

Tahfiz Psychogeography of the Marginals: Reimagining Self and Place through Narratives

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ABSTRACT

In line with James Sidaway's insistence on the psychogeographical integration of nature with narratives across rural communities, this article investigates 'on-the-ground' narratives by the marginals. Psychogeography is often defined as creative studies of space to alter conventional ways of viewing things. The marginals studied in this article were poor communities situated at a rural Tahfiz centre in the northwest of Peninsular Malaysia. Tahfiz centres are plenty across Malaysian states, but they are generally defined as Muslim worshipping and learning spaces inhabited by the young and old whose sustenance relies on the generosity of donors. By analysing these 'on-the-ground' words, readings, and experiences by Tahfiz marginals situated at a de-urbanised locale, we firstly suggest that their 'psychogeographical journey' with said centre puts them in a reflective position that is, in part, illustrated by their consenting and commendatory attachment as an impact of their walking in the said centre. Secondly, we extend this interrogation on the psychogeographical experience of self-and-place attachment by proposing an alternative theoretical model, Tahfiz psychogeography. Tahfiz psychogeography, a model that challenges the idea of Tahfiz centres being unsafe and unaccommodating, emphasises instead the construction and preservation of social engagement. Tahfiz's psychogeography aims to create a strong sense of connectedness and unity by integrating individuals, encouraging flexibility and inclusion, and focusing on a panoptic vision of communal relations.

Keywords: 'on the ground' narratives; poverty; psychogeography; Tahfiz; the marginals

INTRODUCTION

James Sidaway (2022), in his article, "Psychogeography: Walking through Strategy, Nature and Narrative, calls for "further reflection that indicates potential for a broadened field of psychogeography" in which "psychogeographical drifts have moved outside of urban foci," (p.567) following the understudied psychogeographical tracings in non-cityscape settings. Seen in this way, this means that writings about de-urbanised places might serve as a way to revisit rural areas to generate narratives about the effects of local countryside landscapes. This article, therefore, takes up Sidaway's (2022) challenge concerning the integration of psychogeography

with nature and narratives across rural communities. We address this by investigating ‘on-the-ground’ narratives by poor communities at a de-urbanised Tahfiz centre as an example of capturing psychogeographical experiences related to a place that “develops a strong and substantial feeling of attachment” (Khaidzir et al., 2022a, p. 244). Psychogeography, often defined as creative studies of space to alter conventional ways of viewing things (Debord, 2006), involves wandering to provide “different ways of seeing space, enabling for change” (Link, 2016, p.82). The traveller, stroller, flâneur, and stalker may journey spaces in their own unique ways, unstructured or not. Walking through familiar or unknown roads and travelling with a partner or a caregiver all result in changing and challenging strollers’ perspectives. By examining personal narratives which allude to the marginals’ sense of attachment to place, specifically, the Tahfiz centre, we can examine how these narratives reveal a transformation in the general perception of Tahfiz centres that was once regarded by dominant, mainstream accounts as unsafe, chaotic, and unaccommodating (Ahmad Othman & Anas, 2020). To fully perceive and understand both the Tahfiz centre and its surroundings, the marginals who write the narratives following their wandering at the Tahfiz centre forge an attachment with their environment, having been influenced by Tahfiz surroundings (Khaidzir et al., 2022b). It is through the lens of psychogeography that this article seeks to explore the relationship between individuals and place and how these serve as reference points that reshape and redefine their perspectives about Tahfiz centre. As Coverley (2012) suggests, the convergence of psychology and geography, which occurs in psychogeography, is materialised through a space where individuals seek new ways to comprehend their perspectives through engagement with their environment. It is through the personal narratives by the marginals that exemplify this very essence of ‘wandering,’ as its inhabitants seek meaning by immersing themselves in the said Tahfiz centre’s landscape, allowing themselves to be drawn into all that the environment has to offer.

The marginals, as captured in this article, are the poor communities at a Tahfiz centre in Perak whose voices are collected. Tahfiz centres, often defined as a hub for Muslim lifelong religion and divinity spaces spanning different courses from divinity and Islamic-inflected courses to businesses (for example, mineral water productions) and peri-urban/rural agriculture (for instance, melon plantation), stretch sporadically across Malaysian Peninsular, Sabah, and Sarawak. Depending on the generosity of donors, the Tahfiz centre in Perak comprises various men and women of diverse cultural identities who are impoverished and whose motivation to reside in the said Tahfiz vary, and it is precisely because of these varied facets of inhabitants that their accounts are selected as part of their psychogeographical tracings between the self and place (Idrus et al., 2016). By accentuating the diverse backgrounds of the poor, rural marginals on their psychogeographical experience, a “collective intellectual knowledge of production based on a system of interaction between the physical environment as well as a collection of human factors” might be incorporated and brought to the foreground (Marengo, 2018, p. 15). As Barbara Korte (2014) contends, reading ‘on-the-ground’ narratives by the poor offers a way to reflect the essential role of literature, which is “attentive to the particular and capable of rendering the inner worlds of characters.” Through this attentiveness, literature bestows faces and voices upon poverty, inviting readers to view the world from the perspective of those on the margins (p. 2).

