long before a few people took the initiative to organise the collection and disbursement of the funds.

Using the #UndiRabu (Vote Wednesday) hashtag Twitterers such as @mokciknab, @pualdidan, and @bumilangit started offering financial assistance to those who needed help. Soon they started receiving contributions as well. Those who needed help could email them at undirabu@gmail.com. Due to the influx of emails, they later moved to Google forms, one for those who would like to contribute, the other requesting help. At this stage, Twitterers such as @bongkersz, @ladymissazira, and @achafoo also chipped in to help with the effort. On 16 April, one week after the announcement of when Election Day would take place, the team tweeted that they had collected RM141,897.21 (approximately €25,500). They hand out a flat rate of RM200 (€40) to those who have to travel from/to East Malaysia and RM50 (approximately €10) to those who have travel within Peninsular Malaysia. A Twitter account called @Pulang_Mengundi was set up as the official account of the #PulangMengundi initiative, and they have pinned a tweet at the top of their timeline instructing people how to get involved, either to contribute or to request assistance.

The hashtag #carpoolGE14, started by @nizambakeri together with @annieveeee, also started gaining traction to assist those who would like to carpool to their respective hometowns. The smartphone application Droupr, as early as 6 april, also urged people to download their app to facilitate carpooling in light of election day.

Gan Sue Ling, Wong You Jing, Timothy Teoh, Andrew Loh Zhu An, and Grace Look, who were strangers to each other in the beginning, banded to put together the www.pulangmengundi.com website (http://says.com/my/news/a-team-of-malaysians-have-set-up-this-website-to-help-you-pulangmengundi). While the #UndiRabu coordinated the collection and disbursement of funds, the Pulang Mengundi website is more similar to the Tindr app, where they match contributors with fund applicants. The same concept apply to those who would prefer to carpool. Therefore, they do not directly handle funds, instead acting as matchmakers.

The Youth Section of several Chinese Assembly Halls put together an effort to provide free busses for people travelling back to their hometowns to vote. On UndiRabu.com, those interested could find the route they need and book a ticket. They also assist the disabled who would be traveling by taxi. Using the crowdsourcing platform of mystartr.com, they managed to collect RM161,420 (approximately €33,800).

While there are many other initiatives that provide assistance, the ones I have listed above are the most prominent ones. They all share the same goal, which is to provide assistance to those having to travel to vote, regardless of whom they would be voting for. These efforts echo the #JomBalikMengundi / #JomBalikUndi (Let's Return Home to Vote) initiative from the previous general election in 2013. An examination of both these hashtags revealed that the movement did not receive as much traction as before, at least if the number of tweets were to be used as a measure. #JomBalikMengundi were tweeted twenty-six times while #JomBalikUndi tweeted only nineteen times.

On Monday, 16 April, spambots hijacked these hashtags to flood Twitter, trying to drown the communication. Twitterer @HaikalZaidii posted that he was trying to look for financial aid, but found bots instead. He took a short video of a scrolling timeline using the hashtag #CarpoolGE14 and #PulangMengundi.[31] The video showed that all the tweets that appeared are similar to one another, piled with hashtags and also randomly tagging other users, and also a campaign photo of the incumbent, Barisan Nasional. @andrewlza, one of those behind the pulangmengundi.com website, tweeted:[32]

So you kinda know the social media initiative you're involved in is kinda successful when you have Filya Sharapova, Dasha Petrova, Nastena Pavlova, Nastya Ivanova, Marusia Guliareva...

@PulangUndi #ge14 #PulangMengundi #jombalikundi #carpoolge14 #undirabu #undiharirabu #jomundi

He also included a screenshot of the tweets from these spambots that had tagged him. Most of these bots have Cyrillic names or descriptions, indicating that they are from a Russian bot farm. Searching for these bots using similar hashtags now yield very little result because Twitterers have blocked and reported accounts they suspected as spambots. @bongkersz, who is part of the #UndiRabu team, also shared four screenshots of the tweets from the spambots, which look identical to each other, in the tweet saying:[33]

Good job BN cybertroopers. You releasing your bots to spam #PulangMengundi #CarpoolGE14 and hijacking the hashtags for your political nonsense will not be accepted kindly by those really looking for assistance to go back and vote.

