




Discursivities of empowerment, marginal women's agency, and psychogeography of madrasa

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Abstract

This article aligns with James Sidaway's focus on the psychogeographical connections between landscape and narrative in rural communities, using the lived experiences of poor Muslim women at a Malaysian, non-city madrasa as an example. Psychogeography is defined as a creative method for reimagining places beyond conventional views. In this article, place-based, narrative rich model serves as the analytical lens to show how women gain strength through writing narratives about their peripheralized madrasa. While generally seen as centers of worship and Islamic education, these places rely on donor support for

their survival. Typically located in countryside areas, non-urban Muslim places of faith reveal the interplay between human communities and their natural environments. Through these peripheral women's personal narratives, this article firstly argues that their writings exemplify women's spectrum of emotions, from fear, disorientation, and discomfort to solace, security, and contentment, reflecting elevated mental and emotional perceptions of the center of faith. This raises consciousness on their agency despite material and financial restrictions placed on them. Secondly, through this place and perception tracing, their experiences might better be interpreted as a symbolic reimagining of the places of faith, prompting the

proposal of a new theoretical model: the psychogeography of madrasa by marginal women. By analyzing these first-hand narratives, interpretations, and lived realities within de-urbanized settings, this article challenges simplistic, often reductive depictions of women in Islamic faith-based places. Rather than reinforcing stereotypes of women in madrassas as alienated or victims of violence as reported by many Malaysian news accounts, it demonstrates how the theoretical model fosters a panoptic vision, one that shapes, permeates, and sustains social bonds with one another, nurturing collective women's unity and active participation. Therefore, the proposed theory concerning the displaced women offers a counter-narrative, illustrating women's discursivities of empowerment who draw strength not from volatile sufferings, but from communal harmony and collective women's experiences.

Keywords

Rural • Women • Poverty • Literary geography • Psychogeography • Narratives • Agency

1. Introduction

James Sidaway (2022) advances a compelling case for the role of psychogeography and literary landscapes in shaping rural communities. Psychogeography is defined as a creative, subversive approach to studying space (Debord, 2006) which involves drifting through environments to cultivate “new ways of seeing, enabling change” (Link, 2016, p. 82). Whether as travelers, wanderers, or flâneurs, individuals traverse spaces in distinct ways, each journey yielding its own writings. Cognizant of these points, Sidaway argues that, first, the model provides a vital lens for understanding marginalized groups, revealing how their lived experiences are shaped by socio-political forces like displacement and gentrification. Second, it amplifies diverse voices, particularly African-Amer-

ican, Asian, and postcolonial perspectives, shedding light on the complex interplay of identity and belonging within different environments. Third, psychogeography exposes the fragmented, often ambiguous narratives that emerge from these spaces, excavating the nuances of what it means to relate to various places. Of special relevance to this article is Sidaway's call to expand on this inquiry beyond urban settings, advocating for a “broadened field of psychogeography” where “psychogeographical drifts have moved outside of urban foci” (p. 567). One of these place-based explorations involves excavating women's narratives situated at countryside places that elevate the women's bold visions despite material restrictions placed on them.

Building on these insights, this article responds to Sidaway's (2022) calls by examining marginal women's psychogeographical tracings by taking a non-urban Malaysian madrasa as an example. By scrutinizing these underrepresented women's personal narratives, it is argued that these narratives empower women's visions of the said countryside Muslim place of faith by dismantling the monolithic, essentializing views about Islamic spaces as violent, unsafe, chaotic, and accommodating (Ahmad Othman and Anas, 2020) and offers instead what this paper will theorize madrasa place-based, narrative-rich model by marginal women. But before the theoretical model is presented in the following pages, it is pertinent, perhaps, that the important terms are defined and contextualized to sketch the trajectory of the article. Firstly, the often-excluded women are at-the-margins, one, because they are poor and, two, because they are vulnerable. They mostly seek help from these places of faith for shelter and safety away from other harsh realities, for example, domestic violence. Therefore, their visions of demonstrating instead that the said place of worship is benevolent, resourceful, and welcoming can, in one way, underline their agency. By focusing on the writings emphasizing invisibilized women's emotion, and experiences with the Muslim spaces of worship, the discursivities of empowerment can be seen from their “collective

intellectual knowledge of production” (Marengo, 2018, p. 15). Secondly, the minoritized women reside in non-urban places of worship, situated outside Malaysian cityscape that emphasizes human-nature connections (Lewis, 2020). The Muslim-based centers of faith located at the fringes of cities generally serve as a hub for Islamic text acquisition, offering religious lessons alongside practical ventures such as agriculture and small businesses. Funded largely by donations, the places of faith in the countryside house men and women from various backgrounds, each with their own reasons for dwelling there. It is precisely this diversity that renders their stories invaluable for tracing how women’s agency and practice are documented in their negotiation of the self and commune (Raihanah & Idrus, 2023; Idrus *et al.*, 2022; Idrus *et al.*, 2024, 2025). In doing so, personal narratives generated from *dérive* surrounding a place of faith foreground not obedient or muted women who merely must be saved due to their harsh financial, socioeconomic conditionings, but demonstrate instead that the women possess the agency, authority, and active vision as seen in their negotiations with the land encompassing Muslim faith and beliefs.

