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Filem di Malaysia perlukan falsafah?

Historical representation in *Gandhi* and *Sardar*

European art cinema narrative

Pengisian budaya dalam filem Melayu

On *Gol & Gincu*

Qualitative audience analysis research

## Transforming the 'Mainstream:' *Gol & Gincu*

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*There has been a steady increase in the number of independent films produced in Malaysia over the last five years. Those films have often challenged the manner in which Malaysia and Malaysians are portrayed on the screen. The independent film movement in Malaysia has directly challenged the core mainstream commercial cinema in that country, by utilising languages other than Bahasa Melayu and by reflecting upon the lives of non-Bumiputera Malaysians and the manner in which they connect (or otherwise) with their ethnic Malay fellow citizens.*

*The director Bernard Chauly is a part of that independent film movement. In his 2005 film, Gol & Gincu he has deliberately moved into the mainstream commercial cinema of Malaysia. Gol & Gincu is a genre driven teen movie that has been infused with the spirit of the independent filmmakers of the country. While adhering to a set genre pattern centred upon romance and the search for maturity, Gol & Gincu is unique in Malaysian commercial cinema in that it has directly challenged many of the codes of the National Cultural Policy that often shapes that cinema. It portrays the lives of an affluent middle class group of largely female Kuala Lumpur residents and utilises the mix of languages and idioms that those urban youths actually speak. It also uses the genre format to explore issues about contemporary youth and gender in ways the commercial mainstream cinema has avoided.*

*This essay explores the opportunities open to mainstream Malaysian cinema by adopting the spirit of the vibrant independent filmmaking community. Bernard Chauly has with Gol & Gincu successfully made such a 'cross-over.'*

## **Introduction**

Mainstream commercial Malaysian cinema has over the past five years been challenged on the domestic front by the success of an increasingly large number of independent, often digital, short and feature films produced locally and seen by audiences both on the global festival circuit and by discerning cinema audiences at home. Filmmakers such as Ho Yuhang, Amir Muhammad, Tan Chui Mui, James Lee, Yasmin Ahmad and Deepak Kumaran Menon have quietly changed the domestic cinematic landscape while at the same time challenged the mainstream cinema and the nation's proscribed cultural policies by producing films that reflect a more Malaysian, less Malay-centric world on screen. This Kuala Lumpur based film movement has not been overtly oppositional to mainstream commercial Malay language cinema, but it has managed to raise questions about the validity of mainstream practices by showing alternative visions of contemporary Malaysia.<sup>1</sup> It was inevitable that a crossover process would take place that would see independent films themselves begin to be watched in commercial cinema chains and begin to attract a more broadly mainstream audience. The commercial success of Yasmin Ahmad's defiantly independent, yet genre driven *Sepet* (2005) is one such example of this crossover.

Bernard Chauly's *Gol & Gincu* (2005) takes the process of independent-mainstream crossover one step further. He and the production team at Red Films have deliberately aimed their film at the broad mainstream market and ostensibly have released a genre bound and formulaic teen movie to an audience that is young and predominantly female. Chauly and his team have however challenged the practices of mainstream Malaysian filmmaking by adopting the spirit of the independent film movement into both the narrative and the subtext of their film. They have also spent some considerable time and expense on pre-production development in an attempt to release a film that would counter the prevailing critical response to most mainstream Malaysia (read: Malay) cinema by creating a highly developed screenplay and by shooting and editing the film to standards not often associated with mainstream commercial Malaysian cinema.<sup>2</sup> The critic Ben Slater has described the mainstream Malaysian film industry as "a racially chauvinistic, anachronistic and shamelessly low-common-denominator entity, producing brightly lit, stereotype-heavy comedies purely for the fast-buck local multiplex crowd."<sup>3</sup> They are equally criticised for their ad-hoc and clumsy screenplays, poor production values and the manner

in which they invariably portray women in marginalised and stereotyped roles.<sup>4</sup> The greatest amount of criticism levelled at these films is however reserved for their unrepresentative mono-culturalism. Malaysia is seen as a predominantly Malay domain, largely ignoring the multicultural reality of the country. Chauly and his colleagues have overturned the mainstream tradition with the release of their film *Gol & Gincu*.