31 https://bit.ly/2FgzKKk

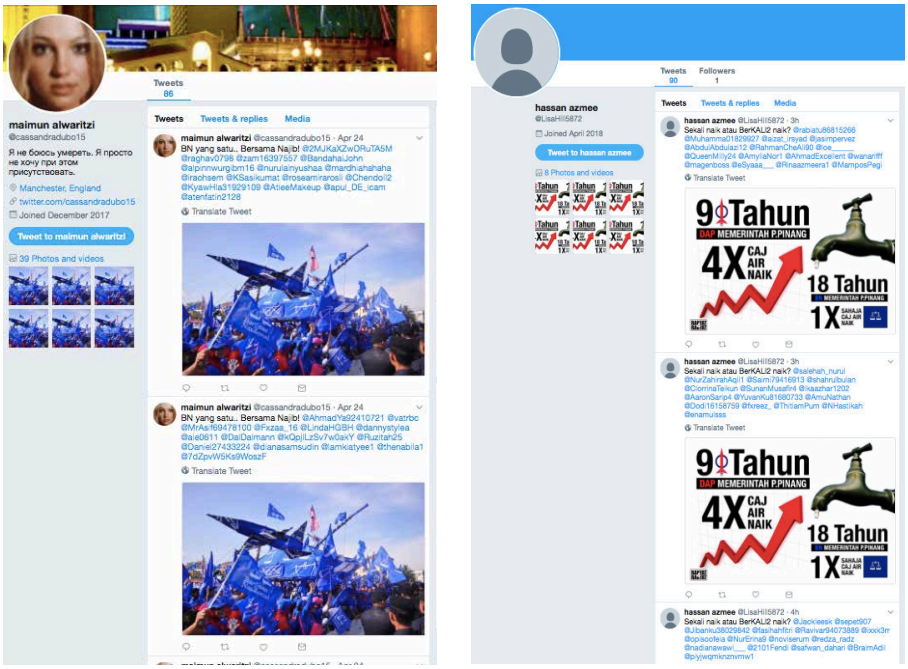
32 https://bit.ly/2KbfVaW

33 https://bit.ly/2HsQwvL

Joe Lee (@klubkidd) said that they started appearing on 16 April, and as of 19 April there were between 2,000 and 3,000 spambots.[34] The spambots had started operating much earlier, since 12 April, flooding Twitter with hashtags such as #SayNOtoPH (PH is Pakatan Harapan, the opposition coalition) and #KalahkanPakatan (Defeat Pakatan), and seemed to have included the #PulangMengundi hashtag later, even though the hashtag was already in operation since 9 April. The Atlantic Council Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRL) which studies disinformation conducted a systematic review of this particular phenomenon, found 17,600 users, and concluded that most of them did indeed meet the criteria of bots: low or zero authority (based on activity and influence), most accounts have alphanumerical handles, repetitive patterns of speech and tweet structure, and they all included the same images and video clips promoting Barisan Nasional, while not promoting other parties (Barojan 2018) .

Having been tagged a few times by these bots, I took the opportunity to examine them myself. The images below show the screenshot of two spambots that I found. In both accounts, we can see that they meet the criteria that the DFRL described. Both repeatedly sent out the same tweet, only changing the handles they were tagging. Both also have almost zero followers. Some effort has been put into making sure that at least the screen name could past as Malaysian. While the one on the left tweeted support for Barisan Nasional, the other compared the performance between Barisan Nasional and the Democratic Action Party in Pulau Pinang, showing that the latter had increased water charges four times in the nine years it was governing the island, while the Barisan had only increased it once in the eighteen years they were governing.

34 https://bit.ly/2I26NES



Spambots active around the 14th General Election.