This article, therefore, asks: How does psychogeography illuminate the discursivities of empowerment by marginal women at a rural madrasa? This article argues that the personal narratives of these women dwellers unveil profound emotional and sensory dimensions of the place. Unlike prior research focused on industrialized cities or empowered urban women, it amplifies peripheralized women’s voices to the center of discussion, reframing their symbolic connections to the non-urban Muslim sites. In the following section, this article is ‘situated’ within non-Western psychogeographical scholarship, exploring its place among diverse literary traditions. Next, it underscores the centrality of personal narratives, drawing from both textual sources and contemporary research. The discussion then turns to its methodologies, particularly *flânerie* and the figure of the *flâneur*, highlighting the role of first-hand accounts

in capturing the experiences of non-urban Muslim women inhabitants at a Muslim learning community. Finally, it presents these narratives, engaging with key questions about the mental and emotional perception concerning women and the said place. Through this analysis, the article, therefore, theorizes what might be termed, psychogeography of the madrasa by displaced women; it is a place-based Muslim emotive model that fosters unity, adaptability, and a panoptic vision of communal life. Specifically, the proposed place-based model, as articulated by these women at-the-margins, presents a transformative counter-narrative. Rather than portraying the place of worship as housing passive, female victims of instability, it reveals how these women construct discourses of empowerment through communal solidarity and shared experiences. Within these sacred educational spaces, women forge resilience not through individual struggles, but through the collective harmony of their interconnected lives, finding strength in the rhythms of daily ritual, the solidarity of study circles, and the quiet power of spatial reclamation as the following discussions will show. In contrast to reductive depictions of Islamic community places as insular or violent, these underrepresented women reimagine them as places of interconnectedness, where shared humanity and collective harmony take center stage. As witnessed and lived by its inhabitants (Tso, 2020), the place-based, narrative-rich journeys undertaken by the disempowered women, thus, recharts a Muslim space of faith as a fertile landscape for agency rather than oppression, where Muslim women’s lived experiences rewrite dominant narratives of Islamic worship centers.

2. Contextualizing personal narratives, cultural and literary environment, and psychogeography

Personal narratives, as forms of literary text, are shaped by the intricate orchestration of a wide-ranging cultural environment. First, the study of liter-

ary environment is often seen as a relatively new approach within literary studies, frequently associated with Panu Minkkinen's (2022) exploration of culture and engagement of place through walking and strolling. Minkkinen (2022) asserts that through these acts of movements, "different literary genres—prose fiction, essay, travelogue, fact, and fiction—intermingle, producing a trembling meaning that 'rings truer' than any geographically accurate description" (p. 352–353). This integration suggests that literary interaction with space could evoke deeper truths than mere representation, depicting the genuine, emotional experiences of humans or human-like agents engaging continuously with their environment (Ryan, 2017). Second, the deliberate combination of personal narratives with walking and strolling underscores the importance of "location, position, distance, and direction" (Ryan *et al.*, 2016, p. 7), elements which resonate within the real-world, cultural settings often reflected in these narratives. Such details reveal the ways in which human actions and characteristics are shaped by the spaces they inhabit, demonstrating the dynamic relationship between cultures and places. Finally, it is crucial to recognize that the literary environment encompasses a rich diversity of genres and forms, extending far beyond any single type of text (Marengo, 2018) following fusion of personal narratives and landscape which often establishes a privileged connection, one to which many geographers have long been drawn. By engaging with "conversational narratives of personal experiences" (Ryan, 2017, p. 520), these narratives offer profound insights into the imaginative, subjective experience of place and its cultural realities, illuminating the subtle yet powerful influence of place on human perception and behavior (Holloway, 2021).

In contrast to merely reading novels or short stories about rural lives, the interrogation of personal narratives presents an alternative lens through which the emergence of place can be seen and understood because memories and feelings captured in personal narratives concerning representations of the

countryside often reveal varied facets of meaning. As Ann Tso (2020) succinctly summarizes, one solid way to integrate writings, behavior, emotions, and feelings in countryside landscapes is through the careful integration and interrogation of places and personal narratives:

psycho geography is the discovery of a new awareness within the self, projected outward into the milieu. Psycho geography also betrays a divided consciousness, whose relationship with its surroundings is also multifaceted. Since each divided self relates to the milieu differently, a new body—space relationship is formed each time a new fragment of the self comes into being. In this vein, each psycho geographical narrative offers a new view of the world, a vision gleaned from unraveling wholes such as the self and the milieu (p.54).

