



Re-viewing the *Entrapment* controversy: Megaprojection, (mis)representation and postcolonial performance

Tim Bunnell

Department of Geography, 1 Arts Link, National University of Singapore, 117570 Singapore, (Tel: 6874-3862; Fax: 6777-3091; E-mail: geotgb@nus.edu.sg)

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Abstract

Becoming the tallest building in the world in the mid-1990s, the Petronas Towers was the centre piece of an image of national progress and development that Malaysian authorities sought to project internationally. The release of Fox Movies' *Entrapment* in Malaysia in May 1999 provoked political outrage and popular disappointment at the way in which the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur had been spliced alongside riverside 'slums' filmed in the town of Malacca some 150 km away. This paper provides a critical reading of the spliced scene in the movie. At one level, the angry response of the Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, to the scene diagnoses a geopolitics of asymmetrical representational power. However, I show how Mahathir's criticism of *Entrapment* in Malaysia was as much a defence of domestic political legitimacy (and national economic investibility) as it was 'opposition' or 'resistance' to hegemonic 'Western' (mis)representation. In addition, while the material and symbolic work of reimagining Kuala Lumpur had sought to negate (neo)orientalist imaginings of 'Asian' cities, the controversial scene rendered visible environmental 'underdevelopment' that has no place in a modern (vision of) Malaysia. *Entrapment* thus performed something in inducing Malaysian cities and citizens to 'clean up' their act, to practice 'fully developed' ways of seeing, being and being seen.

Introduction

In the 1990s, research on city boosterism was extended from North America and Europe to rapidly-growing economies of East and Southeast Asia. One key distinction which was largely overlooked in the export of yet another set of Anglo-American concepts concerned the kinds of city images and imaginings that motivated reimagining. Rather than the post-industrial or de-industrializing urban 'decline' associated with cities in 'the west', city authorities in Southeast Asia sought to overwrite imaginings of 'third world' underdevelopment. What the reimagining of diverse urban worlds *did* share was strategies that involved both material and symbolic transformation: the (re)construction of 'real' spaces as well as place marketing through various media. The intertwining of these two processes was (and remains) crucial. It was gleaming new commercial architecture that provided suitably 'developed' city images for global consumption. In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the world's tallest building, the Petronas Twin Towers, thus performed landscapes of development. 'Modern', 'world class' Kuala Lumpur travelled through its landmark towers in the form of postcards, television screenings, building height charts and photographs. In the late nineties the Petronas Towers was also projected cinematically, getting its big break in Fox Movies' *Entrapment*.

In April 1999, *Entrapment*'s director, John Amiel, announced that Kuala Lumpur's twin towers would form the backdrop for the climax of this big-budget Hollywood movie starring Sean Connery and Catherine Zeta-Jones. A Malaysian newspaper announced that the Petronas Towers was set to become a 'new cinematic landmark' (*Sunday Mail*, 1999, p. 3). Just as the architectural mega-structure stood for the city (and nation) in the film, so film was set to become an agent in the construction and dissemination of new views of/on Kuala Lumpur for mass cinema audiences worldwide: film as *site* as well as sight seeing (Bruno, 1997). While film has long been acknowledged as an important means of place promotion (see Gold and Ward, 1994) here the cinematic landscaping of monumental architecture promised to provide an urban and national imaginative boost.

The power of film, as Jeff Hopkins has noted, arises from the '*semblance of actuality attributable to the film image and the obscurity of its very production*' (Hopkins, 1994, p. 49). To a greater degree than many other ways of '-scaping' the world, the cinematic landscape is able to convince site see-ers that always partial and ideologically-charged views authentically reproduce the way places 'really' are. This is a double-edged sword for city boosters, as the case of *Entrapment* demonstrates: while pre-release media reports in Malaysia looked forward to a cinematic Kuala Lumpur in the image of the ultra-modern twin towers, there was political outcry following the release of the film at the way

the building had been spliced alongside riverside 'slums' shot outside the national capital. The objection of political authorities such as the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, was in part due to a perception that cinematic audiences – not only internationally, but perhaps also in Malaysia – would be convinced that the spliced scene was Kuala Lumpur. Highly image-conscious authorities who had (re)constructed the national capital in the image of the Petronas Towers were all-too-aware of the 'real' effects of (mis)representation for global audiences. While there is a long tradition of work in geography on the reception or consumption of film images (see, for example, Zonn, 1984), my concern in this paper is rather with providing a critical reading of the contested spliced scene in *Entrapment*.