What would be the impact of these bots? It is very difficult to draw a conclusion, although perhaps I could share how other Twitter users have reacted to them. While searching for the bots by going through the timeline of #PulangMengundi, I could tell when the bots were active even though they had disappeared, through other tweets complaining about them. Since the #PulangMengundi became the hashtag for people looking for assistance, the flooding of tweets by the spambots hindered this activity, causing annoyance at Barisan Nasional whom the spambots were rallying for. The DFR Lab also proposed that the campaign would most likely not have any real impact, since the lack of participation from other users contained the use of the two hashtags amongst the bots themselves (Barojan 2018).

Pundits have predicted that this would be a Whatsapp General Election, which is not at all surprising, given that the application is pervasive. Whatsapp is used not just used socially, to keep in touch between family and friends, but it is also prevalent in professional and commercial settings. Information, often unverified, would jump from one Whatsapp group to another, and this is difficult to track.

Although the set-up seems to favour the incumbent, still, the rallying around #PulangMengundi rekindled hope.

Delft. 29. 5 2018.

It has been three weeks since the elections. I received my ballot papers on 9 May, when the counting of votes had commenced in Malaysia. The previous five days leading up to the election were marked by the frantic efforts of Malaysians abroad organising runners to fly back to Malaysia, to ensure that those who actually managed to receive their ballot papers could get them back to the respective poll stations in time. Global Bersih coordinated some of these bottom-up efforts, although some communities also organised locally via various social media platforms. Twitter and Facebook were ablaze with the indignation of Malaysians who felt robbed of their democratic rights. The comment by the Deputy Home Minister, Nur Jazlan Mohamed, that Malaysians abroad only constitute 0.1 percent of registered voters, added fuel to the fire, prompting wishes that he would lose the election by 0.1 percent.

Even though the elections seemed to have been rigged to favour the Barisan Nasional coalition, we all woke up on 10 of May to find out that we have ushered in Pakatan Harapan as government. This was a truly remarkable moment since Malaysia has had the same government since independence in 1957. Alas, the triumph is bittersweet, since we have also re-installed Mahathir Mohamed, now 92 years old, as Prime Minister. Did democracy simply pave the way back to an authoritarianism that we were so used to? Only time will tell. The hybrid regime remains ambivalent, but since hybridity can be subversive, perhaps we can still steer the direction towards democracy.

Appendix 1 Locating the digital in the urban space (metadata analysis)

In drawing a direct link between urban and digital spaces, we first look at where tweets and instagrams are coming from. To do this we use place-related metadata that give information about the origin of the data.

Both Twitter and Instagram have location functions although there are differences in terms of gradient. Twitter has more affordances than Instagram since users can add location on their profile and also on their posts, whereas Instagram only allows location to be added to posts. Users can either choose a place name from the list Twitter and Instagram provide, or type in the location they want. This allows users to post remotely, as users do not have to be in a particular location to tag their post accordingly. On Twitter, users can also opt to share the precise location which yields coordinates which are immediately mappable instead of just choosing place names (Figure App. 1). Instagram on the other hand, does not have this option. It only allows users to choose locations already in the list. Adding new places on Instagram is only possible through Facebook, according to Instagram Help Centre.