There is an enormous diversity of film style and narrative approaches within the Malaysian independent film community. One of the most prolific of these filmmakers has been James Lee and his works range from the highly stylised *Snipers* (2001), *Ah Beng Returns* (2001) and *Goodbye to Love* (2005) through to the more naturalistic and yet hyper-real *The Beautiful Washing Machine* (2004). These filmmakers have clearly looked at the works of Hou Hsiao Hsien and Tsai Ming Liang. Ho Yuhang's *Sanctuary* (2004) is a slowly paced evaluation of the dark recesses of urban domestic life that takes a contemplative approach to on screen realism. Yasmin Ahmad's *Sepet* (2004) tells its tale of interracial romance in a classical narrative style, but nonetheless employs a distinctly indie aesthetic to her film through innovative cinematography and sound. Many films exhibit a sense of emotional detachment and concentrate on the mundane minutiae of everyday life. All of them concentrate on the development of strong characters and avoid obvious generic stereotypes.<sup>5</sup> While there is great diversity within this filmmaking community it is also worth mentioning that there is also great collegiality and most filmmakers assist in the production of each other's works. This sense of community is infused with a decidedly democratic production culture that is unique among the indie film communities of Southeast Asia.<sup>6</sup>

*Gol & Gincu* is neither a stylised nor naturalistic exploration of character and narrative in the manner in which Ho Yuhang or James Lee might reveal it, but it is concerned with realistic portrayals of young Malaysians and it defies the mainstream tradition of resorting to type, stereo or otherwise, in the representation of characters. It was also developed and produced in the spirit of collegiality and community, even though it was a deliberately commercial production. It may conform to generic templates that have their genesis in mainstream Hollywood cinema, but it transforms those conventions by making this a very Malaysian narrative that explores issues that directly relate to the youth and gender concerns that are particular to Malaysia. The film may be deliberately derivative in narrative structure to a number of other successful recent commercial films largely from Hollywood, but it uniquely subverts that derivativeness by entering into a subtle inter-textual

dialogue with those same films. By doing so *Gol & Gincu*, unlike most mainstream Malaysian cinema, has the capacity to be consumed and enjoyed outside of its national borders, without actually compromising its essential 'Malaysian-ness.'<sup>7</sup>

This essay briefly investigates the mode and means of production of the film *Gol & Gincu* and is informed by a number of interviews undertaken with the film's director, Bernard Chauly.<sup>8</sup> It assesses the film critically both in relation to text, inter-text and context and examines why this is a departure for mainstream Malaysian filmmaking. It examines the reception of the film by analysing critical reviews and by assessing on line blog site debates and responses to the film and by taking note of box-office receipts and demographic breakdowns of audience attendance. The essay concludes by looking at the manner in which this ostensibly formulaic film has addressed issues of gender and female empowerment on screen and discusses how language and youth culture are portrayed in a realistic, but nonetheless novel fashion to a young Malaysian audience. This essay makes the assertion that *Gol & Gincu* is a radical departure for local mainstream cinema by virtue of its very Malaysian-ness. 2005 has been described as the "Year Indie Films Broke" in Malaysia.<sup>9</sup> With the release of films such as *Sepet* and *Gol & Gincu* it may well also be the year that the mainstream cinema in Malaysia has been transformed by the infusion of an independent spirit and a determination to release quality products to mainstream cinema audiences in the multiplex chains of the nation.

## **The Film**

*Gol & Gincu* is set in Kuala Lumpur and concerns the rites of passage tale of a young college student Putri. At the beginning of the film Putri's relationship with her boyfriend Eddy comes to an end, when the football mad young man finds he is interested in another girl, the futsal playing Shasha.<sup>10</sup> Determine to win back her man, Putri takes up futsal herself and the film charts the development of an all female futsal team that goes by the name of *Bukan Team Biasa* (No Ordinary Team). The film shows Putri and her fellow futsal players develop as young and independent women through their mutual pursuit of the sport. As the narrative develops we see these young women bring the various complexities of their own lives into their new found collective and we witness the manner in which the women support each other in their

ongoing process of maturity and self realisation. The film is largely set in a middle class and privileged milieu. The dialogue reflects both the linguistic fluidity of modern Malaysian society and the screenplay addresses the complexities of a range of social issues that face these young women from this class. There are oblique references to religious intolerance and moral censoriousness as well as references to the unfair manner in which many men treat their female partners. Polygamy is critiqued. Tellingly there is an oblique and sensitive handling of lesbian attraction between two of the characters and a startlingly real and disturbing revelation of incest. *Gol & Gincu* is on the surface a light entertainment film, but it is not so light as to shy away from dealing with some considerably more serious social issues.