I seek to show how this single image event is bound up with a (geo)politics of postcolonial development. The furore created by the scene diagnoses not only Malaysian authorities' perception of the significance of a cinematically landscaped 'Kuala Lumpur', but also the cultural, economic and geopolitical relations underlying such (mis)representation. Yet, without denying geopolitical asymmetries in representational power – or Hollywood filmic productions' entanglement in such relations (see also Crampton and Power, 2002) – there is a danger of reducing this to a 'west versus the rest' dichotomy. Mahathir's high-profile criticism of *Entrapment* itself belies an orientalist complex in which 'the east' is passively reconstructed in/through the imaginings of an all-powerful 'west' (see Said, 1978). In addition, we must be wary of valorizing such a proactive symbolic response as 'resistance' to (western) neo-colonial domination, thereby obscuring relations of power at other scales. It is important to consider the kinds of politics and 'development' that putatively counter-hegemonic performances serve to legitimize: there is nothing inherently progressive about forms of national (or urban) development that follow formal colonization or which purport to contest neo-colonization. As recent work in geography has highlighted, the *postcolonial* is often marked by a perpetuation or even exacerbation of practices and violences associated with that period supposedly left behind (Sidaway, 2000; Yeoh, 2001). In this paper, I show how ostensibly counter-hegemonic views on *Entrapment* served to legitimize a political regime and compel developmental practices that have important continuities with colonial moral geographies. The postcolonial meanings and political effects of the infamous film scene extend beyond an orientalist imaginative entrapment of the Asian/non-western city.

The remainder of this paper consists of a three-part analysis. First, I detail the rise of Kuala Lumpur through its Petronas Twin Towers. The world's tallest building formed part of a larger 'city within a city' project designed to present a 'fully developed' image of Malaysia as well as to provide 'world class' commercial space. As a backdrop to the climactic scenes in *Entrapment*, the Petronas Towers allowed investible city and national landscapes to be 'megaprojected' to mass cinematic audiences worldwide. The second part of the paper provides a critical evaluation of political contest over the spliced scene in the movie. While Amiel's

'cinematic trickery' reelized Kuala Lumpur to confirm neo-orientalist imaginings of the 'Asian city', Mahathir cast the spliced city landscape as evidence of a broader 'western' misrepresentation of Malaysia. In the context of political and economic 'crisis', Mahathir's views on the film, I argue, re-scaled a civilizational geopolitics of cinematic 'KL' to a national contest for political legitimacy. The third and final part of the paper considers how the postcolonial *effects* of *Entrapment* extend beyond defence of Mahathirist developmentalism. Undesirable elements of filmic 'Kuala Lumpur' rendered visible environmental residues of 'underdevelopment' that have no place in a modern (vision of) Malaysia. *Entrapment* thus made known 'world class' ways of seeing, being and being seen such that Malaysian cities and citizens might clean up their act.

Megaprojection

At least since the early 1990s, the Malaysian national capital has undergone what might be understood as a global re-orientation (see also Bunnell *et al.*, 2002). Regional and international transport links have been comprehensively upgraded and extended through large-scale projects such as the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) at Sepang; and the urban region has undergone a 'wiring' to global networks through massive investment in information and communications infrastructure particularly in the so-called Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), which extends southwards from the federal territory of Kuala Lumpur (Bunnell, 2004).

In addition to this infra- and infostructure, however – and as I have considered elsewhere (Bunnell, 1999, 2002a) – the global re-positioning of Kuala Lumpur has entailed considerable imaginative, discursive and symbolic investment. Many Nation-states, of course, now undertake strategies of 'visualisation' for global audiences (Ó Tuathail, 1997, p. 303). In the Asia-Pacific region in the 1990s, such visualisation frequently took the form of urban mega-projects (Olds, 1995) with a particular penchant for high-rise towers. As Anthony D. King explained at that time: '*... the massive high rise tower is now being used by some Asian countries as a magic wand, stuck metaphorically into the terrestrial globe, to transform what used to be known (in the increasingly obsolescent categories of the 1950s), as the Third World into the First World*' (King, 1996, p. 105).

And this focus on producing a key urban-national landmark *building* was far from misplaced, given dominant forms of visual imaging:

It focuses the lens of the journalist's camera, the eye of the camcorder, the direction of the mobile TV. It is always the image of the building – rarely the diffuse and ungraspable 'city', and even less, the 'imagined community' of the nation – which is used to fix our gaze on the limited space of the rectangular screen. In what is now a totally institutionalized mimetic televisual convention, it is the White House, the Houses of Parliament, the Duma or Eiffel Tower which – subliminally elided into the capital city – is used to mediate the meaning of the Nation to the gazes of the World (King, 1996, p. 102)



Figure 1. The Petronas Towers and 'world class' Kuala Lumpur. (Author's photograph, April 2003)

The specific vogue for spectacular skyscraping landmarks led King to refer to a process of 'Manhattan transfer'. Nowhere, perhaps, was this term more apt than in Kuala Lumpur, where the twin Petronas Towers (see Figure 1) rose to become the tallest building(s) in the world in 1996.¹ The towers in fact form part of a larger real estate project known as Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC). At its unveiling in 1991, Mahathir considered that KLCC – in addition to providing 'world class' commercial space – would be a 'cultural landmark' for Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia, putting the city and the nation on 'world maps' (Bunnell, 1999; Morsidi and Suriati, 1999). The Petronas Towers, in particular, was made to travel, to be mapped, to be seen at a distance; it bore a civic responsibility of standing for and mediating the (development of) the nation.

