

## Postcolonial Civic Identity and Youth (dis)organizing Environment: A Growth into Citizenship Analysis

Mohd Muzhafar Idrus <sup>a</sup>  
[muzhafaridrus@usim.edu.my](mailto:muzhafaridrus@usim.edu.my)  
Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

Ruzy Suliza Hashim  
[ruzy@ukm.edu.my](mailto:ruzy@ukm.edu.my)  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Raihanah Mohd Mydin  
[raihanah@ukm.edu.my](mailto:raihanah@ukm.edu.my)  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

### ABSTRACT

The fluid realities of youth in postcolonial nation-states can reflect changing and challenging landscapes. Their engagements with environment, for example, are not only elaborated in social, political, and economical contexts, but also generated through values, beliefs, and identities. This article adds to contemporary debates by positing that discussions on postcolonial civic identities have to be accompanied by youth narratives and their considerations on nature, time, and digital world(s) by taking Malaysian youths as examples. Specifically, it attempts to theorize youth civic identity within postcolonial context(s) by scrutinizing personal narratives that are symbiotically yoked with discourses on ecology and technology. Through administering personal narratives at a suburban district in West Peninsular Malaysia, this paper opens ‘windows’ into what it means for youths to participate in civic projects. Reading these narratives from the lens of *growth into citizenship*, their wide-ranging experiences in civic affairs can be understood in four ways, namely, recognition, responsibilities, reconciliation, and reciprocity. Two of these emerging themes, recognition and responsibilities, will be discussed in this article. Our attempt at depicting postcolonial civic identity, therefore, is part of a large-scale investigation on civic mindedness that will compel us to reflect on unofficial, continuous accounts of youth reflecting on a sense of belongingness and what the future might bring.

**Keywords:** civic identities; growth into citizenship; postcolonial; youth narratives

### INTRODUCTION

One of the many useful postcolonial trajectories is that it presents insights into counter-narratives within the changing and challenging spaces of socio-cultural complexities as opposed to a single, ‘hegemonized’ elaboration. This article aims at addressing this issue, with the objective of studying how postcolonial civic identity is revealed across Malaysian youth narratives. Two emerging threads of inquiry are interwoven, 1) the ways through which these issues are written, and 2) readings that (inter)connect environment and literary ecocriticism. The central ‘window’ to understanding these aspects, as we argue, lies in an investigation of youth personal narratives that elaborate the dialogic exchanges between youth and their environment, between technology and ecology. These responses to environment, which are often seen in the context of depicting (non)human world(s), are commonly associated with the

---

<sup>a</sup> Main & Corresponding author

notion of citizenship (Peterson, 2019; Pettit, 2016). We wish to draw upon this term, citizenship, by specifically borrowing Holma, Kontinen, and Blanken-Webb's (2018) framework of *growth into citizenship*, to recontextualize and widen its employment to incorporate the observation that nature and technology rarely exist in harmony and that they "can at best form an uneasy alliance" (Sankaran & Nkengasong, 2016, p. 45). For the most part, identities of these youths have provided a growing disjuncture and continuities between their lives and their environment. In other words, to create meaning and a sense of youth-selves, their identities can be explained by looking at the meaning they make of their daily experiences with "civic institutions," amid "cultural practices" that exist side-by-side with modernity in non-Western societies (Rubin, 2007, p. 450). By employing such narrative inquiry, the link between nature and culture and their relations to "global perspectives" can be demonstrated (Roos, 2011, p. 55).

In the following pages, we will present discussions relating to the connection between *growth into citizenship* and youth narratives; of the complex relation between particular reasonings of citizenship-oriented concerns and youth (dis)organizing environment and technology by taking Malaysian youth narratives as examples. These backgrounds will situate the discussions on the emergence of postcolonial civic identity that, in one way or another, provide ongoing, decentralized ways of understanding youth negotiations with civic orientations. Of particular interest are the ways in which youths express civic selves through personal narratives that function to self-represent and self-deconstruct which is a useful tool to promulgate reforms for postcolonial environment. At that point, we will analyze youth narratives using *growth into citizenship* to suggest that these narratives provide youths with the opportunity to weave close, but dynamic relations between ecology and digital cultures. Finally, conclusions will be drawn by taking into consideration implications of postcolonial civic identity. They are pertinent to exploring the relations between postcolonial youth, the environment, and varying contexts of civic identity.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW: *GROWTH INTO CITIZENSHIP*, YOUTH NARRATIVES, AND POSTCOLONIAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS**

We would first like to elaborate on the notion of *growth into citizenship* before discussions on youth narratives and postcolonial civic identity are highlighted. How can *growth into citizenship* define and shape the contour of the study? Inspired by a pragmatic philosopher, John Dewey and his work on theory of social nature of knowledge and action, *growth into citizenship* is primarily motivated by postcolonial contexts of citizenship and civic societies (Holma, Kontinen, and Blanken-Webb, 2018; Holma and Kontinen, 2019). The notion of citizenship draws upon civic affairs within contemporary development practices. *Growth* means "development," so that loosely translated, *growth into citizenship* carries the meaning of "gradual changes in the contexts of everyday experiences of" people in postcolonial nation-states (Holma, Kontinen, and Blanken-Webb, 2018, p. 2). While not necessarily quantifiable, the notion of growth is not definite, but instead gradual and dynamic. As Holma and Kontinen (2019) argue, growth here "is not tied to any predefined ends; on the contrary, ends are always ends-in-view that depend on the context" (p. 17). That is, growth, in this sense, sheds lights on the occasions in which growth transpires further choices, course of actions, and consequences. The nature of growth itself calls for greater analysis; the reasons for selection of civic duties, the relationship between growth and (non)human world(s), and the links between growth and civic affairs all need to be made overt. As postcolonial literature is premised according to varying socio-cultural and geographical standpoints, *growth into citizenship* is a lens that depicts real-life contexts that are related to work, duties, or practices. As Hickey and King (2016) put it, such a theoretical focus encourages a lens that builds upon social justice and

bottom-up citizenship by bolstering citizens' capacities and roles in postcolonial nation-states. In other words, *growth into citizenship* can depict what human beings do in individual and communal civic-oriented activities, including interactions between human beings and environment that occur.