CONVERGENCE OF PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY, LITERARY ENVIRONMENT, AND PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Several characteristics of personal narratives as a form of literary texts result from a complex orchestration of a wide-ranging literary environment. First, literary environment studies are generally considered a relatively novel approach to literary studies and are typically associated with Panu Minkkinen's (2022) approach to writing about human behaviour and their reactions to space through walking and strolling. Minkkinen (2022) specifically argues that through walking and strolling, "different literary genres like prose fiction, essay and travelogue, fact and fiction, all intermingled to produce a trembling meaning that 'rang truer' than any geographically accurate description" (p. 352 – 353). Secondly, the combination of personal narratives and walking and strolling is deliberate because the focus on the "location, position, distance, and direction" (Ryan et al., 2016, p. 7) precisely attends to how these particular elements are relevant to physical settings in the real world that are often reflected in narratives that set up the ways in which human actions and qualities are influenced by places. Finally, one might better be aware that the literary environment is characterised by a multitude of different genres and forms, going well beyond a singular type of text (Marengo, 2018), that the commingling of personal narratives and landscape generally establishes a privileged link to which most geographers have been susceptible. By exploring personal narratives concerning the effect of a landscape through conscious engagement with these locations and places, these narrative accounts provide insights into potent imaginative subjective experiences and material environment (Holloway, 2021).

As such, in contrast to simply reading a book, novels, or short stories about rural life, the exploration of personal narratives could offer an alternative way of seeing and understanding the ways in which places emerge. The memory and reactions in personal correspondence to the representations of countryside places might create and uncover underlying meanings. One way to incorporate reflection and interweaving of human image, behaviour, feelings, and emotions in de-urbanised areas, as Marengo (2018) succinctly summarises, is through the interrogation of personal narratives:

"The countryside, where we go in search of these basic elements of an agricultural and rural world, which represent our origins and our deepest sociocultural roots, even though they have completely changed over the past century... constitutes the hard core of contemporary heritage processes, in a context where traditional rurality has all but disappeared, and the modern form of rurality has to fend off the onslaught of the urban way of life and production".

(2018, p. 16)

Thus, bearing what Marengo clearly articulates, the robust applications of personal narratives to explore how landscape alters human beings' behaviour and how these places signify certain patterns of emotions and feelings can be captured. As we shall see in the subsequent pages, personal narratives hold deep significance, whether mundane, subdued, slummy, fragile, busy, trodden, or volatile," these unofficial, individual accounts grant "authority to what is visible in that it presupposes an experience on the ground" (Dasca, 2018, p.35). The focus on scrutinising personal narratives across the marginals, therefore, resembles in many ways the methods in which "both personal responses and geographical discourse" are interrogated by nature writers (Holloway, 2021, p.75). As David Cooper (2020) argues, personal narratives are central as "first-person accounts of geographical experience" (p.634).

PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY AND LITERARY STUDIES: THE STORY SO FAR

Before teasing out the ways in which psychogeography by the marginals might form some of the many dimensions of Tahfiz psychogeography, we want to give you a sense of the discussion on psychogeography studies while refraining from claiming to provide a comprehensive account of the various ways in which psychogeography approach and writings have been presented. Perhaps, it might be especially important to draw on the ways in which psychogeographical tracing in Tahfiz Centre in Perak may be understood based on the metanarrative of Sheila Hones's (2022) notion of literary geography in which "'literary' refers to literary texts and also to literary studies, while the 'geography' includes not only geographies of the lived world and spatial concepts," but also "human geography" (p.1-2). Seen in this way, places hold deep significance not only in shaping and sustaining individual and group identities but also in influencing human behaviour and mental states. As we shall illustrate, it becomes essential to examine how places (in this case, the said Tahfiz centre) serve as a medium for connecting the inhabitants (the marginals) with the locations they encounter, and since our environment forms a spatial backdrop to the marginals' daily lives, the concept of space is woven into their explorations and journeys.