This process may be considered as a would-be post-colonial de-orientalisation as much as part of a broader global reorientation. The project of reimagining Kuala Lumpur was one of seeking to rework 'western'² urban imaginings: the teeming, unruly third world metropolis in which fabulous and decadent wealth stands alongside slums and shanty towns.³ KLCC, in other words, was intended as a specifically modern(izing) intervention into global/western imaginative geographies; it was very much in keeping with what Ó Tuathail has termed 'power projectionism' – the production of 'hyperreal visions of order, progress and development' (Ó Tuathail, 1997, p. 313). The Petronas Towers projected a postcolonial nation-state explicitly committed to modernizing discourses (Kahn, 1998; Goh, 2002) – to becoming 'fully developed' by the year 2020 (as part of Mahathir's so-called 'Vision 2020'). In the context of 'miraculous' Asian economic performance in the 1990s, such architectural megaprojection marked Malaysia cartographically as part of a 'rising East' challenging western monopoly on the leading edge of modernity.⁴

The socio-spatial transformation that elevated this new region to a world stage meant the 'development' of those places (and people) that did not fit in with authoritative conceptions of a 'world class' city. Kuala Lumpur City Hall stepped up attempts to solve the 'squatter problem', which was clearly aesthetic and moral as much as infrastructural

(Bunnell, 2002b). One of the city's mega-projects in the 1990s, the stupendous Kuala Lumpur Linear City (KLLC) (which was to be the longest building in the world⁵), was marketed in terms of a 'clean up' of the Klang river and its associated squatter communities. Systems of evaluation underpinning the material and symbolic work of reimagining Kuala Lumpur showed significant continuities with colonial fears of dirt, disorder and underdevelopment.

Alongside boosterist strategies of urban(e) projectionism, Malaysian political authorities turned their developmental attention to information technology (IT) culminating in the launch of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) in 1996. In addition to the new electronic federal government administrative centre, Putrajaya, plans for MSC included a new 'intelligent city', Cyberjaya, which was (and is) intended to attract 'world class' IT and multimedia companies in the hope of setting conditions to eventually nurture Malaysian ones (Bunnell, 2004). From 1998, the national IT push came to emphasise 'content-creating sectors' such as film, broadcasting, post-production and animation. That year saw the formation of a 'creative multimedia cluster' as part of MSC to promote Malaysia as 'the premiere destination in Asia for movie shoots' (Manecksha, 1998). The first U.S. production to be awarded 'MSC-status' in September 1998 was *Entrapment*.⁶ MSC status gave the makers of *Entrapment* a host of privileges including fast-track approval of visas for cast and crew, tax exemptions for crew and artists, waiving of censorship regulations and even the provision of police and a SWAT ('Special Weapons And Tactics') team for use in the filming (Baharudin, 1998). There were two principal locations for filming: the town of Malacca and the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur. In pre-release press reports in Malaysia, the film's British director, Jon Amiel, enthused how, 'the Towers provided an impressive backdrop for our climactic scenes' (*Sunday Mail*, 1999, p. 3).

Entrapment thus promised a happy coincidence of two thrusts of Malaysia's global aspirations. First, the film would allow an international projection of the national capital's premier urban landmark. The ceremonies and events in which the Petronas Towers had starred up until that point had largely been confined to domestic media audiences. Posters for the *akan datang* ('forthcoming') attraction in Kuala Lumpur and around the world displayed a glittering cast: a cat-suited Catherine Zeta-Jones alongside Mahathir's celebrated skyprickers, with Sean Connery looking on. Second, it was a partly 'local' multimedia production that would facilitate this international cinematic imagining. *Entrapment* signalled Malaysian participation in the very transnational cultural-economic networks that MSC was intended to plug into. The press in Malaysia heightened expectation about the opening of the US\$80 million (RM 304 million) thriller on 29 April, 1999 – a day ahead of its release in the US (*New Straits Times*, 1999a).

The (geo)politics of cinematic 'Kuala Lumpur'

The makers of *Entrapment* had not followed Mahathir's fully developed script for his city and nation. At one level,



Figure 2. Riverside 'slums' in Malacca. (Author's photograph, March 2001)

cinema-going Kuala Lumpur city authorities did have much to be pleased about. In the movie, the Malaysian capital is a key node in an interconnected global financial network including New York and London, while the Petronas Towers is (in the Director's words) the 'architectural star of the show' (in Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment 2000, np). Mac (Connery) and Gin (Zeta-Jones) hang on precariously from the skybridge which connects the twin stainless steel-clad towers some 230 m above Kuala Lumpur. *Entrapment* is thus a high-profile visualization of the Malaysian national capital as a 'cinematic place' (Hopkins, 1994). Through internationally-distributed cinematic sites/sights, 'Kuala Lumpur' had surely entered a global geo-imaginary. Yet in Malaysia, at least, it was the spliced scene that stole the headlines following prime ministerial criticism. Mahathir was reportedly 'horrified' to discover that the twin towers were shown rising from 'slums' filmed in Malacca (Nadzri, 1999) (see Figure 2).⁷ The Information Minister in Mahathir's government also complained about *Entrapment's* misrepresentation of the building: 'The whole world will come to believe that the scenery they saw in the movie... is real and that there are slums around it, with pollution and poverty' (cited in Ainon, 1999, p. 9).