Discussions on *growth into citizenship* as a framework relate to three broad concepts: habits, disruptions, and aesthetic practices. First, habits, seen in this context, are consequences of thoughts, actions, and everyday experiences that "allow human beings to think and act efficiently and productively" (Holma & Kontinen, 2019, p. 16). The ways in which postcolonial subjects negotiate between private and public lives, individually or collaboratively, between rights, values, and obligations, and between rejection and acceptance, can be identified as habits. Second, disruptions are referred hitherto as distractions that motivate human beings to re-think environmental issues. It is these distractions that disorganize "existing habits to which an individual can respond to in many ways" (Holma & Kontinen, 2019, p. 16). These distractions, as one can imagine, form a powerful impulse that may violate or comply to one's current socio-cultural circumstances. Holma, Kontinen & Blanken-Webb (2018), for instance, highlight that disruptions can "allow individual to become aware of how his or her current habits stand in contradiction with present" conditions (p. 10). Disruptions occupy special position in *growth into citizenship* as *growth into citizenship* prompts postcolonial subjects to re-think and re-treat in dealing with issues that may (or may not) fit their expectations. Thirdly, aesthetic practices. These practices are total consequences to the reactions, cementing alliance with individuals and environment. Aesthetic practices take into account "both the individual and the environment" that "undergo change through this dynamic process, as the individual develops new habits that are more suitable to the current situation through which he or she takes creative action in the world" (Holma, Kontinen & Blanken-Webb, 2018, p. 11). The ways in which aesthetic practices precisely describe human beings in postcolonial nation-state resonate with civic "habitus" (Pettit, 2016), reigning supreme as individuals get to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct habits, duties, and actions to foster change and growth both in human and nonhuman world(s). By applying the notions of habits, disruptions, and aesthetic practices to youth narratives, their reactions to nature and space relate to inquiries on "deep roots and where the sense of destiny is about place and being" (Mohamad, 2008, p. 295).

The manners in which youths see their world(s) wrestling with both ecology and digital 'windows,' what they refuse and desire, generate refreshing insights. In the following pages, we attempt to show that they create binaries between living in a technologically inclusive or ecologically active society that are fraught with modernity. They challenge boundaries of self-representation and self-deconstruction as they "diagnose and reveal the future" (Alonso, 1989, p. 14). *Growth into citizenship* is said to be the harbinger to alternatives of "postcolonial legacy" and "authoritarian regimes" (Holma, Kontinen, Blanken-Webb, 2018, p. 14), yet the message of the theoretical framework, across varying medium and contexts, was the cohesive, collective writings that unveil civic-oriented meanings, moods, and motivations across youth narratives. By approaching youth narratives through the notion of *growth into citizenship*, they provide us with brief glimpses into complex environment and digital world(s) that are fraught with uncertainty in the project of becoming civic-minded individuals. But in any theory that is "tied to what people do" (Holma and Kontinen, 2019, p. 15), the notion of 'growth' in *growth into citizenship* is not fixated on specific values and numerical terms; growth is a "long, slow process" of development (Dewey, 2003, p. 29). That is, whenever youths write about their experiences reacting to their environments, they illuminate issues to be visible and enable other consciousness, choices, and consequences to surface. Their representation on how human worlds are linked to environment suggests practices and routines that are held and expected by community members and how these practices can and should be remembered. In other words, youth civic-related articulations about ecology and technological diversity can elaborate issues

that center on the ability to make change in one's environment (Khosravi, Vengadasamy & Raihanah, 2017; Nelsen, 2016).

But to pose the question again, how has youth postcolonial civic identity developed within the spaces of *growth into citizenship*, and how does the interconnectedness between youths and *growth into citizenship* explain the revolving debates on postcolonial nation-states' environments? Our article argues that, as we sieve copious amount of youth personal narratives, these youth writings create an interaction; of exchanges and meanings that mediate their civic understanding determined by nature and technological culture in their materiality across shifting and overlapping fragments of modernity. In this way, youth stories are continually adjusted by the tenets of digital world(s) and environment at both individual and collective levels. These realignments unveil the intertwining chasms of environment, technological enfranchisement, and civic engagement. Youth narratives that focus on civic affairs, therefore, may elaborate the shape, contours, and consequences of Western-imposed globalization (Pelican, 2009). Youth activism (Youniss, Mclellan, & Yates, 1997), cultural and ecological factors surrounding youths' emerging sense as citizens (Ginwright & James, 2002; Hart & Atkins, 2002), youth and their sense of self (Rubin, 2007), and youth and civic structures (Nasir & Kirshner, 2003) are merely a fraction of examples of youth participation and civic duties. One would certainly discover similar accounts of youths and their participation in civic communities, yet, one needs also to be cognizant of the fact that youths in so many nation states around the world are increasingly attached to ecology vis-à-vis digital 'windows.' Therefore, to read youth personal narratives, as Nasir and Saxe (2003) argue, is to depict their sense of selves, their identities as "multifaceted and dynamic" (p.17) that are embodied in civic participation as we will unveil below. Put it differently, to theorize postcolonial civic identity is to solicit the following youth narratives that stage the dialogues between nature/culture, ecology/technology.