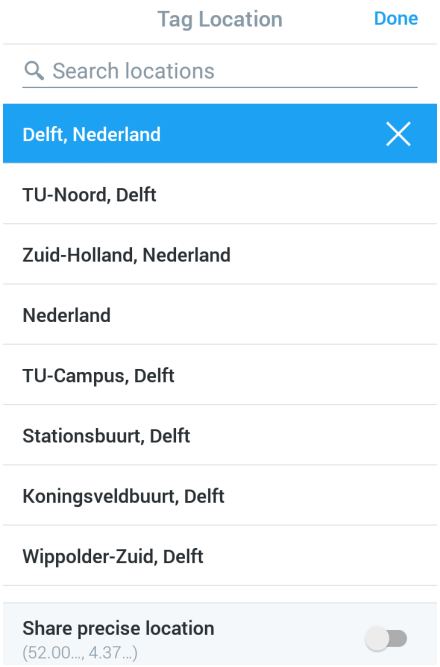


FIGURE APP.1.1 Location services on Twitter

The metadata reveal that despite the differences between Twitter and Instagram in terms of degrees of precision, the location data for Instagram would still appear as coordinates even though users can only choose from a list of place names when tagging their posts. The locational metadata for Twitter on the other hand give the location of the user as stated in their profile and also the coordinates for the post. Since both platforms provide coordinates of those who chose to locationally tag their posts, we use those as the basis to determine the origin. Although Twitter also gives location in the form of place names, this is less reliable since it refers to places mentioned in the profile of the user, and not the post. Here, Twitter is less strict since users can also put in made up place names like 'below sea level' or even their Instagram account names, hence location for the user profile allows users to place themselves in abstract spaces. This is not possible when tagging posts, since if 'below sea level' is typed instead of choosing any of the place names containing any of those words, the post will not be tagged with a location.

As mentioned earlier, only 0.9 percent of the data collected over the course of three months using the hashtags are geo-referenced. This is in line with the findings from Leetaru et al, who after monitoring Twitter stream for a month in 2012, found that

about three percent of tweets include geolocation information (Leetaru et al, 2013). From their research, Kuala Lumpur was in the top four with 2.1 percent of geo-referenced tweets coming from that city (Jakarta was first with 2.86 percent followed by New York City and Sao Paolo).

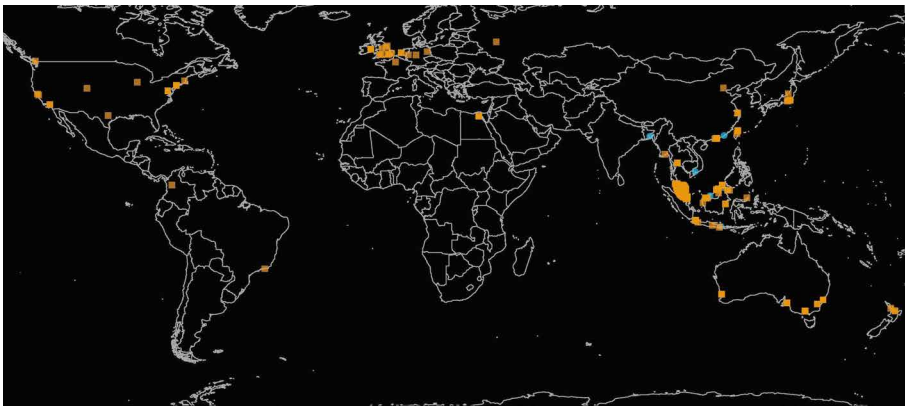


FIGURE APP.1.2 Global distribution of geo-referenced social media data concerning Bersih 4 and the Red Shirt's Rally

Eighty percent of the geo-referenced data consists of Instagrams. Twitter makes up the balance. Percentage over platforms would reveal that only 0.1 percent of tweets are geo-referenced while more Instagrams are at thirty percent. What this entails is that though there is much less content coming from Instagram in the overall total, research that would want to focus on where content is coming from would be much better off concentrating on Instagram than Twitter. Alternatively, if we took the geo-referenced data as the population of our study and not as a representation, then it would be interesting indeed to examine the kind of content that is produced by people who turn on their location services.

The map in Figure App. 1.2 shows that most of the data originate from Peninsular Malaysia and that locations between instagrams and tweets mostly overlap apart from some spots in Vietnam, India, and Hong Kong.