Kuala Lumpur here remained imaginatively entrapped within a 'third world' that had motivated Mahathirist post-colonial development. 'Slums', 'pollution', 'poverty' – all those signs of underdevelopment that a decade of urban investment had sought to erase or, at least, render out of sight – had been collapsed into a single cinematic frame alongside Kuala Lumpur's world class architectural centrepiece. Negative representations of cities in film, of course, have long included vast contrasts between rich and poor (Gold, 1985). Yet Amiel's 'Kuala Lumpur' was perhaps also shaped through a reworked imaginative geography.⁸ Layers of images added to the 'Asian city' archive during a decade of 'miraculous' technological and economic development in the region sedimented to (re)form Kuala Lumpur as a juxtaposition of 'squalid shanties' and futuristic techno-Orientalist landscapes (see Morley and Robins, 1992). In introducing the spliced scene, Amiel notes: 'I think we offended a number of people in Malaysia by doing it, but it was the best introduction we had to this extraordinary city, in which shanty

towns like this are superimposed with the extraordinary futuristic landscapes of the building that we're about to see... ' (in Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2000, np). A specific site and city were thus neo-orientalized, projected 'not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be' (Said, 1978, p. 66).

Entrapment reeled the very city landscapes that political authorities had sought to reimagine. Part of the frustration for city boosters, of course, was that a 'world' of cinematic site-seers would take the spliced scene as 'real'. While the power of narrative spaces produced through 'multiple cuts and negations' to stand in for viewing subjects' own worlds is well documented (Silverman, 1983, p. 205), the likelihood of successful suturing was heightened by the semblance of *Entrapment* Kuala Lumpur to what an 'Asian city' – in the view of international audiences – should look like. Malaysian political authorities knew that *Entrapment* was 'only a movie', but they doubted far flung audiences' ability to see through what Amiel himself acknowledged as 'a piece of cinematic trickery' (in Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2000, np). It is significant, however, that there was no objection to trickery involved in narrating the space of 'Kuala Lumpur' elsewhere in the film. As Amiel discloses in his 'Director's commentary', in one sequence, London's Lloyds Building is shown 'standing in' for Kuala Lumpur and, in another, some of the climactic scenes 'on' the landmark Petronas Towers were shot using 'the tallest architectural model ever built for a movie!' 'The biggest problem', according to Amiel, 'was making the real building look real': 'it has a sort of almost 'unreal' look to it which made it curiously difficult to shoot really' (ibid.). While the Malaysian authorities were satisfied with the 'reality' of filmic landscapes created using shots from London, models in Pinewood Studios and digital effects, as Amiel acknowledges, it was the scenes spliced from neighbouring Malacca that 'caused a furore in Kuala Lumpur' (ibid.). Political objections, then, related less to inauthenticity per se than to *Entrapment's* failure to conform to city authorities' own highly selective (re)imaging of 'Kuala Lumpur'.

Mahathir's take on *Entrapment* drew upon a well rehearsed geopolitical script. As early as the 1980s, the Malaysian Prime Minister had elaborated the threat to the 'East' posed by 'Western' control of 'world mass media': 'Western reporters can disseminate their reports throughout the world and shape the world's thinking and attitude regarding a particular incident or nation' (Mahathir, 1986, p. 51). More than this, 'From their reports one would think there was nothing good in the East. The East is undemocratic, unjust, cruel, chaotic in administration, full of corruption, dishonest, crooked, devoid of know-how, incapable of succeeding in national development, and possessed of a myriad other evils' (ibid.).

The Mahathir era had thus long navigated a geopolitically fraught path between strident critique of western media 'imperialism', on the one hand, and attempts to foster an image of successful national development on the other. If a decade of sustained, rapid economic growth – and media recognition of a newly-dynamic 'Asia' – obscured these

tensions, economic crisis beginning in July 1997 brought them back into sharp relief. Having blamed Malaysia's economic predicament on unscrupulous foreign currency traders, Mahathir's responses rapidly amounted to a crisis of representation. During September and October 1997, in particular, the Malaysian stock market and currency value appeared to fall with every systemic criticism or regulatory call made by Mahathir through the international media (Kurus, 1998). In a rapidly-reconfigured imaginative geography of the financial world, Mahathir became demonized as the 'bad boy' (Jomo, 2001, p. 14) of a sick region. It was in this context that he imaginatively connected foreign investor wariness of Malaysia to 'inaccurate' cinematic as well as media representation: *'The distorted views of the twin towers will certainly make movie audiences in rich countries conclude that Malaysia is a one of those developing countries which wasted public money, perhaps even foreign aid, on useless grandiose monuments'* (cited in Singh, 1999, p. 2). According to Mahathir, then, *Entrapment* was symptomatic of western misrepresentation of Malaysia as part of an undifferentiated post-crisis East, characterised by cronyism, corruption and unproductive loans.