Civic engagement in postcolonial contexts can thus be unraveled through youth narratives that articulate questions of identity, encompassing cultural and "civil" tenets (Mohamad, 2008, p. 294). Youth experiences and elaborations on what it means to be a citizen and a "participant" in civic life in postcolonial societies (Rubin, 2007, p. 449) allow youths to relate to their local and global civic spaces (Nasir & Kirshner, 2003; Nelsen, 2016). Civic-related consciousness, through formal (e.g. applying to be a member of fisheries' association online) and informal means (e.g. following Twitter's current events related to recycling with friends and family) can unveil a bottom-up approach to understand youth lives with modernity, whose voices otherwise "occupy subordinate social positions" (Rosaldo, 1999, p. 260). Almost always at the periphery, youth narratives regarding civic-mindedness are integral to postcolonial discussions and narrative inquiry as they in many ways resemble writing about *growth into citizenship*; a kind of writing that harnesses "a powerful idea in itself given the importance of rights-discourse today" (Mohamad, 2008, p. 296). We apply this to the idea of youth narratives, as *growth into citizenship* bears "growth" "that enables further growth and increases the ability to make change in one's environments" (Nelsen, 2016, p. 249). Through concentrating on youth deliberations, their narratives (de)construct postcolonial civic "cultural identity" (Mohamad, 2008, p. 296) and unearth articulations of reflexive, personalized fragments of environment complexities, as the ensuing discussion will show. By focusing on youth narratives that are collected from a postcolonial nation-state, they are pertinent to elaborating the links between space, environment, and existence.

In the following pages, we take up Holma, Kontinen, and Blanken-Webb's (2018) challenge the importance of civic and citizenship duties across decentralized, unofficial accounts of youths reacting to their environment within the landscape of postcoloniality. Their emphases on different values, interests, and perspectives resonate with our analysis on youth narratives depicting their relations with environment. The multiple layers of writings about



environment will be illustrated when we apply *growth into citizenship* while unfolding youth reactions to technology and ecology. As we shall illustrate, this article extends the scope of postcolonial civic identity vis-à-vis Malaysia's youth narratives so that it can contribute to the debate on their impacts on the conditions of human and nonhuman world(s).

## METHODOLOGY

This essay will devote to a collection of youth narratives for the above undertaking, as these texts conjure the notions of “civic ideals” and “civic realities,” (Rubin, 2007, p. 478) making them a valuable resource for youth worldview(s) on civic associations. Youth narratives which are rich in plurality of voices in many ways can draw meanings about their civic participation, unearthing insights into digital world(s) and their environment. Their stories, their cultural identity conundrums afford them “license to speak” (Mohamad, 2008, p. 297) as they focus on geography and its sub-associated conceptions regarding “given human activity” (Aponte, 1992, p. 114). The following project was undertaken to link these issues through distributing personal narratives to youths who wrote describing what civic engagements meant to them. What deliberations did these youths describe regarding various forms that inspire them to be more active in their daily civic affairs? What alternatives to these forms were considered? What part of using these forms caused them to feel dissonance? What could be learned, based on these narratives, regarding a general theory of youth postcolonial civic identity? The narratives collected were a part of a larger project at a large, suburban district in West Peninsular Malaysia. Thirty-eight individuals between the ages of 18 to 20 participated in the study. Thirty-six of them (22 females, 14 males) were included in this analysis (two were not reported; one had responses deviated from the direction of the study and another participant did not compose the reactions). All youth volunteers were recruited through varying ways, electronically and in-person, through notice boards and advertisements (Idrus, Ruzy, & Raihanah, 2018). The first thirty-eight youth volunteers who responded to our e-mails and notice board expressed their willingness to participate. Although at the beginning we were concerned that perhaps the interests of participants had not gone widespread as we had expected, the repeated phone calls and stream of e-mails received motivated us to recruit more in the prospective weeks. Furthermore, even when we received participants for the first phase of our project, phone calls kept pouring in depicting increasing interests from the part of volunteers. Through getting our participants this way, the issues we were attempting to read were directed by Bryman's (1988) proposition that they “should be couched in terms of generalizability of cases to theoretical propositions rather than to populations” (p.90). Once youth volunteers were advised on the direction of our project in e-mails and phone calls, they subsequently provided informed consent. By using Schachter and Ventura's (2008) framework that guided interpretations on life interactions, the direction of narratives was written. Specifically, the framework called for participants to freely compose their life experiences in general while also relating these to their civic affairs. That is, personal narratives required the participants to freely navigate stories about their lives with particular attention paid to their surroundings, and how these reactions to their surroundings were ‘sprinkled’ with stories about civic-related duties. Participants had 90 minutes to write and they were told to start, pause, and finish at their convenience. By framing the procedures this way, youth were able to “discuss the issues in his or her own terms as much as possible, sharing ‘lived experience’” (Hadad and Schachter, 2011, p. 858).

Personal narratives have flourished as a genre in literary scholarship as their textuality depicts the organization of various corpus, particularly the works of fiction (Mäkelä, 2019; Pignagnoli, 2019; Scucchi, 2015). That is, the choice of using personal narratives is deliberate because the focus of this analysis on postcolonial civic identity and their reactions and presence

of (non)human interactions, precisely attend to how personal experiences construct the reader response. The use of netnography is unsuitable because netnography is structured according to certain digital / net ideology that sets up digital media reading position (Kozinets, 2019). Instead, personal narratives which are subsumed under the broad categorization of “autobiographical literary criticisms” can cultivate, reflect, and create positive changes within our lives (Scucchi, 2015, p. 4). The communal use of the term, autobiographical literary criticisms, to cover the textuality of personal narratives, reader response, and textual analysis contributes to the perception that youth writings based on personal narratives, provide refreshing insights grounded in “the power of the personal within literary scholarship and within individual lives” (Scucchi, 2015, p. 6).