The following narratives that challenge contemporary insular depictions about Islamic spaces of faith by the underrepresented women, as Tso (2020) asserts, mirror descriptions of how individuals' interactions are shaped by their environments, offering the depth of the interplay between self and place. Seen in this way, personal narratives provide a compelling means of demonstrating how landscapes shape human behavior and culture, and how these places evoke specific patterns of emotions and feelings. Therefore, unofficial, individual accounts by women-at-the-margins might bestow "authority on what is visible, as they presuppose an experience on the ground" (Dasca, 2018, p. 35), mirroring the methods by which "both personal responses and geographical discourse" are employed by nature writers (Holloway, 2021, p. 75). As David Cooper (2020) contends, personal narratives are invaluable as "first-person accounts of geographical experience" (p. 634) and it is through these narratives that the landscape comes alive, influencing not only behavior but the cultural responses of those who inhabit it. By focusing on the ways in which personal narratives reveal cultural and literary depth, the stories by

the said invisibilized females construct a powerful counter-narratives which accord privilege to their empowerment as rooted in communal solidarity and shared female experiences in Islamic places, rather than framing them merely as vulnerable and victims of financial instability.

3. Commingling of psychogeography and literary studies

Before interrogating the place-based and mental perceptions of dwellers at a Muslim worship site, it is essential to situate this inquiry within broader discussions of place-based and narrative-rich integrative studies while acknowledging that this is not an exhaustive survey of its diverse intersections with literary studies. A fitting entry point is Sheila Hones's (2022) framework of literary geography, where "literary" encompasses both texts and literary scholarship, while 'geography' extends to human geography, "lived spaces and spatial concepts" (pp. 1-2). Seen in this way, places are not merely backdrops but active forces shaping identity, behavior, and psychological conditioning. This article explores how the de-urbanized place of faith among the Muslims articulates visions of women's empowerment, expressing the ways in which they reconfigure the understanding of an Islamic space as a calm, serene Muslim sanctuary.

Psychogeography has permeated literary studies beyond Western traditions, revealing hybrid, multi-layered theoretical and methodological implications. Novels such as Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* (Bougherira, 2020), Chan Ling Yap's *Where the Sunrise Is Red* (Amran and Ali Termizi, 2020) and *Sweet Offerings* (Amran *et al.*, 2022) demonstrate its analytical power. Bougherira (2020) especially traces themes of motherhood, racism, trauma, and self-discovery, showing how geographical markers catalyze the protagonist's transformation. Meanwhile, Amran and Ali Termizi (2020) illuminate the struggles of Chinese women in Malaysia, using

walking as both a literal and metaphorical "act of resistance", while at the same time subverting gendered spatial divisions to reclaim autonomy (Amran *et al.*, 2022, p. 60). A significant departure for this article lies in Amran and Ali Termizi's (2020) reimagining of the flâneur through a feminist lens, challenging male-dominated narratives of urban wandering. Yet these studies largely overlook engagement of land by minoritized women at the fringes of cities, a gap this article fills by centering the voices of poor women situated at a non-urban madrasa.

Poetry, too, offers fertile ground for this article's inquiry. Khaidzir *et al.* (2021, 2022b) examine Malaysian poems that capture urban transformation, environmental tension, and sociocultural identity, particularly during the volatile aftermath of the 1969 ethnic conflicts. Specifically, Malaysia's notable polarization, rooted in three pre-colonial divisions, is primarily one that concerns ethnic relations, with the national identity commonly favoring Malays. This has led to other communities, such as Chinese and Indian Malaysians, feeling the lack of equal rights and status. A poem, as expressed in their studies, for example, takes readers to the 1969 racial riot, serving as a reminder of the event, capturing the writer's emotional and mental journey through its visuality and spatiality. As such, their work reveals how cities are felt as much as they are built, through wonder, nostalgia, and unease. One striking study (Khaidzir *et al.*, 2021) follows a Muslim female poet-flâneur whose global wanderings become a journey of self-discovery, blending observation with participation. Another investigation (Khaidzir *et al.*, 2022a) innovatively casts participants as flâneurs in Melaka, diverging from traditional poem-centric approaches. Yet these explorations, rich as they are, 'sanitize' de-urbanized spaces and at-the-margin women. In the following pages, the marginal women's narratives, as Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu (2016) argue, are sources of vital expressions of belonging. These women at-the-margins present radical imaginaries about leading lives at the countryside, not as a relic, but a dynamic (re) construction, one that contrasts sharply with the

mechanized, cyclical mainstream version of Islamic places as spaces of vulnerability, volatility, and susceptibility. Therefore, the following sections bring these contrasts to life through the invisibilized women's own stories, offering a placed-based narratives not of feebleness and fragility, but of active, industrious interdependence and resilience as they navigate their worshipping places.