Without denying that Malaysia was a 'geographical hostage' to a crisis-ridden 'Asia' constructed through international media, or that *Entrapment* was somehow unaffected by such imaginings⁹, we should not valorize Mahathir's criticism as 'resistance' to some monolithic western financial-media complex. Apart from the fact that there had been many years during which Malaysian elites had happily invested in and capitalized upon (then) healthy regional associations, not to mention the role of endogenous political economic factors in the subsequent post-miracle meltdown (see Gomez and Jomo, 1999), there was an important domestic politics to the *Entrapment* controversy. Differences of opinion between Mahathir and his deputy as to how the financial situation should be managed ultimately led to Anwar Ibrahim's ousting from government. His dismissal, arrest and prosecution for corruption and sexual misconduct fomented a new alignment of social and political opposition to the ruling coalition and to Mahathir in particular (see Sabri, 2000). Events which began as *Reformasi* in protest to the treatment of Anwar grew into a new electoral opposition coalition in 1999. As Finance Minister, Anwar had shelved or postponed a number of mega-projects, including transport infrastructure for MSC. Mahathir's reluctance to effect such large-scale cut backs was cast as imprudent attachment to 'pet' schemes (Sardar, 1998) and the conception of existing mega-developments as symbols of a political regime riddled with cronyism and corruption (*FreeMalaysia.com*, 1999) was eventually taken up by the international press (Ranawana, 1999). Putrajaya, in particular, became the metasympol of a state capitalism synonymous with lavish monumentality and lack of transparency (Maznah, 2000). Petronas, the national oil company, was involved in controversial acquisitions¹⁰ and continued to bankroll Putrajaya with its 'palatial' Prime Minister's residence. Precisely what Petronas' towers stood for, then, was perhaps more contested than ever before. As anti-government protests proliferated

in the national capital, the world's tallest building was reportedly encircled by *'hundreds of Malaysian police armed with automatic rifles'* (*CNN.com*, 1998). After the media-friendly Anwar emerged from prison to face trial with a black eye, Mahathir's own international image sank to a new low.

Political critique of *Entrapment*, then, was a defence of Mahathir's political and economic legitimacy. We might understand this defence in three ways. The first concerns the spliced scene as 'evidence' of international media distortion. By highlighting *Entrapment's* misrepresentation of Kuala Lumpur through the incorporation of shots of Malacca, Mahathir exposed Malaysian audiences to the inaccuracies of western representation. If filmic Kuala Lumpur was a fabrication, what did this imply about negative media reports on Malaysia's economy, politics and personalities? A second line of defence leads on from this and concerns how economic 'reality' in Malaysia had supposedly been obscured by a conspiracy of misrepresentation. Just as *Entrapment* distorted views of Kuala Lumpur, the western media, according to Mahathir, focused on urban protests associated with the Anwar affair giving Malaysia an *'unstable and dangerous'* image to potential investors (cited in Singh, 1999, p. 2). The 'crisis' of a fundamentally strong economy, in other words, was re-viewed as an effect of hegemonic geopolitical (mis)representation. Thus – and this is the third way in which we might understand the *Entrapment* furore as a defence of Mahathirism – the Petronas Towers stood for the 'truth' of national development under Mahathir. Whereas scenes of underdevelopment had to be imported into a cinematic capital, evidence of progress was right there in the material landscape of Kuala Lumpur. Audiences at the national scale were assured that KLCC was really not like the colonially-inflected scenes of underdevelopment in *Entrapment*, but *'located in the middle of a modern city'* and *'surrounded by 20 ha of gardens'* (ibid.). It is to the post-colonial landscaping effects of *Entrapment* which I now turn.

Postcolonial landscaping

Clearly not everyone in Malaysia uncritically adopted Mahathir's way of seeing (through) *Entrapment* as symptomatic of western misrepresentation. Yet I suggest that popular and political evaluations of the movie enrolled the infamous spliced scene into existing postcolonial national 'development' goals. Whether this cinematic landscape was 'real' or not, it really brought into view those kinds of environments which were deemed unsuitable for an image of world class investibility. A single cinematic image event, then, served to remind citizens of their national responsibility to realise themselves and their environments in visibly appropriate ways. If not all Malaysia was (yet) like the Petronas Towers, the building stood out as an exemplary landmark, pointing the 'way forward' to national-scale fully developed status by (Vision) 2020.¹¹ But while this would necessitate turning around western (mis)conceptions of what Asian underdevelopment was like, systems of evaluation underlying

processes of cleaning up Malaysia's act also showed significant continuities with colonial conceptions of environmental degeneration *Entrapment*, thus compelled and effected a postcolonial landscaping of Malaysia(ns).