Mainstream Malaysian cinema is often characterised by the binary representation of women as either 'good girls' or bad. Representations of women are often merely a platform to expose revelations of moral and ethical goodness or its mirrored evil. There have been few attempts to develop complex, multidimensional roles for women on screen and filmmakers have largely shied away from exploring issues of character ambiguity. The representation of women on screen in largely binary roles and as exemplars for exploring issues of moral piety and licentiousness is not a recent development in Malaysian filmmaking. Indeed it was hallmark of the output of the supposed 'Golden Age' of Malay cinema during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>11</sup> The indie film movement has largely ignored that legacy and has demonstrated a multiplicity of representational models for women on screen. *Gol & Gincu* is important for Malaysian mainstream cinema in that it has deliberately emulated that independent spirit of gender representation in an unashamedly commercial cinematic context.<sup>12</sup>

Bernard Chauly adopted a theatre style approach in developing an ensemble feel among the characters in his film.<sup>13</sup> The actors workshopped their roles in a collaborative fashion during an intensive pre-production rehearsal period where they, according to the director, "did very little work with the scripted scenes. Instead we built character back story, interpersonal dynamics, ensemble trust and balance."<sup>14</sup> The central character of Putri is initially premised on a stereotype – she is a spoilt "princess" – but through her interaction with a variety of very different women on screen we see the initial stereotype being shattered. The screenplay itself was refined during this period. A formulaic template was thus given layered nuances in the process and complex and diverse representations of women were possible.

The film is notable too for the manner in which it addresses several social issues that would not normally find a place within a mainstream Malaysian film. Malaysia has strict rules on censorship and Malaysian filmmakers acknowledge that a climate of self-censorship is prevalent. A number of contemporaneous events in Malaysia are obliquely critiqued in *Gol & Gincu*. The raid by JAWI officers on the Kuala Lumpur nightclub Zouk is mentioned for instance, and while it is discussed on screen only briefly, given the social milieu the film reflects and the economic and cultural materialism of many of the characters, the reference is unmistakably critical of the event itself.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the narrative we are exposed to the ongoing relationship that the central character Putri has with her neighbour and friend Jiji. Early in the film we witness Jiji smoking and missing school and there is an unease about her state of mind as the narrative develops. Jiji's plight is a central catalyst for Putri's emotional development and maturity. Later in the film when Jiji collapses and is taken to hospital we discover that she has miscarried a child. This revelation is a shock, but not nearly as surprising as the later revelation that she is the victim of incest and her father is arrested by the police at the hospital for committing this offence. This serious plot development would appear to be out of place in this otherwise bright teen movie, but the scenes surrounding this incident are handled with considerable taste and sensitivity and explore an issue that is of much recent debate in Malaysia. Bernard Chauly and the producers of the film wanted to dispel the myth that incest only occurs in the *kampung*.<sup>16</sup> *Gol & Gincu* shows that this crime transcends Malaysia's otherwise rigid class boundaries.

The incest theme in *Gol & Gincu* is unique for a number of reasons, not the least that it is a topic not normally dealt with in mainstream entertainment in Malaysia, and certainly not entertainment in Malaysia, and certainly not entertainment developed for a teenage audience. It is also unique in that the theme itself is used to provide a message and social commentary as well as to manipulate a narrative and character development shift within the film. This successful marriage of cinematic form and content is not normally a feature of mainstream Malaysian cinema. As Chauly has said "in terms of plot design, we had gotten ourselves into a situation where dramatically, at the end of what I call part 3 of the story, we needed a revelation, the cracking of the princess' tower, happy pink turning into sickly green.... A sudden jolt that would force a sudden maturation in Putri."<sup>17</sup>

Other topics that the film addresses include such issues as female body image and the nature and diversity of feminine behaviour. The

film questions received notions of what makes a young woman 'feminine' and challenges the normal genre stereotypes of conformist image bound adolescence.<sup>18</sup> Women are shown as having the capacity to question their male partners and stand up for their rights and there is no judgement in representing women as aggressive, competitive and ambitious. More tellingly the film shows both women of size and women interested in traditionally male occupations and interests in a positive and affirmative fashion. The complex relationship between the characters of Shasha and Zie is made further complex toward the end of the film by the palpable but oblique revelation of a lesbian attraction between the two young women. This queer twist in the narrative is visually rather than verbally rendered and this again highlights the manner in which this film uniquely blends form and content in the telling of the tale. Malaysian filmmakers must submit their screenplays to the censors prior to the start of production. *Gol & Gincu* passed the censors with no suggested cuts. This may be attributable to the manner in which censorable issues are encoded within the film in sub-textual and often highly visualised ways. In revealing the issues that this film addresses much of the revelation is in the showing rather than the telling.