Literary studies in non-western contexts have pervasively adopted the psychogeographical approach to interrogate the intricate relationship between places and forms of literature. Hana Bougherira (2020), Amran et al. (2022) & Amran and Termizi (2020), for example, have applied this framework to novels such as *God Help the Child* and *Where the Sunrise is Red*. Bougherira's analysis brings to the fore the entanglement of motherhood, racism, and trauma, demonstrating how geographical settings shape the protagonist's journey as a female African-American. Similarly, Amran and her colleagues investigate the varied facets of societal challenges faced by Chinese women, paying particular attention to the disruption of traditional gender roles and divisions. Poetry has likewise emerged as a significant terrain for subsequent psychogeographical trajectories. Khaidzir and his colleagues (Khaidzir et al., 2021, 2022b) have scrutinised Malaysian poetry through this lens, revealing the profound emotional resonances and cultural identities embedded within urban landscapes. The exploration of a female poet's experiences as a flâneur, for example, offers critical insights into self-discovery and identity, particularly within the context of Muslim womanhood. However, participants as flâneurs in Melaka provide a distinct perspective on the cultural and historical dimensions of place (Khaidzir et al., 2022a). Their fieldwork-based observations, as they assert, revealed a sinuous (re)construction of the sense of the self and engaged connections to Melaka's cultural and historical significance, but the collective dimension unpacks mixed bags of self-discovery, values, and leisure. Yet, we are also cognisant that although these studies demonstrate a keen engagement with psychogeography, the writings by the marginals across rural areas are still deficient. The question, then, becomes, how does psychogeography as a framework demonstrate engagement of the self and place across the inhabitants of a non-urban poor community?

This article argues that, as we sift through the personal narratives that seek to elaborate upon the 'on-the-ground' stories across the marginals at a Tahfiz centre in Perak, these personal narratives might invariably entail several of the many components of feelings and emotions, particularly, sensory experiences. Building upon varied facets of prior work, this article enriches ongoing discourses on incorporating psychogeography as a lens by highlighting the centrality of the marginals' voices, whose symbolic attachment and experiences in the countryside are no longer relegated to the periphery but pushed instead to the centre of discussion concerning their reimagination of self and place. As Ryan et al. (2016) chiefly argue, personal narratives by the

marginals often serve as a means for them to demonstrate attachments to these places and how these places affect what they know about Tahfiz centres and how Tahfiz centres are generally reported (in the mainstream media). In the following pages, our aim is to depart from existing investigations by presenting the exaltation of rural life and contemporary (re)constructions of the countryside, seen in one way, pitting the cohesive alliance of de-urbanisation against the conventional, mechanised, and strenuous demands of cityscapes as we shall see from the personal narratives by the marginals.

PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY OF THE MARGINALS

Before we explore the multilayered experiences across the accumulated personal narratives on the reimagining of the self and place, it is perhaps useful to dwell upon the research specifics and important concepts. First, this article centres on the concept of *flânerie* as a methodological lens for exploring and observing environments. *Flâneurs* or *flâneuses* are generally understood as individuals deeply attuned to the nuances of societal dynamics and diverse atmospheres that pervade specific places (Sidaway, 2022). *Flâneries*, characterised by their seemingly aimless wandering, become modes of inquiry that transcend conventional walking practices, and through keen observations and analytical configurations, *flâneurs* decipher and unravel meanings hidden within specific places (Holloway, 2021). As such, *flâneurs* bridge the environment and individuals' consciousness, offering engaged and keen insights into how the places affect their sense of attachment to the said place (Khaidzir et al., 2022a), throwing light on what they know about the place and what they are told to believe about the place (in this case, the Tahfiz centre).

Second, the psychogeographical approach centralises 'drifting.' Drifting, which is borrowed from a French word, 'dérive,' is used to describe one's ability to roam specific places, accumulating sensory experiences associated with observing, gathering, and interpreting information, meanings, and experiences in their entirety. That is, when humans drift into their surroundings, they experience particular elements of the landscape, a process integral to the concept of psychogeography, which seeks to harmoniously interlace the mind, behaviour, and environment. This act of drifting not only serves as a vessel for elevating individuals' consciousness about the environment but may also compel them to recognise the profound impact that settings can exert upon them (Sidaway, 2022). In the current psychogeographical tracing, the marginals-as-*flâneurs* drifted freely in and around said Tahfiz centre with no clear direction. As Holloway (2021) articulates, wandering and drifting constitute a practice of *dérive*, unplanned and conditioned by sociocultural and situational contexts.

TAHFIZ CENTRE IN CHANGKAT JERING, PERAK

The Tahfiz centre in question is pseudonymised to ensure compliance with privacy, and for ease of reference, the Tahfiz centre is now referred to as Tahfiz al-Qalam. Tahfiz al-Qalam prioritises both lifelong learning and Islamic classes, housing youth and senior citizens who attend this place-of-faith premise voluntarily or on parental request, with the majority of its attendees hailing from poor or vulnerable communities (for example, domestic abuse victims, impoverished divorced women, and seniors). Because Tahfiz al-Qalam combines lifelong learning through liberal arts education, such as integrating catering, melon plantation business, and Quranic studies, just to name a few, this centre appeals to senior citizens as this Tahfiz centre also accommodates the