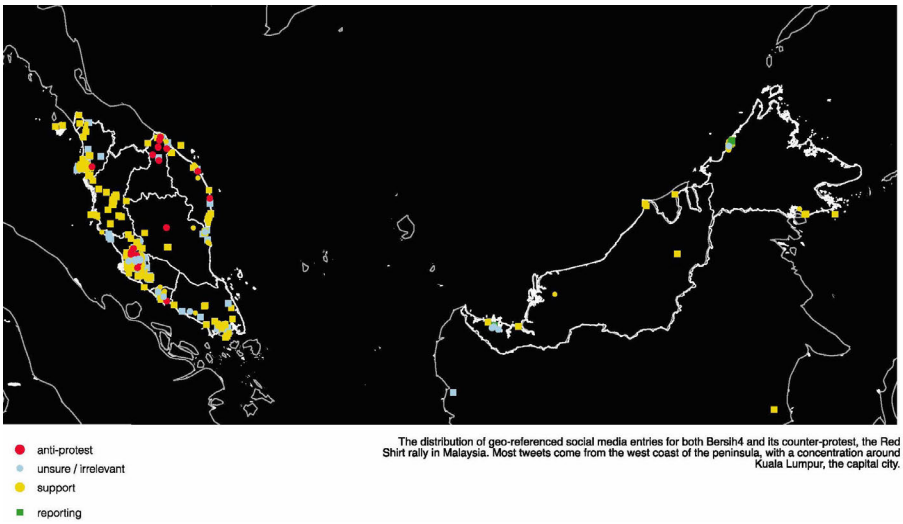


FIGURE APP.1.3 Geographical distribution of geo-referenced social media data in Malaysia

Most data originate from Peninsula Malaysia with a concentration on the west coast, which is more developed in terms of infrastructure (Figure App. 1.3). This informs Leetaru's findings where there is a high correlation between geo-referenced tweets and NASA City Lights imagery, meaning areas which are more developed and have electricity tend to produce more geo-referenced tweets (Leetaru et al. 2013). They argue that this illustrates that although the data are transmitted wirelessly from mobile phones and other devices, they still need physical infrastructure like cell towers to capture the signal and make the connection. Hence, this dependency of wireless technology on physical infrastructure shows the very crucial connection between the digital and the spatial. The digital can only exist if the spatial conditions allow it to. This analysis could also be extended to the urban scale, where the urban form could play a role in determining the connectivity to digital space.

While it is hard to argue against the point above, it is also worth noting that places which are more developed tend to have a higher concentration of population, hence it could also be a case of there are more people in touch with technology in the city and they tend to tweet more than people in less developed areas, hence there is a higher probability of geo-referenced tweets which require a certain level of sophistication to come from this more developed area.

Appendix 2 List of interviewees

1. Fahmi Reza – Activist. Non-aligned with any political parties.
2. Syahredzan Johan – Lawyer and activist.
3. Interviewee A – A Bersih committee member
4. Interviewee B – An active PAS member.
5. Interviewee C – A participant in Bersih 2.
6. Interviewee D – A Brazilian interviewed to get an impression of protests in Brazilia.