Current academic discourse acknowledges the limitations of comprehensively capturing the diverse applications of personal narratives across research contexts. However, existing scholarship provides critical insights, albeit rather briefly, that enable researchers to engage with these narratives in their full complexity. Personal narratives especially reveal interwoven accounts of lived experience, intentionally crafted for specific audiences (Bruner, 1991). These narratives serve as interpretive frameworks, offering expansive possibilities for analysis. Within immersive, sensory-laden environments, they act as catalysts for critical reflection, challenging entrenched assumptions by rendering visible both articulated and unspoken dimensions of human experience. Several studies demonstrate the transformative potential of personal narratives. Eastmond's (2007) research, for instance, reveals how individuals employ personal accounts as subtle yet powerful acts of resistance, reclaiming agency against reductive generalizations. Similarly, Bruner's (1991) conceptualization of humans exemplifies the significance associated with cognitive imperative of narrative construction, a process through which fragmented memories are synthesized into coherent meaning. Therefore, personal narratives might function as essential sense-making instruments that orient spatial awareness.

However, narratives do not emerge as fully formed discourses and artifacts. They require deliberate construction, a process of interrogating one's life complexities into structured, communicable forms (Bamberg and McCabe, 1998). Individuals, much like cartographers, impose order on experiential chaos, arranging events into meaningful sequences

that reveal underlying significance. Scholarly research affirms this dual capacity of personal narratives; personal narratives generally interpret (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2004; Mascia, 2020) and actively construct lived experiences, building representations that serve both external audiences and internal reflection. Building upon these theoretical foundations, this article advocates for a more nuanced engagement with personal narratives, conceptualizing them as dynamic sites of convergence where these displaced women's experiences with a non-city-based madrasa land's imagery and lived experiences coalesce into knowledge. This perspective is particularly informed by the narrative practices of Muslim communities with the worship places, whose female inhabitants articulate their boldness through negotiations with the surrounding lands in the effort to elevate their reputation as safe havens.

4. Psychogeographical tracing of madrasa's marginal women: a methodological approach

Prior to analyzing the complex interplay between the women's self and place as articulated through personal narratives, it is necessary to establish the study's conceptual foundations. This section firstly begins by introducing the central approach concerning the said place-based, narrative rich writings. Secondly, it will introduce specific methods and approaches taken to capture the said minoritized women's writing.

4.1. Psychogeography

This investigation employs two interrelated methodological approaches, namely, *flânerie* as a methodological lens for exploring and observing environment observational framework and *dérive* as an engagement practice with landscape. Firstly, the concept of *flânerie* serves as a primary analytical lens, referring to the practice of deliberate, observant wandering through

urban and rural landscapes (Sidaway, 2022). Flâneurs (or flâneuses) are defined by their heightened sensitivity to social dynamics and spatial atmospheres, transforming dwellers who walk into a mode of critical inquiry (Holloway, 2021). Far from aimless meandering, this practice constitutes a form of spatial hermeneutics, where practitioners decode embedded cultural meanings and reveal how environments influence cognition and behavior. In this article, marginal women assume this role. Their movements through institutional spaces demonstrate their minds, emotions, and mental relationships between landscape and how they could erase partial and insular portrayal about Islamic worshiping centers in the countryside.

Secondly, the method of *dérive*, a French term indicating purposeful drifting through environments to experience their affective and symbolic dimensions (Sidaway, 2022), is integrated. This technique emphasizes sensory immersion and spontaneous engagement with landscapes, facilitating awareness of how surroundings shape perception and action. This article also follows this approach. It documents how peripheralized women at the fringes of cities enact this practice through unstructured exploration of their institutional environment; in fact, their behavior organically responds to their minds and surrounding madrasa environments (Holloway, 2021). In the context of the present investigation, the displaced women at a de-urbanized Islamic worship center pick up the role as flâneurs, drifting freely around the place without prescribed instructions, an unplanned and organic exploration which is shaped by the socio-cultural and situational contexts in which it occurs (Holloway, 2021) as the following pages will show.