impoverished elderly and young learners whose parents have deceased. The poor Tahfiz inhabitants are survived either by public, stranger donations or centralised district and state government monthly allowance (contingent upon their varied socioeconomic backgrounds). Tahfiz al-Qalam stretches about 0.4-0.5 hectares and is constructed in different ways; some buildings are made up of bricks, while others are covered in wood panels and nipa roofs. The congregation meets two nights per week for simultaneous prayers and religious (Friday) sermons, while on most days, they disperse into several groups with varying directions. The buildings are palpably clear during the day, but some areas are covered in murky, dimmed lighting since the maintenance of buildings depends on how much monetary value donors present themselves. There are two courtyards, one with a high-ceilinged interior, the other remarkably vast and open. While one is generally used for religious tasks, the other is designated for lifelong learning and preparation of food caterers' dishes. Depending on different schedules for different individuals and groups, men and women do not sit close to one another, while elderly women simply stay in their housing, and these women are cared for by appointed guardians by *Mudir* (loosely understood as the leader of Tahfiz centre). Yet, it is important to note that Tahfiz al-Qalam is filled with learners from various sociocultural backgrounds. For instance, one of the inhabitants was a revert Buddhist to Islam who spent some 20-plus years in civil engineering before deciding to submit to the call of Islam, and despite family and friend complications, he left his professional work, divided his properties and inheritance to his wife and one child and had since resided in Tahfiz al-Qalam. Similarly, a woman in her late 50s from Mindanao, Philippines, decided to enrol at the Tahfiz centre as confronting the difficulties of city living and having served as a teacher at a private school presented her with moral and religious conundrums that compelled her to revert to Islam.

PROCESS AND PROCEDURE FOR ADMINISTERING AND COLLECTING PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Following discussions with the leader, we were allowed entrance for three days, accompanied by a friend who had access to the Tahfiz centre. We were told that the first day was kept as a way to get acquainted with the inhabitants and place, making cordial contacts through friendly interactions, while the remaining two days were each spent on administering and collecting personal narratives and following through with the personal narratives, respectively. So, on day one, we proceeded to lead casual conversations as a way to get to know one another. Our friend, who had friendly contact with the leader, liaised and touched base just so the direction to drift and write personal narratives had no ill intention and that the psychogeographical tracing could commence and complete as scheduled.

On day two, in retrieving the marginals' personal narratives about their experiences with the Tahfiz centre, the marginals were introduced to the concept of flâneurship as a guiding principle. They received guidance on how to effectively engage with their surroundings, emphasising the centrality of open-mindedness and vigilant observation, but they were told that no explicit directions concerning turns and intersections would be provided. However, while these marginals were not explicitly labelled as flâneurs, they were encouraged to embrace the role of attentive observers who were free to explore and interpret their environment, a method replicated from "Psychogeographical Experience between the Self and the Place" (Khaidzir et al., 2022a). To aid the marginals with writing their narratives, the marginals were furnished with one(1) A4-sized notebook as they freely roamed the Tahfiz centre at their leisure and willingness at each stop, observing and navigating the spaces, buildings, and nature. After one hour, the marginals stopped their wanderings and instead were given a maximum of ten minutes to finalise their written

narratives concerning what they explored, experienced and what the landscape meant, including how the landscape affected what they knew about Tahfiz centre and what they were told to believe. Out of sixty-seven personal narratives, only fifty personal narratives were considered and, therefore, assumed to be legible for interrogation. Seventeen were removed due to reasons including but not limited to ineligible handwriting, irrelevant or invalid descriptions, or no-response narratives. Due to the limitation of space, only eight narratives were chosen for discussion in this article.

On day three, we clarified some aspects of the personal narratives just to ensure that what the marginals had wanted to write, in fact, was visible on the personal narratives. We concluded the investigation by thanking our contact and Tahfiz al-Qalam leader, and they were told that we might proceed to be in contact if something came up in our personal narrative analysis. We proceeded to rewrite the narratives by applying the structure proposed by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2000), which emphasises the importance of recognising essential narrative components. To minimise concept effect, member checks were employed to avoid deviations in corpus interpretation that may not align with the marginals' viewpoints (Piaw, 2020).

THE MARGINALS, PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY, AND REIMAGINING BETWEEN THE SELF AND PLACE

We would like to reiterate the centrality of anonymity in this article, and pseudonyms are, therefore, hitherto employed to protect the marginals' rights to confidentiality. The first narrative is from Maryam. Maryam, a revert Hindu-to-Islam who was one of the many domestic abuse victims who arrived in Tahfiz al-Qalam in 2019, wrote the following narrative concerning her exploration at the said Tahfiz's entrance:

...to the little quaint town in Kebun Bukit...turned a bit left and then right, of course, I feel we are in the centre, it seems that I have stepped into a place I have never known before...just drifting...I am lost in the structure of the landscape as there lives simple country folk, down-to-earth villagers, traditional farmers..but once I return to this Tahfiz, it feels as if it is a homage to that village in a sense that it provides a different view, this Tahfiz I am setting foot is not lost, this tahfiz is not a mixed bag of upside-down space, this Tahfiz will not rot in extinction. Divine blessings for the birth of this Tahfiz. Unlike what my friends say, I can now see life's path as guided by Allah the Most Merciful in this Tahfiz.