## **Production and Reception**

*Gol & Gincu* is Bernard Chauly's first commercial feature film.<sup>20</sup> Having worked as an independent filmmaker and in television, Chauly came to this project as a result of his association with Red Communications, a production house noted for its work in television.<sup>21</sup> This production house is unique in Malaysia for a number of reasons. It is run largely by women and it proudly multicultural. Chauly claims that the development of *Gol & Gincu* was a collaborative process and that a team spirit was seen as essential to achieving their stated aims and objectives.<sup>22</sup> Such a production culture is at odds with the hierarchical and studio emulative nature of most Malaysian mainstream film production. Red Films has not only adopted the collaborative and collegial approach that is seen as unique to the Malaysian indie film scene, but has also utilised tried and tested methods learnt in television production. In making film that is aimed at the commercial mainstream, but is infused with the spirit of independent filmmaking, Red Films has adopted new and dynamic production strategies.<sup>23</sup> That the company has made a film that is affirmative, liberal, issue related and that



addresses young women in particular should be no surprise given the work this production house has done in television and the fact that many of the people employed to work on *Gol & Gincu* have also come from a background of working in independent films in Malaysia.

Initially the project was going to be a low budget digital independent feature, but as the script was being developed producer Lina Tan and Bernard Chauly decided that the film could be made for a commercial release if funds could be accessed accordingly.<sup>24</sup> Bureaucratic complications in dealing with the National Film Development Board, FINAS, meant that the Producers needed to adopt new strategies in securing their funding.<sup>25</sup> In mid 2004 the producers were able to secure sponsorship from the mobile phone provider Maxis, whose youth oriented product Hotlink, features strongly in on screen product placement.<sup>26</sup> In bringing the high profile Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir on board as Executive Producer, Red Films was able to secure further corporate sponsorship for the production. A demonstrably commercial, but nonetheless independent approach was utilised in the pre-production, production, post-production and distribution of *Gol & Gincu*. Certain traits of the production process have informed some of the debates that took place in the broader reception of the film once it was released.

The film opened rather inauspiciously in August of 2005 during the height of the haze emergency across Malaysia. Most commercial releases in Malaysia have their box office peak on their opening weekend and then tend to subside in terms of attendance figures. *Gol & Gincu*, while only moderately successful overall at the box office, managed to increase its audience share over time. Much of this can be credited to word of mouth publicity.<sup>27</sup> Blog sites began to discuss the film and this sparked considerable interest.

Malaysia has a very healthy blog site culture and in this assessment of the reception of the film in Malaysia numerous blog site commentaries on the film have been accessed. Many of the observations made on these sites echoed the critical sentiments in the broader media coverage. There was a sense that the overall storyline was derivative and most observers remarked on the narrative similarities the film has with such commercially successful foreign films such as *Legally Blonde* (Dir: Robert Luketic, 2001) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (Dir: Gurinder Chadha, 2002).<sup>28</sup> More will be said shortly in relation to this when an assessment is made of the relationship between the text, context and inter-textuality of the film, but at this point it is important to note that the neither the director nor the screenwriter ever claimed that they were not adopting a

formulaic and genre bound approach to their film. The only other negative criticism of note is apportioned to the on screen product placement given to the sponsors of the film and to the manner in which this appears to further endorse a sense of consumer materialism as being the pervasive obsession of many young women such as Putri.<sup>29</sup>