4.2. Methods/steps taken

A three-day fieldwork was conducted at a madrasa. As it is not always possible to identify persons or organizations directly and publicly, particularly when individual privacy of the said persons or

organizations could be compromised, the following pseudonym, Madrasa al-Barakah, is used in this article. The said Islamic educational institution serves both as spiritual sanctuary and social enclave. Occupying a 0.4-0.5-hectare compound of brick and nipa palm structures, the place embodies architectural hybridity that mirrors its pedagogical pluralism. The faith-based center's dual courtyards are open to both sacred and secular rhythms of community life. The vaulted prayer space hosts biweekly congregational gatherings, while the open-air courtyard functions as classroom, kitchen, and communal hub as can be seen in Figure 1.

Madrasa al-Barakah comprises voluntary attendees and young adults under parental or state guardianship, representing many of Malaysia's most vulnerable demographics. These are female survivors of domestic violence, economically disadvantaged women who are divorcees, orphaned youth, and elderly persons dependent on government subsidies and charitable donations who seek protections and offer professional and personal contributions. Here, gender segregation follows traditional Islamic practice, though the presence of remarkable converts, including a former Buddhist engineer and a Filipina grandmother, seen in one way, exemplifying an "archipelagic thinking" framework (Hew, 2023), contributes to exploring different ways of being a different national and also being Muslim in Southeast Asia. By virtue of this example of diversity, the Islamic place of faith's role as a site of both physical shelter and spiritual transformation provides a flourishing avenue to accord privilege to the discursivities of empowerment by the invisibilized women.

The fieldwork and investigation employed the said methods to map the intersection of physical space and subjective experience. The research protocol was realized in distinct phases. The initial research day focused on environmental and social acclimatization through unstructured social engagement with the madrasa dwellers. Specifically, the research employed participant observation techniques to establish rapport with the said community members. A research



Figure 1. Madrasa, Mohd Muzhafar Idrus, June 12, 2024

assistant, serving as cultural liaison, facilitated clear communication of research objectives regarding place-based responses, their mapping, and personal narrative collection. This orientation period culminated in the Islamic community leader identifying sixty-seven potential women-as-participants, who were subsequently briefed about the forthcoming research activities. The primary data collection employed a modified *flâneur* methodology adapted for the context of the said place of faith. Participants received instruction in six core observational techniques (observe, notice, collect, analyze, reflect, move) derived from established qualitative research frameworks (Creswell, 2007; Khaidzir *et al.*, 2022a).

Each participant was equipped with standardized A4-sized writing materials and directed to engage in self-guided spatial exploration of the area. This *dérive* exercise lasted sixty minutes, followed by a structured ten-minute reflection period, allowing participants to capture immediate sensory experiences (visual, auditory, tactile), spatial triggers of personal memory, and environmental influences on emotional states. The final research day implemented quality control measures through member-checking procedures. The research assistant conducted follow-up interviews to verify narrative accuracy and intentionality. Research activities concluded with formal expressions of gratitude to participants and community leadership, while maintaining openness for future consultation during the analysis phase. This three-phase methodology yielded viable narratives for subsequent analysis (McNamara, 2009).

From the initial corpus of sixty-seven collected narratives, fifty met the established criteria for inclusion in the final analysis. Seventeen narratives were excluded based on exclusion illegibility, thematic irrelevance, or incomplete responses. The research team conducted multiple iterative readings of the selected narratives (McNamara, 2009), recontextualizing Ollerenshaw and Creswell's (2002) structural narrative framework for systematic coding. This analytical approach identified five core elements within each narrative: [S] Setting: Encompassing physical, temporal, and socio-cultural contexts (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002, p. 335), [C] Characters: Representing both individual actors and collective interactions within the madrasa environment, [A] Actions: Documenting observable behaviors and intentional practices, [P] Problems: Identifying conflicts or challenges requiring resolution, and [R] Resolutions: Marking transformative moments or outcomes. For example, in one of the women's writing, "As we gather at dawn at the madrasa fountain, the loss of forests is widespread. This madrasa land demands gentler stewardship although asking for forgiveness heals the problems", settings is demonstrated by "the madrasa fountain", characters could be represented

by “we”, and the problem is illustrated by “loss of forests is widespread.” Actions could be seen from “this madrasa land demands gentler stewardship” while resolution could be witnessed from “asking for forgiveness heals the problems.”