The initial effect of the cinematic landscaping of Kuala Lumpur in *Entrapment* among Malaysians was anticipation and excitement at seeing 'their' places on the big screen. Hollywood movies in themselves, of course, are hardly new to Malaysian audiences, particularly the English-speaking, urban-based middle classes.¹² Indeed, it is in part the popularity of these imported movies that has been cited as an explanation for the supposedly impoverished state of 'indigenous' film-making (Amir, 2002).¹³ Nonetheless, it is rare for Malaysia(ns) to be seen in 'global' productions. As one writer in the *New Straits Times* reflected following the release of *Entrapment*: 'When the trailer first hit local cinemas a few months ago, you couldn't help but feel a frisson of excitement when the Petronas Towers loomed on the big screen. It was a 'Hey! I know that place!' response that washed over you. . . ' (Shareem, 1999, p. 3).

Geographical recognition of and identification with the 'Malaysian' movie scenes thus formed an important part of the motivation for and experience of watching *Entrapment*. Yet these local audiences also viewed with a critical eye for geographical inaccuracy:

'It's only the last third of the movie that's set in KL, and that opens with a scene of Connery and Zeta-Jones sailing down a squalid river with the Twin Towers in the background. That's actually the Malacca River, and there's a brief burst of indignation at the way the filmmakers have cut and pasted our landscape together like some theatrical puzzle. Other scenes are set in the older parts of the city, filled with crumbling colonial shophouses, squawking traders and large crowds of people angrily gesturing at each other to get out of the way. You can't help but feel miffed that they've made KL look like a giant wet market (circa. 1969 rather than 1999), but then I guess our local colour was what had attracted the filmmakers in the first place.' (ibid.)

'KL' may have been cut and pasted to satisfy the expectations of western audiences, but Malaysian viewers – unlike the 'others' in Said's (1978) Orientalism dichotomy – are active consumers and critics of the ways in which their places are (re)presented.¹⁴

In a context where progress had been constructed in the form of a high-rising cityscape, however, the 'local colour' of KL did not translate into positive self-image. One 'proud Malaysian' reported that he had made a point of seeing the movie while on holiday in the U.S. In a letter to the *New Straits Times*, Edward Fernandez wrote: 'the film was good, but the photography of Malaysia was full of lies. I, for one, am very proud of the Twin Towers and I know that the surrounding areas are very modern and clean' (Fernandez, 1999, p. 11). Fernandez articulated what boosterist authorities feared: audiences in the U.S. and elsewhere, without first-hand geographical experience, would not be able to distinguish a cut and pasted reel landscape from the 'real' one: 'The ignorant audience who have not travelled to the

East all went away with a terrible picture of Malaysia'. Importantly, however, this national environmental distortion was, according to Fernandez, experienced as personal embarrassment: 'I was literally cringing in my seat when the film showed these scenes'. In a nation-state where 'modern' and 'clean' city landscapes have been inherited as a barometer for the progress of Malaysia(ns), scenes of national environmental underdevelopment came to be experienced as individual as well as collective shame.¹⁵ The *Entrapment* scene thus revealed 'real' and symbolic postcolonial anxieties about being seen to be less-than-modern.

Public embarrassment diagnoses those environmental features and landscape characteristics in opposition to which national 'development' has been defined: 'environmental otherness' (Arnold, 1996). As alluded to above, vast financial and political investment has gone into 'cleaning up' the national capital in particular. As Mahathir himself acknowledged, however, spaces of 'underdevelopment' have not been entirely eradicated, even in KL: 'We don't deny that there are squatters in Kuala Lumpur, but they are not near the Petronas Towers' (cited in Nadzri, 1999, p. 2). The *kampung setinggan* ('squatter settlement') became the key site/sight of anti-urbanity in the increasingly image-conscious 1990s (Bunnell, 2002b). Squatter eviction and relocation in the 1990s focused on removal from the globally-visible and nationally-exemplary city centre and the proliferation of low-cost high-rise blocks on the periphery of the federal territory (Bunnell *et al.*, 2002). Yet even adjacent to Kuala Lumpur City Centre, there are other spaces out of keeping with the authorities' desired city vision. Kampung Baru on the western side of KLCC is a Malay Reservation village within what is now central Kuala Lumpur; and, in Parliamentary debate on the Kampung Baru 'problem', the settlement was likened to the *kampung setinggan* depicted in *Entrapment* (Parlimen Malaysia, 2001). Modern Malaysia's environmental 'others', in other words, extended beyond the squatter *kampung*; they also extended beyond the national capital and its city centre. In contrast to his Prime Minister, the Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister, Datuk Seri Sabbaruddin Chik reportedly said that 'there should not be an outcry against [Entrapment] since there were many areas in the country that were still in a deplorable state' (cited in *New Straits Times*, 1999c, p. 10): 'It's nice that there are people who want to make movies in Malaysia because it will publicise the country to the world. But film makers cannot be showing only the good side of the country. If an area filmed is dirty and full of rubbish, it is our duty to actually clean it up.'