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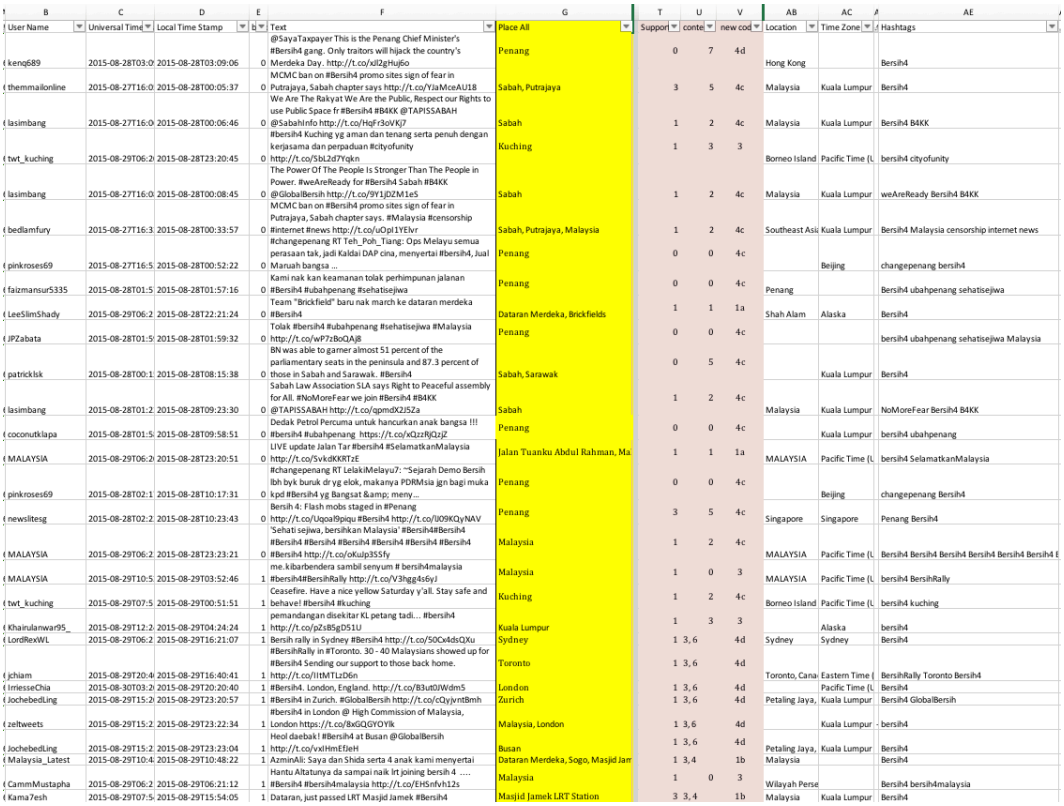
Appendix 3 Spreadsheets of the tweets