Three primary themes emerged from the analytical process, namely (1) women, spatial practices and community formation within the place, (2) women’s drawing strength from individual and collective memory about the place’s landscape, and (3) bold and transformative accounts of perspectives. Nevertheless, the use of personal narratives as a research method is not without its challenges, particularly regarding questions of reliability and validity. Such limitations often stem from the difficulty of producing a quantifiable corpus, given the inherently subjective nature of personal accounts and the possibility of interpretive ambiguity. Although these issues are widely acknowledged within qualitative research, there is broad scholarly consensus that personal narratives remain valuable, as they convey forms of subjective truth (Ryan, 2017). In this article, several measures were adopted to reduce the impact of researcher presence and interpretive bias. First, as mentioned earlier, a trained research assistant, not the principal investigator, was responsible for seeking consent, clarifying questions, and offering prompts. This decision was made deliberately, as the assistant could help soften hierarchical and power-related differences tied to various aspects, for example, status, age, or gender, that might otherwise influence participants’ responses (St Croix and Doherty, 2022). The assistant underwent more than eighteen hours of training and received detailed briefings and instructions on how to respond appropriately to participants’ inquiries. Second, to minimize interpretive bias in the handling of responses, member checks were carried out to cross-check that the researchers’ interpretations accurately represented the participants’ intended meanings (Piaw, 2020). Further, two peer debriefers provided their expertise; one a specialist in postcolonial literature and the other holding

a doctorate in English literature. Both have over ten years of teaching experience and they have an explicit familiarity with the intersections between literary studies, personal narratives, and place-based, narrative-rich studies, lending critical depth and expertise to the nuances of the investigation, as the following pages will demonstrate.

5. Marginal women, authoritative writing

This section represents the women who write about the said place of Islamic faith following their psychogeographic tracing, highlighting their discursivities concerning empowerment. These writings by the invisibilized women are chosen as they exemplify shared visuality following their *dérive*, captured through strategic and situated discursivities that resemble contemporary representations, born from the interaction between individuals (the said underrepresented women) and images (in this case, mental and emotional perceptions of the physical landscape) which possess the capacity to motivate and mobilize action (García Varas, 2019). Thus, by focusing on their writings, their agency can be seen despite material and financial restrictions placed on them.

The following excerpt came from Mariyam, a 33-year-old female caterer. Having had experiences with food provision while looking after younger residents, Mariyam’s heart is full:

Even though our madrasa is seen by mainstream news as violent, and nobody wants to come here, this landscape, the courtyard and ablution fountain, give me most pleasure that one day I’d like to continue to serve the community. I know that we are food caterers on Sundays, but we’d also like to welcome everyone and especially value the courtyard and ablution space as this is a space to cleanse out anxieties and own and attain Allah’s grace. The wide space is perhaps the most important characteristic of this madrasa, and I could relate to the appeals of this space. This space

allows me to not just feel good about myself, but also the fact that the courtyard and ablution fountain instill within the madrasa community a sense of faith.

This excerpt reveals a psychogeographic reclamation of space, where Mariyam subverts the place's violent media depictions by emphasizing its sensory and spiritual affordances. The courtyard and ablution fountain serve as therapeutic landscapes that cleanse anxieties and foster faith, demonstrating women's agency in transforming stigmatized religious spaces into sites of belonging (Osman, 2022). Through embodied rituals ("ablution") and communal practices ("food catering"), she asserts ownership over reputation, countering both potential stereotypes and alienation related to the Islamic place being dangerous. The wide, open architecture facilitates this agency, offering physical and psychological freedom distinct from restrictive urban environments. After living at the Muslim community, Mariyam's narrative constructs a place-based, narrative-rich writing that elaborates how women actively reshape religious spaces through affective attachment and future-oriented service (Tso, 2020).

The next narrative is retrieved from Rossa. A 51-year-old widow, Rossa, came to the Islamic educational institution having raised five children who are now adults. Rossa says:

Unlike mainstream television news that reports madrasa as lacking vitality, madrasa here is bountiful. There are melons and rambutans, along with other crops, fields of cabbage and chilies. The mango groves add a touch of elegance and subtly brighten a landscape shaped significantly by human effort. The madrasa covered with this landscape, reflects how my friends and I could continue the concerted work on divine intervention, benevolently and seriously.

This excerpt exemplifies Guy Debord's (2006) approach through its emphasis on how women like Rossa draw strength from the Islamic place of worship's agricultural landscape which produces distinct emotional and spiritual effects, counter-

ing media portrayals of the Islamic hub as barren. The lush orchards and cultivated fields transform the environment into a site of vitality and divine connection, demonstrating women's agency in reshaping perceptions of Islamic education spaces. On one level, the harmonious blend of natural abundance and religious purpose reflects a Debord's 'situationist' reimagining of space, where Rossa and her female counterparts actively construct meaning through their cultivation of both land and faith. On another level, this psychogeographic engagement empowers them to redefine the Islamic center as a place of growth rather than stagnation. By framing agricultural labor as both spiritual practice ("divine intervention") and ecological stewardship, Rossa claims authority and control (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2021).