On one level, Maryam speaks of the direct nature and location as she strolls the courtyard. By identifying near locations and places, she seems to associate the notion of simple lives and the ways in which Tahfiz al-Qalam builds powerful, cohesive alliances with her eyes as depicted by the utilisation of "country folk," "down-to-earth villagers," and "not lost." Seen in one vein, Maryam feels as if this space rejuvenates her soul and nourishes her outlook by connecting her feelings, the space she is in, and the ways in which the tranquil space offers the necessary ability of 'pandering' back. By contemplating the future and weaving together her present experience within the Tahfiz and its surrounding landscape, Maryam reveals how the continuous interaction with these spaces speaks to the potential for her, the 'stroller', to act as a vessel. This vessel bridges the self and the environment, creating a profound connection that fosters a strategic alliance with these "located experiences," allowing for transformative moments of belonging and understanding (Hones, 2022, p. 108). On a broader level, Maryam's narrative elaborates what Cooper (2020) argues on the significance of personal narratives, as Maryam is keen to take advantage of Tahfiz al-Qalam's lively place by paying nods to the village, seemingly able to colour readers' perception that her flânerie comprises the place, external landscape, and her devotion to Islam. As Hones

(2022) asserts, this fragmentary observation is one of the many examples of how one loves and remembers a place, a great imaginative description by a flâneur. Maryam's narrative, therefore, resembles "adherents of faith within sacred space," who "form a sense of" themselves and "the sense of our place at varying scales of space-time" (Singh & Rana, 2020, p.75).

The following personal narrative is retrieved from a 49-year-old male, Jack, a Malaysian Sabahan's Kadazan-Dusun (one of Sabah's largest ethnic groups) whose deteriorating health following an unsuccessful business merger led him to the auspicious Tahfiz al-Qalam since 2017, as he considers his previous worldview falls short of the reciprocal relationships across his 'own faith systems:'

When the Mudir developed the land together with the companies, it felt as if this land was brought to life; the life was cleansed. All sufficiently moist, sandy, fertile soil nourished the entire Tahfiz, especially this area where I step. This soil, 20 meters away from *surau* (mullah), has nourished various people, including my friends and me, and probably 2-3 generations back. Now, it has been capable of generating fresh homegrown fruits and soil for animals. I guess the land is not tired of producing more and more stuff for us. What was considered probably a lifelong effort has now turned into terrific results, enough to cover the costs of electricity, water, wifi, and food for us. In actual fact, it was a splendid sense by the Mudir to rush and race against time to elevate this soil, maybe because I think the thought of survival snaked his mind. Like hundreds of other mudirs, the burden of rules on survivability prompts him to produce more and more. What others say about Tahfiz is so not true; this Tahfiz is not only a reflection of Mudir's prosperous and progressive vision, but he is humble about it, too.

What Jack writes has thrown light on the significance of Tahfiz al-Qalam's bountiful and stable nature by combining his own experiences and what the place close to Musollah has to offer. On the one hand, the connections between the Tahfiz leader and his visionary aims incorporate the varied tapestry of environmental 'companionship,' the fertile soil of this location, where the produce matures to ripeness, has come to be recognised as their place of mutual becoming. By citing "moist, sandy, fertile soil," "nourished various people," and "fresh homegrown fruits and soil," Jack seems to be struck by the way the said Tahfiz might prosper by creating almost a harmonious interweaving of environmental heritage that might be passed down, continued, and perpetuated. On the other hand, Jack's grasp of the interaction he had with the specific location of Tahfiz al-Qalam seems to suggest that it is this nature's haven that is now made overt, one that no longer resides as an invisible, excluded place, resulting from the wandering and reflecting upon how the specific Tahfiz centre location changed his view. Instead, the collective practice of generating food supplies is now pushed to the centre of geography because it raises one's consciousness concerning the notion that he and the marginal community have co-become with Tahfiz and that the agricultural qualities still never cease to stop surviving and existing. Jack's narrative, therefore, mirrors flâneur's "perspectives and life experiences" (Hones, 2022, p.118).

Diana's subsequent narrative further interweaves the thread of environmental consciousness. A former nightclub server-turn-cafe owner, the 43-year-old Diana came for a period of six months to lead the Tahfiz congregation to turn the marginals-as-learners into beginner-level culinary experts. She helped with the preparation of the ingredients and demonstration of the specific ways of getting the dishes ready, at times with ten marginals and at other times with less than five people. The following narrative is written by Diana:

The land owner possessed the land some 10 years ago; it seems they have lived elsewhere, in Johor, some 100 kilometres away. While the landowner lived elsewhere and far away, they agreed to rent this land provided that the rearing of ducks, chickens, and cows remained in Tahfiz. But I think the landowners do not earn much, are very reserved, and did not show up so much with the Tahfiz businesses. We are happy in a way because I do not want this Tahfiz to be on the verge of destruction, and I don't want Tahfiz to go extinct. This Tahfiz is not what is reported in the newspaper.