In analyzing these narratives, elaboration that identifies youth private information was removed (Idrus et al., 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017, 2019). Giligan’s guided multiple reading was used as we went over the narratives multiple times (Brown et al. 1988), selecting passages from narratives in which youth elaborated engagement with civic affairs. By applying Alexander’s (1988) notions of “asking a question” over the course of reading and analyzing the narratives, three major questions were posed; 1) What advantages and/or disadvantages did they see exist in their civic engagement experience? 2) What did these reactions tell us about their civic identities and their complexities? 3) To what extent do these narratives reflect individual and/or collective responses to civic identity and why? Recurring / other emerging themes are also analyzed, although these were not the primary aims of this project. Seen from the perspectives of *growth into citizenship*, civic conceptualizations arising from these youth narratives “shift attitudes and feelings of citizenship in a more in-depth way than any forms of civic education” (Dorman, 2014, p. 170).

In general, the narratives projected both implicit and explicit perspectives regarding aspects of civic affairs. Viewed from postcolonial referencing, there are many emerging issues related to civic consciousness, technology, and environment, but to reiterate, in this paper, we focus on readings that link environment to youth activities by taking Malaysian youths as examples. Youth narratives, as we shall see, can be described within the following categories of 1) recognition: refers to how technology provides youth the identification to link ecology and civic sphere, 2) responsibility: refers to civic duties or efforts related to minimizing intrusion on environment through the use of technology, 3) reconciliation: refers to when the use of technology is restricted to pave ways for environmental sustainability, 4) reciprocity: refers to when technology empowers women, minorities, or a community’s environment. In other words, one could even compartmentalize these typologies as being cognition-related (recognition and reconciliation) and action-related (responsibility and reciprocity) when viewing the many “heterogenous” identity within postcolonial nation-states (McLeod, 2000, p.120). In these accounts, we have readings of youth exchanges showing their coming face-to-face with Western-imposed modernization. By looking through the narratives this way, it is argued that youth, who are almost always involved in “state-building processes” (Mitchell, 2012, p.267) could persuade, deride, or patronize their own kind, at times singly, and at other times collectively within “complex and varied contexts” for developing civic identity (Rubin, 2007, p. 451). However, this essay draws upon two of the four major components to depict youth postcolonial civic identity, namely, recognition and responsibility. This approach, while conceding to some arguments, will allow for a more focused discussion. Noah, Clarence, Cindy, Yadena, Madeenah, Jeremiah, Lu Chen, Siti, Adlina, Sharifah, Tariq, Kumaran, Naim, Che Leong, Siew Keng, Lucas, Rajandran, Hamad, Alya, Sya, Azwan, Lee, Azy, Yu, and Am are pseudonyms used in the following discussions to protect confidentiality of participants.

## ANALYSES: RECOGNITION OF CIVIC IDENTITY

Youths in our project deliberated the connections between environment, digital world(s), and civic engagement. At some points, disjuncture regarding ecology and human beings' actions is portrayed, at other times, there is a recognition that profess the unity across flora, fauna, and human beings. To revisit, recognition is a term on which we dwell when technology grants youth the opportunity to identify and link ecology to civic affairs. Given the awareness of the participants, we found consenting 'voices' about their civic duties across many youth narratives.

Noah, Clarence, and Cindy consent to such participation in civic engagement:

Civic mindedness is something related to good manners, good attitudes, and behavior. With technology, humans become more empathetic towards nature because they intentionally invent something that do not neglect nature.

Human beings practice civic involvement while showing concerns towards preserving nature. In short, they enhance people's awareness to provide better amenities that encourage civic activities in the long run.

With technology, human beings extend civic engagement by caring for our nature and focusing on eco-friendly products such as hybrid cars, energy resources, and sewers.

Their analyses of the situation highlight the manner in which civic duties are crucial for cohesive alignment between culture and ecology, particularly when that involves technology. For many youths, they choose to actively explain the meanings of civic 'prides,' providing a symbolic dimension that relates to balancing between technology, human beings, and environment. Other participants such as Yadena and Madeenah suggest the same idea. To integrate technology is to make opportunities available for contributing to what it means to be a citizen. Yadena, for instance, writes, "More young people raise awareness about civic projects in the context of giving attention to nature and quality of life, whether on Facebook or blogs. We have got to widen our knowledge and capabilities to do more and to care for them more." Since many virtual field(s) allow participants such as Yadena and Madeenah to express their civic-social relations, the forces of virtual connectivity bolster their engagements. Through these narratives, their engagement with civic duties are seen as reaffirmed and echoed.

To many participants, engaging in civic duties fulfil other functions. Specifically, other participants emphasize on the purpose of technology in privileging social and community projects. While it is common for some participants to engage in civic-related roles, they personally reveal that human beings' activities can impact nature. Jeremiah, Lu Chen, Siti, Adlina, Sharifah, Tariq, and Kumaran mentioned:

Technology can be a medium to spread awareness among the society to love their environment. For instance, through television, campaigns on how to preserve nature can be done. In Malaysia, we need to have our own mindsets.

I watched a video on Instagram about drones. Technology which is used by drone to water all harvested plants is very interesting. This will make humans realize that they have to respect the plants every single day to make sure the plants stay moist, grow healthily, and produce more food to humans.

My friend posted a video on Instagram on how processed foods are made. I can relate to situations when we will no longer have natural plants due to climate change. But as a human being, we cannot have it all; we help when and where we can.

My cousin told me about #cleanwater. I remember this hashtag because water is important in human's daily lives because it is one of the basic needs, especially after I think about my grandmother's life during Japanese occupation. By thinking about this hashtag on Instagram, I can show how we can sanitize water, delivering more quality water to human beings.

By paying attention to nature, we, Malaysians, become more knowledgeable through seeing pictures online, hastagging nature and ecology. By thinking of hashtags, gadgets, and internet, we can dream of new technologies in order to produce or create more quality nature-related products such as strong seeds and better crops. We never know when our natural resources will run out.