The next narrative is written by Ayla, a 47-year-old business operator who went to Muslim place of worship to uplift the poor. Ayla writes:

This space close to the porch dome tells a lot of stories about the madrasa community; our tenacity, hard work, and intelligence in both Islamic studies and social skills maintain the madrasa's landscape in a state of fertile order, resulting in great beauty. Unlike TV news (television news) that reports our madrasa as a vulnerable space, I have deep love for the madrasa's soil; our girls' strong emotional connection to the land, and our routinized commitment ensure that both the young and old contribute to the environment. The preservation of the radiant, tranquil, and picturesque landscape, particularly the porch dome, rich with fruitfulness, reflects the girls' harmonious bond with God.

Applying Sidaway's (2022) psychogeographic lens, this excerpt reveals how the Islamic learning hub's built environment ("porch dome") and cultivated landscape become sites of women's epistemic and material empowerment. Through "tenacity, hard work, intelligence", Ayla psychogeographically maps the space as an archive of communal resilience, challenging dominant narratives about Islamic education

spaces. Through scrutinizing Ayla's narrative, it can be argued that Ayla relates to women's environmental stewardship concerning transformative aspects of the said Muslim communal landscape into both spiritual metaphor ("harmonious bond with God") and feminist praxis, where agricultural labor becomes an act of knowledge production (Marengo, 2018). It is, therefore, not a stretch to argue that Ayla and her female companions' emotional connection to land ultimately models an alternative space, according privilege to women's ecological contributions and creating a gendered place-based, narrative-rich approach of mutual care (Martin, 2021). The "fertile order", Ayla says, mirrors Sidaway's (2022) concept of landscapes as palimpsests of power, here rewritten through women's embodied relationship with the sacred space and sustainable labor.

The fourth narrative is written by Raya, a 27-year-old student at the said Muslim learning institution. Raya is heavily dependent on the said Islamic place of faith as her parents abandoned her. Raya says:

I hate it when they say our madrasa is always poor, a place where only dumb people live. Far from it, this near-to-farm madrasa never veers into mere space for the rich or wealthy elites; instead, it remains consistently open, practical, and dignified. This is a land that can only be understood through our hard work toiling for the fertility of madrasa land. The madrasa land prepares me to focus more on our madrasa classes, especially at night when the landscape is dark and tame. Regardless of the fact that most of us are poor, this madrasa's land is pleasing since it is at night that the very same landscape calms me down from over-memorizing the Quran.

Applying Debra Renee Kaufman's (2018) feminist agency, Raya's narrative might challenge dominant stereotypes by recontextualizing instead the Muslim learning hub as a site of dignity and intellectual vitality rather than poverty. Raya seems to assert one form of feminist agency by reframing agricultural labor as epistemological work; understanding the land of Muslim

communities through toil becomes synonymous with mastering religious knowledge. Catharina Löffler's (2017) psychogeographical walking-as-knowing manifests in the nocturnal landscape's pedagogical rhythm, where darkness transforms the farm into a 'tactile' space that regulates Quranic memorization. On the one hand, the intersection of bodily labor ("toiling for the fertility of madrasa land") and cognitive labor ("madrasa classes") might create a feminist place-based, narrative-rich writing where the land itself becomes co-educator, resisting classist and ableist assumptions about life at the Muslim site. On the other hand, the nightfall's "tame" darkness could be an emergent, agentic space where Muslim dwellers like Raya negotiate intellectual pressure through embodied connection to the cultivated soil.

Banee, a 53-year-old female food assistant operator, came to the Islamic learning space in 2018 after failing to sustain her business. Banee writes:

People passing by our madrasa from the main road often fall in love with the secluded and resonant atmosphere, marked by gentle, dry, yet richly green trees and earthy brown soil. It is a work of God-given beauty so captivating that it becomes a decisive factor for anyone seeking divine intervention or the presence of filial piety. This madrasa, with its emphasis on open space, soothes troubled souls and heals broken communities. People often stop by to talk to us and find themselves embraced by the tranquil prayer hall and the shady arcades of the madrasa. I usually slip away to invite my friends to explore the stable, paved ground beneath the tall, lush green trees, where we test one another's knowledge of Quranic chapters and plan our days to assist the elderly who might need help in the back of area of the madrasa.