Diana seems to conjure up emotions associated with the land, possibly ambivalence, in elaborating upon the brief history behind the land, despite the Tahfiz leader having to monthly finance the land while being cordially happy when the land owner is not visible to the eye. Specifically, Diana's interaction with the place seems to suggest that there is a human community at work at the specific place to which Diana refers that sees the creation of a knowledge repository; it is as though Diana suggests that Tahfiz al-Qalam may be best remembered through the lens of a debtor-creditor relationship, one that underscores the idea that the land owner's invisibility does not equate with neglect of the animals. Hence, the continued presence of "ducks" and "chickens" serves as a reminder of their enduring survival, subtly affirming this responsibility. Although Diana may have consented to the idea that the removal of the land owner from her flâneuse might not be equated with the loss of Tahfiz and Tahfiz's demolition, Diana's writings seem to depict that she is not ready to see an exodus of the Tahfiz population as this might simultaneously mean a murder of local geography and discontentment of collective farming practices, just like inhabitable places like what was reported in the "newspaper." The uneasiness about the disappearance of the land that Diana stepped on, therefore, might draw a parallel with what Marengo (2018) argues as making "agricultural work less desirable" (p. 24) that delineates how "she identifies here her own observations and experience of landscape as a significant source for narrative and action. Particularly relevant is that she notes not only things which can be seen but also the physical" destruction of "the landscape" (Holloway, 2021, p. 79).

The following narrative is written by Prasik, a male *huffaz* (a Quran memoriser) who had one solid goal in mind, to upgrade various techniques of reciting Quran independently and graduate from Tahfiz al-Qalam to teach other children the centrality of Quran and its translation. The 34-year-old male, whose father was a former Malaysian foreign affairs official, was a graduate of an international school in Asia. Prasik saw the concern of Tahfiz al-Qalam and its sustained representations in comparison to surrounding lands in his narrative:

I heard that some men first worked on this land beside our Tahfiz. But, after interacting with fellow soldiers from cities, these men came to understand that there were alternative ways to earn money beyond just working the land. They compared their modest clothing and instant noodles with the city dwellers' lifestyles, jobs, and salaries. There were maybe ten to eleven guys who left the land here, maybe because of the salary there and the airconditioned jobs. If the empty land here, almost covered with fully tall, darkly green and brown trees, looks empty and sullen, our Tahfiz might also be slightly smeared with this landscape; something must be done to the uninhabited land. This Tahfiz is different from what I heard from the news.

Seen in one way, Prasik saw that Tahfiz al-Qalam's representation is predicated on geography, in this case, the interconnectedness of said Tahfiz with the empty land that sits right next to it. Prasik's portrayal of fear in relation to a specific landscape, namely, the adjacent abandoned land, as the initial impetus for creative action, aligns with Tso's (2020) conceptualisation of the wanderer or stroller as a distinctively situated observer in the interpretation of place, regardless of suburban, rural or otherwise, because geography and landscape could be perceived differently and presented in varied facets. On a broader level, Prasik situates his fear of the desolate, disorganised, and overwhelming barren land within perpetuation of the "news" about other Tahfiz centres, thereby documenting that as a result of his wandering, there is an absence of land workers which is attributed partly, as Prasik indicates, by a free-market economy, which :

Corrode social structures in the city that are the geographical markers of social unity and welfare, although a semblance of order has been projected onto this corrosion to conceal it from urbanites as they go about their day-to-day lives. The order in question is panoptic, and the city itself is a panopticon that regulates every movement and every (consumerist) desire for the generation of capital. In this respect, urban living is an exercise in conformity toward which psychogeographers feel ambivalent, while psychogeography is a rejection of the capitalist economic model/order that the city represents (Tso, 2020, p. 18).

Prasik's insights, in relation to Tso's (2020) psychogeographical argument on neoliberal economy, underscore his perturbation by particular landscapes, which, therefore, reveals how his positionality within specific locations shapes and influences the processes of wandering and strolling that characterise his engagement with Tahfiz al-Qalam's environment.

Hussein, who grew up poor in a foster-parent household, did not finish college. Due to a series of mental health breakdowns, he was generally sidelined in school and, inevitably, test scores and in a routine mainstream academic environment. The 24-year-old Kedah native had resided in Tahfiz al-Qalam for at least two years at the time when we arrived. The following narrative was written by Hussein, referencing a neighbouring land of said Tahfiz:

Many find it difficult to accept his apologies (if and only if he apologises) as the loss of forests is widespread. My friends and I always wonder if this somewhat triangular land...could have been more humble and peaceable, secretly wishing that the person(s) behind deforestation was ever caught in the act. They have failed to keep this part of the land and mountainous area pristine. This Tahfiz is pristine, so it should not reflect other unsafe areas.