Human beings are becoming more civic-minded when it comes to providing care to nature. Compared to the olden days, technology today raises people's awareness to provide better amenities to facilitate civic activities. Youtube can help sustain this interest, I think.

After independence, there are a lot of research done by scientists who are experts in ecological studies. We can see this via Twitter. These work gets across the world easily.

How youths consider technology to advance environmentally related causes can symbolize two things. Firstly, hashtags and video-sharing capacities enhance the kind of control through which youth get to navigate, giving themselves unofficial, decentralized accounts of participating in civic-related avenues. Secondly, activities such as uploading photos and writing updates on social media define them as youth who express interests in nature-centered discussions. These discussions among postcolonial Malaysian youths provide yet another strategy for maintaining society's "stability" (Maznah, 2008, p. 296). Participating in civic projects, therefore, can mean the recognition to represent and explore the strength of technology to help 'nourish' the environment.

But this is not always the case with other participants. Because of human-centered projects, many feel that their environments are threatened, especially now with the advent of videos that can capture such conundrums. Zainab, for instance, highlights her ambivalence, "I saw sometime ago a Facebook video on air pollution. The air pollution index (API) recorded the highest pollution for the past decade. We are living in a very sick environment because human activity interferes with air quality." Others, including Naim and Che Leong, raise their doubts towards changes in environment:

Sometimes using technology can lead to many people not being civic-minded. As a citizen, I know that hills and forests should be preserved so they exist in perfect conditions without any development. I learn that with no exercise of being civic, human beings will become greedy and nobody wants to show bad things in virtual spaces.

Common sense, to me, will dictate that we should recycle the things that are still useful, and turn them into something new. I got it that they want to show recycling on Facebook, but if you throw plastics while capturing that act on video and let the world see, I don't see the point.

By revealing youths' inner thoughts, these narratives seek to suggest that youths witness the virtue of the disjuncture that straddles across technology, civic affairs, and environment. Some of these narratives highlight the tensions between public and private spaces surrounding the question of human activity and civic projects. The recognition of the ways in which technology links civic affairs within the enclaves of nature and ecology can mean two things. First, it foreshadows the disintegration of civic involvement. In demonstrating civic projects in virtual world(s), the friction between physical development projects and demeaning erosion of nature is met with feelings of shame and guilt. Second, they, in one way or another, elaborate the manner in which the exchange of civic engagements is crucial for uncovering human activities (Aponte, 1992), even if digital spaces have an unhealthy preoccupation with such



‘exposé.’ One cannot define youth civic identity in any simple way, and as these different stories have shown, the significance of nature in youth selves is more complicated than the written representation of them. To theorize postcolonial civic identity, thus, depends on many different and complementary youth-related entities, including “knowledge, personal experiences of nature, attitude, and perceived social norms” (Prévot, Clayton, & Mathevet, 2016, p. 12).

Seen from the lens of *growth into citizenship*, technology makes visible some of the many causes close to youth environment, giving them a chance to diagnose and reveal the future (Alonso, 1989). Their sense of deep roots and destiny by raising questions of existence and continuity in lives make visible youths’ originality of “thoughts” (Mohamad, 2008, p.295); they mobilize the resources they obtain from their surroundings and create a feasible, cohesive alliance with flora, fauna, and human beings. Through this lens, they dismiss the fact that technology is a form of abuse; they recognize online ‘institutions’ as mechanisms through which youth regard their awareness as “directly geared toward social accountability” (Holma, Kontinen, & Blanken-Webb, 2018, p. 6), establishing a nucleus of knowledge that go beyond their familiar socio-cultural boundaries (Alonso, 1989). Because many youths in postcolonial societies are peripheralized in public, hegemony-endorsed civic platforms due to, among others, sophisticated vocabulary and rhetoric (Cornwall, 2007), youths in our study, in many ways, ‘reclaim’ “their” voices about environment and “lands” (Geshiere, 2011, p.339). By focusing on youth narratives that may also function as an “exercise of self-criticisms,” (Maznah, 2008, p. 296), their voices on what it means to “recognize the inherent entwinement among objects to be learned and the lived situations in which these objects become meaningful” (Holma, Kontinen, & Blanken-Webb, 2018, p. 8) highlight the centrality of ecology. The lens of *growth into citizenship* used to read the stories of youth confronting modernity vis-à-vis technological breakthroughs, therefore, shows the significance of youth narratives that are fundamental for recognizing “taken-for-granted ways of thinking and practicing change” (Holma, Kontinen, & Blanken-Webb, 2018, p. 10).

## ANALYSES: RESPONSIBILITY AND CIVIC IDENTITY

Another contentious issue emerging in youth narratives on civic engagement is the sense of responsibility, which refers to civic duties related to minimizing intrusion on environment through the use of technology. Unlike ‘recognition,’ the notion of responsibility represents actions and duties that maintain uniformity between human beings and their land-related activities within the complex terrains of technological applications (Geshiere, 2011). Although it is common for youths from other countries to express their attitudes, moods, and meanings on civic affairs, it is through digital world(s) that many participants, for instance, Siew Keng, Lucas, Rajandran, Hamad, Alya, Sya, Azwan, Lee, and Azy raise allegiance with ecology and humans’ activities:

In Facebook marketplace, I think, we have eco-friendly refrigerator, air-cond, and even eco-friendly cars. For example, air-cond controls the emission of CFC into the open air up to only 30% emission compared to non-eco-friendly air-cond. Thus, we can say that human beings protect nature.

Through Grab, Uber, Mycar, we help one another, especially if one is in need of emergency (911). These apps also allow us to save the environment by carpooling.

Civic mindedness is portrayed through people who appreciate the nature. For example, last week I saw an Instagram post containing pictures of unknown kids killing other animals, and she reports such abuse to police using telephone immediately. Telephones actually give one of these advantages, which is the ability to make a report. To me, this reveals how human beings are so

concerned about what happens around them by spreading good deeds online. So, by showing that we use technology to care for other people's actions and activities, we can appreciate the nature more.