B	C	D	E	F	G	T	U	V	AB	AC	AE
User Name	Universal Time	Local Time Stamp	b	Text	Place All	Suppor	conte	new cod	Location	Time Zone	Hashtags
kenq689	2015-08-28T03:0	2015-08-28T03:09:06	0	@SayaTaxpayer This is the Penang Chief Minister's #Bersih4 gang. Only traitors will hijack the country's Merdeka Day. http://t.co/xll2gHuj6o	Penang	0	7	4d	Hong Kong		Bersih4
themmailonline	2015-08-27T16:0	2015-08-28T00:05:37	0	MCMC ban on #Bersih4 promo sites sign of fear in Putrajaya, Sabah chapter says http://t.co/YJaMceAU18	Sabah, Putrajaya	3	5	4c	Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur	Bersih4
lasimbang	2015-08-27T16:0	2015-08-28T00:06:46	0	We Are The Rakyat We Are the Public, Respect our Rights to use Public Space fr #Bersih4 #B4KK @TAPISSABAH @SabahInfo http://t.co/HqFr3oVKj7	Sabah	1	2	4c	Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur	Bersih4 B4KK
twt_kuching	2015-08-29T06:2	2015-08-28T23:20:45	0	#bersih4 Kuching yg aman dan tenang serta penuh dengan kerjasama dan perpaduan #cityofunity http://t.co/5bL2d7Yqkn	Kuching	1	3	3	Borneo Island	Pacific Time (L	bersih4 cityofunity
lasimbang	2015-08-27T16:0	2015-08-28T00:08:45	0	The Power Of The People Is Stronger Than The People in Power. #weAreReady for #Bersih4 Sabah #B4KK @GlobalBersih http://t.co/9Y1jDZM1eS	Sabah	1	2	4c	Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur	weAreReady Bersih4 B4KK
bedlamfury	2015-08-27T16:3	2015-08-28T00:33:57	0	MCMC ban on #Bersih4 promo sites sign of fear in Putrajaya, Sabah chapter says. #Malaysia #censorship #internet #news http://t.co/uOp1YEivr	Sabah, Putrajaya, Malaysia	1	2	4c	Southeast Asia	Kuala Lumpur	Bersih4 Malaysia censorship internet news
pinkroses69	2015-08-27T16:5	2015-08-28T00:52:22	0	#changepenang RT Teh_Poh_Tiang: Ops Melayu semua perasaan tak, jadi Kaldai DAP cina, menyertai #bersih4, Jual Maruah bangsa ...	Penang	0	0	4c		Beijing	changepenang bersih4
faizmansur5335	2015-08-28T01:5	2015-08-28T01:57:16	0	Kami nak kan keamanan tolak perhimpunan jalanan #Bersih4 #ubahpenang #sehatisejiwa	Penang	0	0	4c	Penang		Bersih4 ubahpenang sehatisejiwa
LeeSlimShady	2015-08-29T06:2	2015-08-28T22:21:24	0	Team "Brickfield" baru nak march ke dataran merdeka #bersih4	Dataran Merdeka, Brickfields	1	1	1a	Shah Alam	Alaska	Bersih4
JPZabata	2015-08-28T01:5	2015-08-28T01:59:32	0	Tolak #bersih4 #ubahpenang #sehatisejiwa #Malaysia http://t.co/wP7zBoQAj8	Penang	0	0	4c			bersih4 ubahpenang sehatisejiwa Malaysia
patricklsk	2015-08-28T00:1	2015-08-28T08:15:38	0	BN was able to garner almost 51 percent of the parliamentary seats in the peninsula and 87.3 percent of those in Sabah and Sarawak. #Bersih4	Sabah, Sarawak	0	5	4c		Kuala Lumpur	Bersih4
lasimbang	2015-08-28T01:2	2015-08-28T09:23:30	0	Sabah Law Association SLA says Right to Peaceful assembly for All. #NoMoreFear we join #Bersih4 #B4KK @TAPISSABAH http://t.co/qpmdX2j5Za	Sabah	1	2	4c	Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur	NoMoreFear Bersih4 B4KK
coconutklapa	2015-08-28T01:5	2015-08-28T09:58:51	0	Dedak Petrol Percuma untuk hancurkan anak bangsa !!! #bersih4 #ubahpenang https://t.co/xQzzRjQzjZ	Penang	0	0	4c		Kuala Lumpur	bersih4 ubahpenang
MALAYSIA	2015-08-29T06:2	2015-08-28T23:20:51	0	LIVE update Jalan Tar #bersih4 #SelamatkanMalaysia http://t.co/SvkdKKRTzE	Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Ma	1	1	1a	MALAYSIA	Pacific Time (L	bersih4 SelamatkanMalaysia
pinkroses69	2015-08-28T02:1	2015-08-28T10:17:31	0	#changepenang RT LelakiMelayu7: ~Sejarah Demo Bersih 4bh byk buruk dr yg elok, makanya PDRM sia jgn bagi muka kpd #Bersih4 yg Bangsat & meny...	Penang	0	0	4c		Beijing	changepenang Bersih4
newslitesg	2015-08-28T02:2	2015-08-28T10:23:43	0	Bersih 4: Flash mobs staged in #Penang http://t.co/UqoaI9piqu #Bersih4 http://t.co/lJ09KQyNAV	Penang	3	5	4c	Singapore	Singapore	Penang Bersih4