Firstly, by combining the consequence of deforestation due to the lack of care and attention accorded to the "other unsafe areas," the specific location Hussein traverses affects his sense of attachment with the place by juxtaposing the barren land and the possibility for a benevolent closure through the following words, "could have been more humble and peaceable, secretly wishing that the person(s) behind deforestation was ever caught in the act." The deliberate contrast seems to suggest a dichotomy of land decline and the lack of lawful force that ensued, which seems to foretell a mental dissonance and an unpalatable psychological value (the questionable tenor of apology and absence of legal dimension). Seen in this way, Hussein portrays that the irresponsibility associated with the next-door land owner severs and de-personalises the growth of nature, trees, and sand that may have infected his flânerie. The perspective of Hussein as an insider flâneur might cast him as someone disturbed by the deficiency of legal forces that help to destroy nature, trees, and sand, a view that, therefore, might highlight the failure of maintenance and the disintegration of harmonious interlace between human and nature. This form of destruction, as Tso (2020) argues, illustrates Hussein's perspective, which might be equated with a shocking and impossible-to-rationalise discontinuity between the environment and humans.

Hafi, a 21-year-old Tahfiz goer, originally hailed from Kedah. Following his unsuccessful completion at a local university, Hafi decides to enrol in the Tahfiz classes following his parents' unfortunate financial ordeal, instilling within himself that whatever he learned from Tahfiz al-Qalam might be put into use when he would resume university courses in the near future. Hafi had the following to say:

Although we are influenced by the mainstream ideas concerning how Tahfiz is unsafe and dirty for anyone to live, study, and work, we are prepared to make this Tahfiz a liveable place because the pressure to survive mounts on Mudir every day mainly because the property would one day be owned by him. Look at this fountain wall facing the kiblat (qibla). He prepared this place to sustain and made it interesting to anyone coming here. He did not lie when he said he wanted to make this Tahfiz a pure, serene, and complete place, not just to pray and seek blessings from God.

Hafi appears to have discerned that the Mudir's resolve to ultimately claim the property stemmed from the weight of expectation to negate the idea that "Tahfiz is unsafe and dirty," despite its seeming insignificance when set against the more established and prestigious living and learning institutions of the mainstream. By intertwining his reflections on Mudir's accumulated efforts and the significance of the landscape, specifically, the "fountain wall facing the kiblat (qibla)," as a deliberate feature designed to generate more visits, the fountain becomes more than just a physical structure, it integrates with the painstaking details of what the Mudir has accomplished, standing as an emblem of the emotional and behavioural responses evoked by the landscape. As such, the fountain enriches not only the self but also, by extension, the greater Tahfiz al-Qalam. The Tahfiz-ness generated from Hafi's narrative might burst into both the current and otherworld's life, as Tahfiz goers' divine prayers and intervention might branch off into radically transformative, similar visions (Mudir's "preparation" might mirror greater "serenity," "purity," and "blessings"). The fountain here, therefore, makes up for the Tahfiz-ness that unveils multiple points of sacred worlds, and the upkeep of this fountain appears to symbolise the preservation of unity among the inhabitants and visitors of the Tahfiz as if the care given to its waters reflects the cohesion and unity within the community itself. As Tso (2020) succinctly summarises, Hafi's depictions "defamiliarise what lies in plain sight, sometimes with the bold ambition to extricate themselves from what is by all appearances a spectacle of consumption" (p.4).

The following narrative is written by Sully, a southern Thai Muslim who was a Tahfiz attendee after the pandemic. Following harsh and chaotic COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021, Sully was in search of a place that sought to discern and understand him and his relationship with faith and sacredness. Sully wrote:

This ablution fountain is different from what they say about Tahfiz. This Tahfiz gave us so much choice! It is here that we are grouped together before the ablution as if all boys are 'conjoined' into one soul, one life, but even more so, making us feel less alone, less awkward. This fountain, in its fragments, is where we laugh, joke around, walk in stride, and stop to recite the surah (sura). All problems are just gone. I think this ablution fountain where it sits is powerful, more powerful than the walkway minaret.

The bundle of commonalities, the laughter, jokes, walks, and Quran recitation by strollers like Sully, seems to support the activities compatible with the inhabitants, seemingly accentuating the collective responses to how specific location, the ablution fountain, affects how it colours the dwellers and visitors' perception and calling attention to the fountain's significance as one of the many coherent Tahfiz places. Sully, having roamed the specific location, feels as if the ablution fountain changes what he has been told about Tahfiz centre (read: this ablution fountain is different from what they say about Tahfiz). As such, it is not a stretch to argue that the specific place highlighted by Sully seems to empower him not only with the ablution fountain's ability to render him the ability to scrutinise and absorb the landscape (Hones, 2022) but also encourages Sully and his comrades to forge a relationship between outside influences ("fountain") and internal agency ("powerful" and "less alone"). The unofficial goal here is possibly to provide readers the opportunity to feel the absolute fervent and intense spirituality accorded to wanderers of this fountain. Establishments such as the ablution fountains, therefore, elevate the stroller's experience, rendering the place satisfaction and serene blessedness.