What audiences and critics did appear to love about the film was the manner in which it realistically portrayed Malaysian youth. A leading review in the on line arts journal *Kakiseni* claims that "what makes *Gol & Gincu* a Malaysian winner is its non-patronising sub-text about embracing our multi-ethnicity, as reflected in the easy-going friendship forged, rather than a mere 'multi-racial tolerance'. There is no discrimination due to race, gender and class; gender and class; just one another to count on."<sup>30</sup> The praise here is also a subtle critique of the broader mainstream Malaysian cinema. The film is also praised for using the language that is spoken by many young middle class Malaysians – an unselfconscious fusion of Malay, English, street slang and local idiom. The ensemble cast all have their own unique way of talking to one another and this is again a reflection of the multilingual, multi-lingo nature of contemporary Kuala Lumpur.<sup>31</sup> The dialogue in the film is casual and candid and is used in the development of both character and ideas. Audiences who know Kuala Lumpur will be able to discern what neighbourhoods some characters come from. It transcends class and ethnicity, but it remains unclear whether the use of such site-specific language is well received or fully comprehensible outside of the urban (and urbane) world of Kuala Lumpur.<sup>32</sup>

Critics and commentators also appreciated the visual elements of the film commenting on the production values, the art direction and, for a mainstream Malaysian movie, the innovative cinematography and editing. Young Malaysian cinema audiences may not as yet be familiar with the work of many of their independent Malaysian filmmakers, but by watching *Gol & Gincu* they have been exposed to the work of many in the crew who have learned their craft in those indie films. Overall, with some minor, but well articulated reservations about commercial product placement and questions about the narrative originality, those who chose to comment publicly about this film have enjoyed it and many have hailed it as possibly a new beginning for popular film entertainment in Malaysia.<sup>33</sup> Both audiences and critics alike responded to the film as if they themselves had a stake in it. That is a rare achievement for a contemporary Malaysian commercial film.

## Text, Context and Inter-text

Plot and character similarities with the Hollywood film *Legally Blonde* (Dir: 200) in *Gol & Gincu* are unavoidable. Bernard Chauly has said that, “structurally, yes we learnt from the spine of *Legally Blonde*. A lot of people accused us being unabashedly derivative. But I’m proud of our characterisation, adaptation and complex sub-plotting...all of which you will never find in a Hollywood teen film.”<sup>34</sup> By adapting the template of the Hollywood teen film *Legally Blonde* and layering the new film with a deliberate and articulated sense of Malaysian-ness, *Gol & Gincu* enters into a cinematic dialogue with the Hollywood original. It is deliberately referential and the choice of *Legally Blonde* further endorses the filmmakers desire to make a film that is consciously about female empowerment. The textual and structural references are however subverted in the very process of contextualisation. It is at interstices of text, context and inter-text that this film reveals its uniqueness rather than its derivativeness.

Genre film is by nature self-referential. It could be further argued that *Gol & Gincu* through its contextual subversion of the structural template also enters into a subtle dialogue with other teen movies that have likewise localised the genre format like for example the Indonesian film *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* (2002). Both films explored teen angst in a middle class milieu. Many Malaysian mainstream films are set in affluent middle class settings but what makes *Gol & Gincu* different from those films is the manner in which that middle class milieu is further contextualized. By utilizing the sports arena as the central focus for the gathering of a collection of characters, the filmmaker has brought together a range of ethnic and class differentiations that in reality define contemporary Kuala Lumpur.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore the film explores the possibilities of interethnic camaraderie in ways that most Malaysian commercial cinema avoids. If Malaysian society is characterised by divisions and cleavages based upon class, race and religion as many observers have claimed, then *Gol & Gincu* is unique for its intentional representation of the manner in which Malaysian negotiate on a daily basis through those divisions and cleavages.<sup>36</sup> That the film shows this process of negotiation in an affirmative way while at the same time exploring a number of themes associated with female empowerment, further demonstrates the sub-textual complexities of this otherwise light entertainment.