Malaysian viewers of *Entrapment* were thus induced to 'use the experience to improve living conditions' (ibid.).

It is in this way that the spliced cinematic landscape may be said to have performed something in the conduct of would-be developed Malaysians. 'Clean up' involved attending not merely to the look of existing places or environments, but also to the ways of seeing, the constitutive practices of environmental otherness. Another *New Straits Times* letter writer, having watched a movie at KLCC, was 'amazed' at parents in the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) train

who allowed their five year old daughter to ‘wee-wee’ in the carriage:

‘If I were a tourist, checking out Malaysia’s new mass transit system that boasts the best technology and widest tunnels yet, I would go back and tell friends, relatives, colleagues and just about everyone else not to come to Malaysia because the people live in slums. When they come out, they urinate in trains and even on the street. And then the whole world would come to believe that the scenery they saw in Entrapment is real, KLCC is owned by the World Bank (a foreign organisation) and that there are slums all around it, with pollution and poverty the order of the day’. (Mahendran, 1999, p. 11)

For G. Mahendran of Petaling Jaya, the LRT urinating incident was symptomatic of ‘a general rule that Malaysians do not know how to appreciate and take care of public property’. Such acts of environmental abuse are ‘a crime against all the educated, civilised and sensible Malaysians around’ (ibid., p. 11). Individual (mis)conduct becomes a national crime when Malaysia and Malaysians are seen to be ‘uncivilised’. *Entrapment* was bound up in postcolonial moral geographies of how citizens should conduct themselves in globally appropriate ways. The realization of Vision 2020 is, after all, in part a matter of being seen to be a ‘fully developed’ nation, one ‘respected by the peoples of other nations’ (Mahathir, 1991, np). A ‘Western’ cinematic landscape subjected to popular and political critique for mis-representing the Malaysian present thus played a role in showing the way to a supposedly more respectable future.

Conclusion

I have sought in this paper to elaborate how a single filmic image event may be a productive site/sight for critical geographical reading. The geographical implications of the spliced *Entrapment* scene have been considered in a number of ways, not least the imaginative making of place through an architectural-filmic assemblage. Malaysian ‘Manhattan transfer’ was confirmed following the destruction of New York’s World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001: fears of ‘terrorist’ attack which led to an evacuation of Kuala Lumpur’s own twin towers on 12th September were a perverse testament to successful global megaprojection (BBC News Online, 2001). A year earlier, on the first day that the Petronas Towers skybridge opened to the public, a British tourist reportedly enthused to the Malaysian media that ‘the film *Entrapment* had been good publicity for the Twin Towers among Westerners’ (Loh, 2000, p. 1). One wonders if some of the 800 visitors who visited the towers on that day were a little disappointed at the lack of ‘colour’ of the city below. KLCC is, as Mahathir had protested, surrounded by gardens along with modern office buildings, hotels and a shopping mall. The latest *Draft Structure Plan* for ‘Kuala Lumpur 2020’ reaffirms ‘world class’ criteria for inclusion in the city’s official future (City Hall Kuala Lumpur, 2003). Even Malacca – so often incorporated into guidebooks on ‘Kuala

Lumpur’ as a ‘must see’ on account of its rich historical and cultural landscapes – may not be able to fulfil the ‘other’ side of the oriental(ist) cityscape for much longer: the Malacca state government has applied to federal government sources for funds for a ‘rehabilitation of the river’ (Pacific Rim Council for Urban Development, 2001) in the town. Will future site-seers be content with what Malaysia is ‘truly’ like? Malaysia’s tourist marketing campaign, ‘Malaysia, Truly Asia’ includes a poster featuring a multi-cultural cast performing sanitized official Malaysian diversity in front of a sparkling Petronas Towers.

Self-orientalisation and the cutting and pasting that go into making up city (and national) boosters’ own ideologically-selective landscaping, I have argued, need to be considered in relation to geopolitical asymmetries in representational power. In 2002, Malaysia was remapped as part of a terrorist-infested ‘Islamic world’. Not surprisingly, Dr Mahathir was reportedly ‘deeply upset that the country has been lumped as one of the 15 terrorist-risk countries.’ He protested that despite attempts at ‘positioning the country as a model Muslim nation’, the Bush administration’s decision to view ‘moderate Muslim Malaysia... in the same light as radical Iraq’ thwarted attempts to attract both foreign investors and tourists’ (Pereira, 2002). Once again, Malaysian political authorities felt the economic and social effects of what Mahathir would no doubt consider to be ‘Western’ media distortion. The geopolitics of specifically cinematic power is clearly deserving of critical geographical treatment in its own right (Crampton and Power, 2002). In this paper I have merely cautioned against romanticizing ostensibly counter-hegemonic readings of Hollywood productions. As I have shown, the postcolonial (geo)politics of *Entrapment* extends beyond opposition to its neo-orientalist splicing of Kuala Lumpur.