Human beings become aware on how to preserve and protect this world from disruption as consequences of industrial activities. This is one of the reasons why I use the hashtag, #cleanspaces.

Some of my newsfeed Facebook pictures illustrate the emphasis on quality of air, clean water, healthy lifestyles, and colorful flowers. My niece even makes a collage and I uploaded them on my Insta- and yes, I got many likes within seconds.

Last two weeks, I watched a video on Youtube on how one manages a sustainable environment by placing plants in an office; plants that release oxygen. To me, this is important as my father's office is always cramped and stuffy. Youtube has taught me to be a healthy and responsible citizen.

Youtube has these reaction videos where they record reactions from people who view smoke released from automobiles. Many of them, including me, felt that our lives are endangered. When I link this to what I see happening in other countries, I remember seeing a specific lane for cars with drivers carpooling with their friends, reducing air pollution. I think we should start this dialogue about keeping our air clean, as smoke released from cars can be harmful. As citizens of this earth, we will breathe quality and fresh air.

I read somewhere on an Instagram post of a research carried out by Malaysia Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI) on paddy seedlings. It contributed a lot in terms of harvesting and soil qualities; Compared to 10 years ago, our paddy field could only harvest twice a year, and now I know how we can sustain our food resources.

Every day, we see people inventing something new to make our lives easier by sharing what they do on Facebook. They do research about the problems to change and find solutions in the name of civic work.

These youth stories that are pregnant with narratives of "ecological" equilibrium (Sankaran, Nkengasong, 2016, p.44) reveal how youths exploit digital formats, as well as how this symbolic interaction with nature formulates bases for civic affairs. Since youths need to express their social dependence through technological institutions, the moods, meanings, and conjecture shown here maintain alignment with flora, fauna, and human beings, and, to a certain extent, legitimize their civic participation. Through such narratives, their 'proactive' approaches towards civic life, different "from adult-devised definitions" (Rubin, 2007, p.453), can be so important, painting a fraction of reading of postcolonial civic identity which is not "purely essentialist" property "of a static self, but rather dynamic, as youth are positioned in relation to varied social practices" (Nasir & Saxe, 2003, p.17). Thus, the presence of snapshots of digital apparatuses such as Instagram and Facebook become more significant because not only are they perceived as (re)producing 'ecological-social' relations, they are also sites to bolster civic community.

But similar engagement does not necessarily translate into other youths' experiences. Many of these participants assert ambivalence while demonstrating duties to minimize environmental intrusions. As we shall see below, a number of participants, namely Yu and Am, deeply regret civic duties being displaced from overall picture of youth engagement. In other words, the interaction of human beings and environment sometimes do not create a cohesive union when access to digital world(s) are involved:

Human beings use their common sense when dealing with nature. But to me, when I watch videos of illegal logging on Youtube, we know that it takes only a few minutes to cut and chop down the trees, but it takes years to grow them back. These videos, among many others, make visible of problems, but I intend to use Facebook to remind users that nature is our friend, not enemy!

The recent move by the government to separate rubbish based on their make is excellent. My mom plays her part by posting pictures of plastic-flooded beaches around the world on Instagram. As a human being, shame on us.

A comparison of the readings here and the ones prior to this section reveals an important disconnection when human beings respond to their environments. According to these participants, although the intention to raise consciousness on environmental protection is noble, they have little affection for displaying environmental conditions that are ruptured by modernity. These disapprovals strongly depict nature/culture binary as unpleasant; to display environmental intrusions is to make visible the feelings of weak moral and emotional capacities. These dissenting youth voices provide an insight into an understanding that civic participation vis-à-vis youth involvement with ecology and human beings activities do not always portray a stable alliance.

The lens of *growth into citizenship* that elaborates the interaction between youths and civic engagement reveals how they relate to physical environment, and how youths develop strategies to cope with nature's deterioration and regeneration. Fraught with postcolonial's 'development,' these youth narratives express youth identity as having the agency to iron out complexities between modernity and "locality" (Sankaran & Nkengasong, 2016, p. 44). As "firstcomers" with early exposure (Hilgers, 2011, p. 36), they rise and take control of atrocities and challenges, designating spaces they could "occupy" and assuring a harmonious "coexistence among people" and "natural forces" (Hilgers, 2011, p. 36). By raising the value of ecology through emphases on lands (Jacob, 2007) they make visible of the ways to resist environmental destruction. Resorting to digital world(s), for example, Facebook, and Instagram, as mechanisms to keep these challenges at bay, these narratives are examples of *growth into citizenship* texts that raise our consciousness of youth lives and their creative actions in the world to valorize nature as points of cultural consonance and dissonance. *Growth into citizenship* as a tool of analysis, once applied to these narratives, functions to highlight "specific habits that are held by community members with regard to citizenship" and to engage "people's everyday lives by working together to find solutions to" environmental problem" (Holma, Kontinen, & Blanken-Webb, 2018, p. 12), revealing their "sense of destiny" about "place and being" amidst modernity structures and practices (Mohamad, 2008, p. 295).

## CONCLUSION

The investigation above has essentially conceptualized various nuts and bolts of postcolonial civic identity that are reflected in the selected youth narratives at a suburban district in West Peninsular Malaysia. They mobilize the dynamic configuration of two of the many ways to characterize what it means to participate in civic engagement, namely through the notions of recognition and responsibility, that emerge while reading their interactions about nature/culture binary. In sum, how youths depict postcolonial civic identity as demonstrated in these personal narratives can unveil how they react to Western-imposed globalization. It expresses a sense of contributing to be a citizen and resembles the localized versions of youth civic engagement in Malaysia.