Finally, we are introduced to Ilo. At the time of writing, Ilo, whose age was not disclosed, had been involved with Tahfiz al-Qalam for about three years. Because his parents were divorced, Ilo was accorded a generous inheritance but decided instead to adhere to Islamic fundamentals, although he previously considered himself a 'broken-down' Muslim whose whole self was not 'Muslim-comprehensible.' He writes:

The composite stacks of exterior bricks were found close to this minaret, and maybe they belong to the inhabitants of the next landowner. Last I heard, the construction company was shut down, and our Tahfiz might have been affected by this because the construction next to Tahfiz was supposed to be another place that draws in the crowd or visitors at least. Maybe they were struggling to keep up with the cost. Nobody knew came to work on the next-door land, and even the crane and bulldozer, I heard, were missing, and the workers disappeared maybe because they could not find a job here. The land, now, sits empty, looking murky, sodden, and grey, though the trees have now grown wild and probably too dense at some point; some decayed and may be dangerous for they invite wild animals to launch their attacks and build nests. This Tahfiz is different, and it should not be like other places, as reporters have told us.

By using words that hinged on an 'incoherent' de-urbanised landscape, Ilo might suggest to the fore that anyone who pays visits and attention to Tahfiz al-Qalam might not enjoy a degree of awe and fascination. Through “stacks of exterior bricks,” “nobody,” “crane and bulldozer, I heard, were missing,” “empty,” “murky,” “sodden,” and “grey,” Ilo possibly signifies the possibility of the next-door land that is dysfunctional and aged, constructing a discursive depiction about the imperfect ‘parts’ of the abandoned neighbouring land which presents embodiment and emergence with much bigger landscape ruins. On a broader level, this narrative bears a resemblance with a seeming notion of a rescue mission, calling attention to a possible loss of meaning; it is a deterioration of nature that continues to (re)define the landscape at said Tahfiz possibly because Ilo does not want the Tahfiz to “be like other places as told by reporters.” Ilo has probably lost faith, but he still believes in the rejuvenating efforts that seem to commingle with the representation of Tahfiz al-Qalam; whether the regenerating of the neighbouring land might result in (in)compatibility with said Tahfiz is difficult to say at this point, but there is a sense of pertinent psychogeographical dimension that is coherently articulated by Ilo, cautioning visitors, and possibly readers out there, concerning the depths of unkept nature precisely to resist the envision of wild predators. Ilo, therefore, discredits the neighbouring place because the next-door dilapidated land tarnishes Tahfiz al-Qalam’s reputation as a place for resourced ecology (Green, 2016). As Tso (2020) acknowledges, “nature is integral to society and, by extension, the world. Since society is nature in a civilised form and the world is an aggregate of societies, the rules of nature should hold sway in any society, any part of the world” (p.17).

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to analyse psychogeographical tracing across the marginal poor at a rural Tahfiz centre in Perak. The varied facets of experiences delineated as a result of the marginals’ wandering the said Tahfiz centre can be considered in one way: a psychogeographical tracing between the self and place attachment that reimagines and recolours their perceptions on how the Tahfiz in question is unlike other Muslim spaces. By focusing on the exaltation of rural places, this article demonstrates that despite the socioeconomic limitations placed on the marginal poor, their agency to identify and explain how the said Tahfiz centre situated in the countryside is different from other Tahfiz centres has possibly built what Marengo (2018) terms as "collective intellectual knowledge of production" where "countryside" perpetuation based on agricultural and rural world elements "represents" their “origins and deepest sociocultural roots, even though they” might “have completely changed over the past century” (p. 15-16). It is, therefore, theorised that the marginals at the Tahfiz Centre who made links with the landscape have different stories to tell concerning their psychogeographical experiences. Contrary to normal, albeit traditional accounts of Muslim spaces, Tahfiz psychogeography places synchronic emphasis on informing, permeating,

and preserving social engagement for the common goals of panoptic vision of interconnectedness in pursuit of dynamic integration principle, which have less to do with the restrictive ensconced view of violent Muslims across Tahfiz centres. This means that despite the hardships and relatively harsh realities associated with poor communities in the rural Tahfiz locale (the very idea about Tahfiz centres as ‘unsafe’ and ‘unaccommodating’), the marginals demonstrate that they do not only persist in adhering to established paths, but they are willing to seize the opportunity to form imaginations anew and creative sketches of their own sociocultural trajectories.

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