What Banee writes demonstrates a notion of empowerment through the Islamic place of worship's psychogeographic influence, where the environment's sensory and spiritual qualities, "richly green trees, earthy brown soil, and open space", reshape visitors' emotional and social experiences (Debord, 2006). On

one level, Banee exercises agency by transforming the landscape of the Muslim community into a therapeutic and communal space, countering stereotypes of religious institutions as rigid or unwelcoming. On another level, though, the resonant atmosphere not only attracts outsiders but also emboldens Banee to guide friends in Quranic study and care for the elderly, reinforcing collective empowerment through shared labor and learning. By curating movement (slipping away to gather friends) and repurposing the landscape (a stable ground for study; shaded areas for reflection), Banee and her peers enact a form of *dérive*, a purposeful drift that redefines the Muslim learning hub as a dynamic, inclusive space, not as a place of violence and volatility. Thus, the Islamic learning and worshipping place becomes both a sanctuary and a site of active resistance, where beauty and devotion foster social healing and self-determination.

Lastly, the following narrative is presented by a 39-year-old, Sofia. Sofia only visits the said Islamic center of learning on weekends as she also works. She has the following to say:

I read in the newspaper that madrasa is an ugly and unwelcoming place. But I don't experience that. The smell of the madrasa is what keeps me alert with my divine intervention to Allah. I usually wake up earlier than others just to be outside at the courtyard in between darkness and sunrise to sense this pleasant, sweetish, heavy citrus smell. The pure frosty, open and fresh air which is incorporated into this curious earthy smell are like delicious havens. After sunrise, proceed to settle my prayer just to make sure I am at peace with myself. With the broad, walled and open courtyard, I am able to see how I, like everyone else here, is connected to one another and that we have a sense of purposeful living within and beyond this vast and limitless madrasa.

From the perspective of Ann Tso's (2020) intertwining theoretical model of place and rich narratives, Sofia powerfully illustrates marginal women's empowerment through a psycho-

graphic engagement with the Islamic place of faith, challenging dominant media narratives that frame the said Muslim communal institutions as "ugly and unwelcoming." Banee's sensory experiences, particularly the "pleasant, sweetish, heavy citrus smell" at dawn, create an intimate, embodied relationship with the environment that fosters spiritual alertness and personal agency. Her deliberate ritual of waking up early to inhabit the transitional space "between darkness and sunrise" demonstrates how women reclaim and redefine Islamic faith institutional courtyards as sites of autonomous spiritual practice. The vast, walled-yet-open architecture facilitates both individual contemplation ("at peace with myself") and collective connection, subverting in one way, patriarchal constraints through a lived experience of "purposeful living", that streamlines "a synchronic universe wherein present and past aligned to ensure historical continuity" (Tso, 2020, p.9). Therefore, Sofia's place-based, narrative rich writing transforms the Islamic learning center from an object of external critique into a subjectively meaningful landscape where marginalized women like her actively construct their own spatial and spiritual empowerment.

6. Conclusion

This article examines place-based, narrative rich engagements focusing on countryside Islamic space's spatiality and visual representations by taking invisibilized women's narratives as examples. Through analysis of these minoritized women personal narratives, a distinctive form of spatial attachment that fundamentally reconfigures perceptions of Islamic places can be accentuated. Our analytical discussions reveal that despite socioeconomic constraints, these marginalized women exercise significant agency in articulating how their rural Islamic educational institution differs from mainstream reporting. That is, unlike these news articles that situate Malaysian Muslim learning spaces as chaotic, unaccommodat-

ing, and unsafe, the writings by displaced women show women's discursivities of empowerment that draw strength not from volatility, but from the communal harmony and collective women's experiences. As such, the underrepresented women have somewhat gained more authority to shape their own quotidian trajectory, creating "intellectual knowledge of production" (Marengo, 2018, p. 15-16) that dismantles the essentializing, monologic perception about madrasa's unsafe, violent, and dilapidated surroundings. The disempowered women who recount their experiences with the visuality of the said Islamic learning hub position themselves as discerning and authoritative observers of the said place they inhabit. Their personal writings stand in contrast to official narratives about the non-city-centric, Muslim-based faith institution, offering an exaltation of their voices as the often-excluded women construct alternative knowledge about what the said center mean to them. These narratives by the said female inhabitants at the Islamic place of worship serve as a powerful counterpoint, using the women-at-the-margins' experiences as examples of emotional and intellectual transformative responses to landscapes, places, and visuality. Through their words, meanings, and experiences, the women situate themselves within the geographical contexts, valuing instead the physical attributes of the Islamic worshipping and learning place and its surroundings, paying careful and keen eyes to the architecture, design, and landscape's dual role as both replenishing sources of a home and workplace. Through its place-based and emotional and mind tracings, the article theorizes what may be called a 'madrasa psychogeography model by at-the-margin women,' a spatial model rooted in Islamic communal place that cultivates unity, adaptability, and an expansive vision of communal life. Within these sacred spaces, women reforge resilience not through individual struggles, but through the collective stability of their interconnected lives, rediscovering strength and female stratagems as expressed in the aforementioned sections of this article.

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