## Conclusion

*Gol & Gincu* has transformed the mainstream commercial Malaysian film industry by demonstrating that a genre based motion picture can speak to its intended audience with intelligence and originality. It has done this largely by adopting many of the production as well as thematic practices of the Malaysian independent film movement without compromising either the commercial integrity of the film or the broader conventions of the teen film genre. The film speaks to the genre while subverting the original skeletal framework of the Hollywood film *Legally Blonde* by localising the film firmly in a realistic, non-stereotypical portrayal of contemporary female youth culture in Kuala Lumpur. That the city and its denizens are shown to be comfortable with their dynamic, but complex urbanity is evidence that this film is proud to articulate the cosmopolitan ease with which these globally aware young women represent the face of contemporary Kuala Lumpur. This is a mature development in an industry not often noted critically for its maturity. By doing this in a mainstream and commercial cinematic context Bernard Chauly and Red Films have paved the way for a revitalisation of the Malaysian film industry. The largely positive reception that the film has received only bodes well for future independent-mainstream crossover filmmaking endeavours.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> McKay, Benjamin, "A Conversation with Amir Muhammad" in *Criticine*, Manila, October 2005, <http://www.criticine.com>
- <sup>2</sup> The production team at Red Films have developed a unique corporate ethos that equates directly to the mode of their productions, the manner in which they develop their projects and the issues that they decide to cover in their films. For more on this see Surin, Jacqueline Ann, "Bringing Up Issues the Reel Way," *The Sun*, Kuala Lumpur, August 26, 2005, <http://www.sun2surf.com/article.cfm?id=10838>
- <sup>3</sup> Slater, Ben, "New Independence in Malaysia" in *Firecracker*, London, June, 2005, <http://www.firecracker-media.com/moxie/current/feature0802.shtml>

- 4 McKay, Benjamin, "The Taming of Ning" in *Kakiseni*, Kuala Lumpur, June 14, 2005, <http://www.kakiseni.com/print/articles/reviews/MDY4NA.html>
- 5 In James Lee's gangster films *Snipers* (2001) and *Ah Beng Returns* (2001) the stereotyped criminals are revealed in a heightened state of realism that subverts the more traditional action and gangster genre stereotypes.
- 6 For more on the thematic and stylistic nature of contemporary indie filmmaking in Malaysia see Williamson, Robert, "Affection and Disaffection: Ideas, Themes and Styles in Current Malaysian Independent Cinema," *Firecracker*; London, June, 2005, <http://www.firecracker-media.com/moxie/current/feature0803.shtml>
- 7 As an aside, I have shown this film in Australia to a number of people in the age and gender bracket that the film was initially marketed to and the response from those viewers was largely very positive.
- 8 The author would like to thank Bernard Chauly for his time and patience in insisting with this paper. The author had a number of face to face interviews with the director in both Singapore and Kuala Lumpur and was greatly assisted by a series of written responses to interview questions that the director provided while he was working in London. Those written responses now form a valuable twenty-page testimony outlining the production history of the film.
- 9 Slater, op cit
- 10 Futsal is a version of football that is played indoors. This rather hybrid sport has become enormously popular in Malaysia.
- 11 Kueh, Adeline, "The Filmic Representations of Malayan Women: An Analysis of Malayan Films of the 1950s and 1960s," unpublished MA thesis, Murdoch University, 1997.
- 12 For more on binary representations of women see Fuziah Kartini Hassan Basri and Faridah Ibrahim, "Racun dan Penawar: Pertentangan Citra Wanita dalam Filem Melayu Zaman 50-an" in

their volume, *Antara Gaun dan Kebaya: Pengalaman dan Citra Wanita Melayu Zaman Pra-Merdeka*, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, 2000.

- <sup>13</sup> Chauly, Bernard, Interview Transcript, London, December 2005.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid
- <sup>15</sup> The inclusion of this reference to the religious officers raid on the Zouk nightclub is perhaps not totally unsurprising given that the Executive Producers of the film, Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, the daughter of the former Malaysian Prime Minister, was an outspoken critic of the raid and the subsequent conduct of the religious authorities.
- <sup>16</sup> Rural based village.
- <sup>17</sup> Chauly, Bernard, op cit.
- <sup>18</sup> A number of young women in Malaysia who responded to feedback commentaries on the film on blog sites showed considerable surprise with the inclusion of a leading female character of size and that she was not cast as a comedic figure. Many young women praised the non-judgemental manner in which the film developed this character.
- <sup>19</sup> Some commentators in Malaysia also claimed that the film may have passed the censors due to the direct involvement in the production of Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, but such claims can only be treated as speculative. I believe that the director, Bernard Chauly, the screenwriter, Rafidah Abdullah, and the producer Lina Tan are responsible for this film passing the censors while still addressing otherwise taboo issues in contemporary Malaysian cinema.
- <sup>20</sup> Previously Chauly had directed the experimental film *Saying Goodbye* (1997), the short film *Adam and Steve* (2000), the television movies *Piala Untuk Mama* and *Multimedia Super Cintun* and had worked on a number of documentaries with fellow independent filmmaker Ho Yuhang. Chauly has also worked extensively on the Red Communications televisions series *3R*, a magazine format show that deals with issues relating to young Malaysian women and that reflects an ethos of empowering women.

