

*Review Article*

**REVIEWING ELEMENTS  
OF FEMINISM IN A  
MALAYSIAN PLAY:  
KUALA LUMPUR  
KNOCK-OUT**

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*Kuala Lumpur Knock-Out* (henceforth to be known as “KL-KO”) is the second project of Kualiti Works. KL-KO is the most commercial performance staged by Kualiti Works; this was the first time Kualiti Works advertised its play in mainstream newspapers in the, as well as solid patronages from an impressive list of sponsors. Written and directed by Ann Lee, it was staged in Experimental Theatre, Kuala Lumpur in 1996. KL-KO revolves around the life of Tan Ai Leng (played by critically acclaimed dancer Mew Chang Tsing), a young Chinese woman from Penang who dreams of fighting Mike Tyson in an exhibition-boxing match in Kuala Lumpur. Simultaneously, her best friend Mazuri experience a rather unpleasant incident at her workplace. After 22 years, it is recompensing to look back at the relevance of the issues highlighted in this play. Simultaneously, one would realise that the elements of feminism discussed in this play are the real problems faced by women in this country, even after the new millennium.

**Keywords:** feminism, detractors, sexual harassment, matriarch, patriarchy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kuali Works Sendirian Berhad is one of the three flagship brands of The Kuali Group, Malaysia's first all-women arts company. Co-founded in 1994, its main activities linger around theatre, television and publications. 'Kuali' ("wok" in English) is selected as a fitting metaphor for the company's ability to bring together women from all over the place to create 'food for thought' to cater to theatre enthusiasts. According to Ann Lee, one of the co-founders, Kuali Works offers a completely different experience to Malaysian theatregoers, as its works focuses on women issues, which was considered rare in the Malaysian performing arts scene in the early 1990s (A. Lee, personal communication, May 31, 2018). Highlighting women issues in a performance is strongly related to the feminist theatre and its practitioners. According to a renowned feminist theatre practitioner, Helene Keyssar (1984), feminist writing must be done by feminists or female playwrights, in order to justify that feminist drama is about female issues and agendas written exclusively by women. Charlotte Canning (1996) identified two primary sets of performers within the feminist theatre groups: those already involved or working in the theatre who sought alternative channel for their artistry and those not previously working in the area but found theatre as "a locus for political agency". In 1999, Elaine Aston introduces her concept of feminist theatre practices, focusing on three different schools of feminism: liberal feminism, cultural feminism and socialist feminism. This paper is focusing only on liberal feminism and cultural feminism. The political aim in a liberal feminist performance is to increase opportunities for women in society, while the characters should include strong roles for women often represented within domestic and familial spheres. As for cultural feminism, the political aim is to contest the patriarchal organisation of society, while the characters should indicate 'Woman' as 'Other', as well as highlighting intra-feminine relationship with emphasis on mother/daughter relation.

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