It is with some final reflection on postcolonial performance that I conclude. If landscapes – architectural, filmic or otherwise – perform something, it is because they are bound up in (re)shaping individual and collective views.¹⁶ Architectural sites and cinematic sights play a role in scaping the world; the tall building, the section of reel, both of these material objects have effects. In this way, the cinematic landscaping of cities and citizens is actively enrolled in the politics and practices of their material remaking. The case of *Entrapment* shows that this politics is not reducible to ‘Western’ (mis)representation and opposition to it. While the reaction of political authorities in Malaysia to the spliced scene may be read as a form of resistance to the ‘arsenal of images’ which (re)produce hegemonic power structures (Said, in Talreja, 1998; Said, 1993), *Entrapment* also heightened (post)colonial fears of ‘underdeveloped’ places and people. New, more ‘developed’, ways of seeing, being and being seen were made known in opposition to such imag(in)ed internal otherness.

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Notes

¹Sometimes the Petronas Towers is considered as two buildings, but I treat it as one throughout this paper.

²I use scare marks here to denote that the ‘west’ is as much an overgeneralized construct as are its constitutive others. ‘Occidentalism’ was particularly apparent during the 1990s when rapid economic growth emboldened an increasingly assertive discourse of ‘Asia’ (see Yao, 2001).

³Classic urban geography texts such as Terry McGee’s *The Southeast Asian City* depict widening ‘rich-poor gaps’ within cities as well as between urban and rural areas (McGee, 1967, p. 27). While these texts and their imagery live on, however, even before the 1990s, it was doubtful whether Malaysia formed part of a ‘Third World’ in the way McGee had envisioned this in the 1960s.

⁴As *Progressive Architecture* (1996, p. 44) put it, ‘a shift of historic proportions is taking place, and architecture is the present symbol of that transformation’.

⁵KLLC became a victim of the economic ‘crisis’ which began in 1997.

⁶This was followed shortly by another Fox picture, *Anna and the King*, starring Jodie Foster.

⁷I was unable to obtain permission to reproduce the scene from the movie. Figure 1 is a photograph of the section of the Malacca River that was spliced alongside the Petronas Towers.

⁸Movies, like photographs, ‘produce and reproduce imaginative geographies of the social group or institution for which they are made’ (Rose 2000, p. 555).

⁹At least one review of the film implies directorial intent: *As Dr Mahathir complained the other day, the director John Amiel has used computer technology to relocate the Petronas Towers in the slums of Malacca, a hundred miles south. Amiel wants to make a point about wasting a ton of money on a useless extravagance – which, of course, is exactly what he’s doing too*’ (Steyn, 1999, p. 42)

¹⁰Including one which assumed RM 1.2 billion of debt of Konsortium Perkapalan, the shipping firm of Mahathir’s eldest son (Saravanamuttu, 2003).

¹¹‘The Way Forward’ was the speech in which Mahathir announced his Vision 2020 in 1991. I borrow the conception of Kuala Lumpur as exemplary centre from Abidin Kusno’s work on Jakarta (Kusno, 2000).

¹²Although, in many cases, they are viewed on smaller screens in (often pirate) VCD format. Three weeks after the release of *Entrapment*, copies of the film were among several thousand pirated VCDs reportedly seized by the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs division of the state government in Penang (*New Straits Times* 1999b; see also Sardar, 2000).

¹³Amir also mentions a range of other explanatory factors, including censorship.

¹⁴Said has also acknowledged possibilities for resistance in his historical work on colonialism in *Culture and Imperialism* (Said, 1993).

¹⁵Wendy Mee (2002, p. 61) has noted a ‘generalised sensitivity in Malaysia towards negative stereotypes of Malaysia as a nation that is technologically backward, still ‘developing’ and (formerly) underdeveloped’. What I am suggesting here is that such sensitivity takes a specifically environmental form, such as through cinematic landscapes of ‘underdevelopment’. Attempts to escape such (neo-)colonial labels have fostered a heightened awareness of distinctions between that which is considered to be ‘modern’ or ‘progressive’, and that which is not, and a postcolonial imperative of developing or else obliterating the latter.

¹⁶When I talk about the ‘performance’ of a building or a movie chart, clearly I do not mean this in the sense that Judith Butler has famously used the term (see Butler, 1990). Rather, following the science studies literature that Trevor Barnes amongst others have brought into Geography, performance here is understood beyond the embodied to include the *effects* of objects, things (Barnes, 2002).

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