- <sup>21</sup> *Gol & Gincu* was released by Red Films, the production arm of Red Communications Sdn. Bhd.
- <sup>22</sup> Chauhy, Bernard, *op cit*.
- <sup>23</sup> As further evidence of the collaborative, but professional approach that Red Films adopted, it was decided in the script development stage to engage the services of a script analyst. The Indonesian screenwriter Prima Rusdi (who co-wrote *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* (Dir: Rudy Soedjarwo, 2002) and *Eliana, Eliana* (Dir: Riri Riza, 2002) was brought on board to help refine the narrative direction of the film. Bernard Chauhy commented to me in his interview that one of the major problems in Malaysian cinema is the lack of professional script doctors.
- <sup>24</sup> Chauhy, Bernard, *op cit*.
- <sup>25</sup> Surin, Jacqueline Ann, 'No Business Like Show Business' in *The Sun*, Kuala Lumpur, April 1, 2005. <http://www.thesundaily.com/article.cfm?id=8261>
- <sup>26</sup> Chauhy, Bernard, *op cit*.
- <sup>27</sup> Chauhy, Bernard, *op cit*.
- <sup>28</sup> The only similarity *Gol & Gincu* has with *Bend It Like Beckham* is that they are both films about women and sport. The link people are making to this film may be attributable to the witty line used in a scene of *Gol & Gincu* where a character refers to the British movie directly.
- <sup>29</sup> The character of Putri and her friend Mia are materialistic, but their obsession with material objects is tempered as the films narrative develops and Putri in particular becomes a more mature character.
- <sup>30</sup> Chuah Siew Eng, 'Girls Who Dig Balls', *Kakiseni*, Kuala Lumpur, August 16, 2005, <http://www.kakiseni.com/print/articles/reviews/MdcyMw.html>

- 31 Bernard Chauly said to me in an interview that “we live in a country where we think that we have a lingua franca (Bahasa Malaysia) but we don’t. We are split by our mother tongues and for a lot, their proficiency in English and nothing else. Going the Bahasa Baku way a decade ago has proven that it’s not the solution to communicate as one. Our Ministers still say that we cannot use ‘rojak’ language on screen but if that’s how characters have to speak, that’s how they have to speak-lah!”
- 32 Chauly has admitted that the film should have in hindsight been subtitled in Malay alongside the English subtitling. As to whether the film speaks to young audiences outside of the major urban centres, Chauly says that “more than 60% of our audience watched the film in about 11 Klang Valley cinemas (out of 28 nationwide) so yes it’s probably safe to say that we were most successful with the ‘urban’ audience.” He did however go on to point out that “qualitatively, I’m not interested in the actual makeup of this so-called ‘urban’ audience. According to UNDP studies, in a couple of year’s time, more than 2/3 of the Klang Valley anyway. So of course we had a lot of kampung folk watching the film... in KL.”
- 33 The Kakiseni review online was accompanied by a comments register and detailed and lively feedback was given to the film in the weeks following its release. Go to : <http://www.kakiseni.com>
- 34 Chauly, Bernard, op cit.
- 35 The director has said, “In very subtle ways, I-Iann the production designer and I wanted to reflect this diversity in *Gol & Gincu*. We mapped out the ‘world of the character’, reflecting the actual geography of the Klang Valley. Putri’s middle class affluence is quite specific and we could only see her existing in several, specific parts of KL. The geographical journey or development arc for us was when ‘Putri does Gombak’, when she drives to pick Dayang and her siblings up. Putri would never have driven to Gombak before – that’s why she has a KL road map on her dashboard – and that development is part of her maturation process, getting out of her protected shell, her comfort zone. So, although it’s seemingly generic middle class, a lot of further thought went into making it even more context-specific.” (Interview transcript)



- <sup>36</sup> It is difficult to extricate class from ethnicity when discussing Malaysia. Cultural identity is so often mirrored in class identification. See both Kahn, Joel, 'Subalternity and Construction of Malay Identity' and Stivens, Maila, 'Gender and Modernity in Malaysia, in Alberto Gomes (ed.) *Modernity and Identity: Asian Illustrations*, La Trobe University Press, Bundoora, 1994, chapters 2 and 4 respectively.

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