More broadly, flipping through these pages that approach postcolonial civic identity has explained, albeit not comprehensively, the interconnections of postcolonial youths who (dis)entangle and (re)construct their imagination of the past and present with the environment. Their consenting, dissenting, ambiguous, and ambivalent responses into what it means to embrace postcolonial civic identities reflect their sense of belongingness, as they continue to highlight disjuncture and continuities among human and non-human world(s). These discussions, as McGonegal argues, cannot be dismissed as irrelevant, for denying their

interactions with ecological spaces is akin “to foreclose on the promise of justice altogether” (2004, p. 141). As ‘early’ postcolonial subjects, the readings demonstrated in this article show that a majority of them rise and take control of atrocities and challenges, designating spaces they could occupy and assuring a somewhat (dis)harmonious coexistence with nature. By focusing on youth narratives, this article proposes to be the start of comprehensive postcolonial civic identities that tell stories of change in the midst of derangement and disarrangement.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was supported by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia GGP-2017-075. We thank anonymous reviewers. Errors are our own.

### REFERENCES

- Alexander, I. E. (1988). Personality, psychological assessment, and psychobiography. *Journal of Personality*. 56(1), 265-294. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1988.tb00469.x>.
- Alonso, C. J. (1989). *The Spanish American regional novel*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press. <http://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511519376>.
- Aponte, B. (1992). Reviews. [Review of the book *Spanish American regional novel: Modernity and autochthony*, by Carlos J. Alonso]. *Hispanic Review*. 60(1), 113-115.
- Braidotti, R. (2006). Posthuman all too human. *Theory, Culture & Society*. 23(7-8), 197–208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276406069232>.
- Brown, L. M., Tappan, M. B., Gilligan, C. & Argyris, D. E. (1988). A guide to reading narratives of conflict and choice for self and moral voice. Unpublished manuscript. Harvard.
- Bryman, A. L. A. N. (1988). *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*. Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman.
- Buell, L., Heise, U. K. & Thornber, K. (2011). Literature and environment. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*. 36(1), 417–440. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-111109-144855>.
- Ceuppens, B. & Geschiere, P. (2005). Autochthony: Local or global? New modes in the struggle over citizenship in Africa and Europe. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 34, 385-407. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.34.081804.120354>.
- Dewey, J. (2003). *The middle works of John Dewey (1899-1924). Vol. 14: Human nature and conduct* (J. A. Boydston, Ed.). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. (Original work published 1922).
- Dorman, S. R. (2014). Citizenship in Africa. In E. F. Isin, & P. Nyers (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of global citizenship studies* (pp. 161-172). London, England: Routledge.
- Geschiere, P. (2011). Autochthony, citizenship, and exclusion- paradoxes in the politics of belonging in Africa and Europe. *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*. 18(1), 321-339.
- Ginwright, S. & James, T. (2002). From assets to agents of change: Social justice organizing, and youth development. *New Directions for Youth Development*. 2002(96), 27–46. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.25>.
- Hadad, T. & Schachter, E. (2011). ‘Religious-lite’: A phenomenon and its relevance to the debate on identity development and emerging adulthood. *Journal of Youth Studies*. 14(8), 853–869. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2011.616487>.
- Hart, D. & Atkins, R. (2002). Civic competence in urban youth. *Applied Developmental Science*. 6(4), 227–236. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0604\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0604_10).



- Hickey, S. & King, S. (2016). Understanding social accountability: Politics, power, and building new social contracts. *The Journal of Development Studies*. 52(8), 1225–1240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2015.1134778>.
- Hilgers, M. (2011). Autochthony as capital in a global age. *Theory, Culture & Society*. 28(1), 34–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0263276410380939>.
- Holma, K., Kontinen, T. & Blanken-Webb, J. (2018). Growth into citizenship: Framework for conceptualizing learning in NGO interventions in sub-Saharan Africa. *Adult Education Quarterly*. 68(3), 215–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713618768561>.
- Holma, K. & Kontinen, T. (2019). *Practices of citizenship in East Africa: Perspectives from philosophical pragmatism*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429279171>.
- Idrus, M. M., Ruzy, S. H. & Raihanah, M. M. (2014). Popular culture: Power and position in popular TV Fiction. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 118, 330–334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.02.045>.
- Idrus, M. M., Ruzy, S. H., & Raihanah, M. M. (2015a). Malay cultural identities: A review. *Humanities and Social Sciences Letters*. 3(1), 1–9. doi: 10.18488/journal.73/2015.3.1/73.1.1.9.
- Idrus, M. M., Ruzy, S. H. & Raihanah, M. M. (2015b). Followership: Boosting power and position in popular TV fiction. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*. 15(01), 207–224. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17576/GEMA-2015-1501-12>.
- Idrus, M. M., Ruzy, S. H. & Raihanah, M. M. (2016). Globalization, re-discovery of the Malay ‘local,’ and popular TV fiction through audience narratives. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*. 22(2), 31–48. <http://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2016-2202-03>.
- Idrus, M. M., Ruzy, S. H. & Raihanah, M. M. (2017). Rediscovery of the Malay ‘local:’ youth and TV fiction in Malaysia. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*. 22(2), 210–225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2016.1154876>.
- Idrus, M. M., Nor, F. M. N., Ruzy, S. H. & Raihanah, M. M. (2018). Advice-giving roles and strategies in selected faculty member-graduate student advising. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*. 18(2), 217–234. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17576/gema-2018-1802-15>.
- Idrus, M. M., Ruzy, S. H. & Raihanah, M. M. (2019). Pursuing imperfection, forgiveness, and repentance in popular twenty-first century Malay television fiction. *Kritika Kultura*. 33/34, 455–475. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13185/3078>.
- Jacob, J.-P. (2007). *Terres privées, terres communes: gouvernement de la nature et des hommes en pays Winye, Burkina Faso*. Paris: IRD.
- Kayira, J. (2018). Exploring hybrid third spaces in the place mappings of Malawian youth. *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education*. 34, 30–47.
- Kerridge, R. & Sammells, N. (1998). *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*. London: Zed.
- Khosravi, G. D., Vengadasamy, R. & Raihanah, M. M. (2017). Ecoethical significance of wilderness in Pablo Neruda’s selected poems. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*. 17(3), 55–69. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17576/gema-2017-1703-04>.
- Kozinets, R. (2019). *Netnography: The essential guide to qualitative social media research*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Leman, J. (1987). *From challenging culture to challenged culture: The Sicilian cultural code and the socio-cultural praxis of Sicilian immigrants in Belgium*. Leuven: Leuven University Press.