MALAYSIA	2015-08-29T06:2	2015-08-28T23:23:21	0	'Sehati sejiwa, bersihkan Malaysia' #Bersih4#Bersih4 #Bersih4 #Bersih4 #Bersih4 #Bersih4 #Bersih4 #Bersih4 http://t.co/oKulp355fy	Malaysia	1	2	4c	MALAYSIA	Pacific Time (L	Bersih4 Bersih4 Bersih4 Bersih4 Bersih4 Bersih4 B
MALAYSIA	2015-08-29T10:5	2015-08-29T03:52:46	1	me.kibarbendera sambil senyum #bersih4malaysia #bersih4#BersihRally http://t.co/V3hgg4s6yJ	Malaysia	1	0	3	MALAYSIA	Pacific Time (L	bersih4 BersihRally
twt_kuching	2015-08-29T07:5	2015-08-29T00:51:51	1	Ceasefire. Have a nice yellow Saturday y'all. Stay safe and behave! #bersih4 #kuching	Kuching	1	2	4c	Borneo Island	Pacific Time (L	bersih4 kuching
Khairulanwar95_	2015-08-29T12:2	2015-08-29T04:24:24	1	pemandangan disekitar KL petang tadi... #bersih4 http://t.co/pZsB5gD51U	Kuala Lumpur	1	3	3		Alaska	bersih4
LordRexWL	2015-08-29T06:2	2015-08-29T16:21:07	1	Bersih rally in Sydney #Bersih4 http://t.co/50Cx4dsQXu	Sydney	1	3, 6	4d	Sydney	Sydney	Bersih4
jchiam	2015-08-29T20:4	2015-08-29T16:40:41	1	#BersihRally in #Toronto. 30 - 40 Malaysians showed up for #Bersih4 Sending our support to those back home. http://t.co/IItMTLzD6n	Toronto	1	3, 6	4d	Toronto, Cana	Eastern Time (	BersihRally Toronto Bersih4
IrriesseChia	2015-08-30T03:2	2015-08-29T20:20:40	1	#Bersih4. London, England. http://t.co/B3ut0JWdm5	London	1	3, 6	4d		Pacific Time (L	Bersih4
JochebedLing	2015-08-29T15:2	2015-08-29T23:20:57	1	#Bersih4 in Zurich. #GlobalBersih http://t.co/cQyJvntBmh	Zurich	1	3, 6	4d	Petaling Jaya,	Kuala Lumpur	Bersih4 GlobalBersih
zeltweets	2015-08-29T15:2	2015-08-29T23:22:34	1	#bersih4 in London @ High Commission of Malaysia, London https://t.co/8xGQGYOYlk	Malaysia, London	1	3, 6	4d		Kuala Lumpur	bersih4
JochebedLing	2015-08-29T15:2	2015-08-29T23:23:04	1	Heol daebak! #Bersih4 at Busan @GlobalBersih http://t.co/vxlHmEteH	Busan	1	3, 6	4d	Petaling Jaya,	Kuala Lumpur	Bersih4
Malaysia_Latest	2015-08-29T10:4	2015-08-29T10:48:22	1	AzminAli: Saya dan Shida serta 4 anak kami menyertai	Dataran Merdeka, Sogo, Masjid Jam	1	3, 4	1b	Malaysia		Bersih4
CammMustapha	2015-08-29T06:2	2015-08-29T06:21:12	1	Hantu Altatunya da sampai naik lrt joining bersih 4 .... #Bersih4 #bersih4malaysia http://t.co/EH5nfvh12s	Malaysia	1	0	3	Wilayah Perse		Bersih4 bersih4malaysia
Kama7esh	2015-08-29T07:5	2015-08-29T15:54:05	1	Dataran, just passed LRT Masjid Jamek #Bersih4	Masjid Jamek LRT Station	3	3, 4	1b	Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur	Bersih4

FIGURE APP.3.1 A screenshot exemplifying the spreadsheets of the tweets. The coloured columns indicate the coding exercise applied to the tweets.

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Curriculum Vitae

Nurul is trained as an architect and an urban designer. While working at Garis Architects in Malaysia, she was involved in developing masterplans and urban design guidelines in Vietnam and India among other places. A short stint at Fluid Design Limited in London exposed her to public consultation work. She joined Universiti Teknologi Malaysia as a tutor in 2010 where she taught urban design studio and theory and was a researcher in the Sustainable Historic Waterfront research project.

Nurul holds a Diploma and Bachelor's degree in Architecture from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, and a Master of Architecture in Urban Design from The Bartlett, University College London. She joined the TU Delft's PhD programme at the department of Urbanism, at the Chair of Design as Politics, in 2012. Her research focuses on the democratic performance of post-colonial public space, where she traced the production of key architectures and public space in Malaysia, and analysed how contemporary street protests that manifested in both streets and tweets informed the ways that the postcolonial politics of space unfolded in a context like Malaysia. Nurul is interested in the power structure that shapes and governs public space in post-colonial societies, and how digital technologies could play a role in redistributing that power.

TOC