- Mäkelä, M. (2019). Literary Facebook narratology: Experientiality, simultaneity, tellability. *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*. 17(1), 159-182. 10.1353/pan.2019.0009.
- McGonegal, J. (2004). *Imagining justice: The politics of forgiveness and reconciliation in postcolonial literature* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. McMaster University.
- McLeod, J. (2000). *Beginning postcolonialism*. Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press.
- Mitchell, M. I. (2012). Migration citizenship and autochthony: Strategies and challenges for state-building in Côte d'Ivoire. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. 30(2), 267–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2012.664415>.
- Mohamad, M. (2008). Malay/Malaysian/Islamic: Four genres of political writings and the postcoloniality of autochthonous texts. *Postcolonial Studies*. 11(3), 293–313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790802226702>.
- Nasir, N. S. & Kirshner, B. (2003). The cultural construction of moral and civic identities. *Applied Developmental Science*. 7(3), 138–147. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0703\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0703_4).
- Nasir, N. S. & Saxe, G. B. (2003). Ethnic and academic identities: A cultural practice perspective on emerging tensions and their management in the lives of minority students. *Educational Researcher*. 32(5), 14–18. <https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0013189X032005014>.
- Pelican, M. (2009). Complexities of indigeneity and autochthony: An African example. *American Ethnologist*. 36(1), 52–65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2008.01109.x>.
- Peterson, J. D. (2019). Doing environmental humanities: Inter/transdisciplinary research through an underwater 360° video poem. *Green Letters*. 23(1), 68–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14688417.2019.1583592>.
- Pettit, J. (2016). Why citizens don't engage power poverty and civic habitus. *IDS Bulletin*. 47(5), 89–102. <https://doi.org/10.19088/1968-2016.169>.
- Pignagnoli, V. (2019). Changing dominants, changing features? The fiction/nonfiction distinction in contemporary literary and Instagram narratives. *European Journal of English Studies*. 23(2), 224–238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825577.2019.1640431>.
- Prévot, A.-C., Clayton, S. & Mathevet, R. (2016). The relationship of childhood upbringing and university degree program to environmental identity: Experience in nature matters. *Environmental Education Research*. 24(2), 263–279. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2016.1249456>.
- Roos, H. (2011). The war of the worlds: Relocating the boundaries between the human and the non-human. *Journal of Literary Studies*. 27(4), 50–70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02564718.2011.629445>.
- Rosaldo, R. (1999). Cultural citizenship, inequality, and multiculturalism. In R. Torres, L. Miron, & J. Inda (Eds.), *Race, identity and citizenship: A reader* (pp. 253–261). Malden: Blackwell Publishers.
- Rubin, B. C. (2007). “There's still not justice”: Youth civic identity development amid distinct school and community contexts. *Teachers College Record*. 109(2), 449–481.
- Sankaran, C. & Nkengasong, J. (2016). Forests and ecocultural disequilibrium in two postcolonial novels from Cameroon and Singapore. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 53(1), 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989416652447>.
- Schachter, E. P. & Ventura, J. J. (2008). Identity agents: Parents as active and reflective participants in their children's identity formation. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*. 18(3), 449–476. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2008.00567.x>.

- Scucchi, J. (2015). *A place for the personal: Autobiographical literary criticism through the lens of transformative learning* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Utah State University, Logan, Utah, United States of America.
- Spencer, S. (2016). Transcending traditional tropes: Autochthony as a discourse of conflict and integration in postwar Krio/Non-Krio relations in Sierra Leone. In C. Højbjerg, J. Knörr, & W. Murphy (Eds.), *Politics and policies in Upper Guinea Coast societies* (pp. 205-222). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sredanovic, D. & Farina, F. G. (2015). Can youth with a migrant background speak? Representation citizenship and voice in Italian TV and press journalism. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. 36(6), 693–709. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2015.1095713>.
- Stapleton, S. R. (2015). Environmental identity development through social interactions, action, and recognition. *The Journal of Environmental Education*. 46(2), 94–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2014.1000813>.
- Weidner, C., Braidotti, R. & Klumbyte, G. (2019). The emergent environmental humanities: Engineering the social imaginary. *Connotations*. 28, 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.25623/conn028-weidner-et-al-1>.
- Wolfers, E. (2017). Sustainability: Suspicious concerning attainability, with particular reference to the pacific. *Portal: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*. 14 (2), 87-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5130/portal.v14i2.5484>.
- Youniss, J., McLellan, J. & Yates, M. (1997). What we know about engendering civic identity. *American Behavioral Scientist*. 40(5), 620–631. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764297040005008>.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mohd Muzhafar Idrus (PhD) is an Assistant Professor at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. His research interests include literature, discourse analysis, and popular culture. He is a reviewer for a number of Taylor & Francis's journals including *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *Cogent Education* and *Cogent Arts and Humanities*.

Ruzy Suliza Hashim (PhD) is Professor of Literature at the School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). She is Deputy Director of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Press (UKM Press).

Raihanah M. M. (PhD) is an Associate Professor of literary studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Her research interests include Literary Studies, Minority Fiction, and Muslim Diaspora.