

Kampung Rules: Landscape and the Contested Government of Urban(e) Malayness

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Summary. *Kampung* ('village') habits and traits have been widely invoked in 'explanations' of inappropriate urban conduct among Malays in Malaysia. State-sponsored rural-urban migration for Malays from the 1970s was bound up with a conception of urbanisation as a remedy for the supposedly socioeconomically debilitating effects of *kampung* life. Yet many such migrants, especially in the national capital, Kuala Lumpur, came to live in squatter *kampungs*. A dominant Malay nationalist rationality of government has long understood squatter settlements as a failure of attempts to urbanise the Malay. Even when squatters are relocated to public flats, '*kampung* values' have been invoked to account for inappropriate social conduct. However, *kampung* norms and forms are increasingly drawn upon in authoritative conceptions of Malay and even Malaysian urbanity. '*Kampung* rules' for Kuala Lumpur's physical and moral landscape are shown to emerge from the contested government of urban(e) Malayness.

1. Introduction

In May 1997, a 27-year-old technical assistant was killed by a brick thrown from block 94 of the Putra Ria apartments on Jalan Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur. The front cover of the English language daily *Malay Mail* on 30 May featured this 'murder' and called for an awareness campaign to 'educate' flat-dwellers on appropriate means of garbage disposal (*Malay Mail*, 1997a).¹ Around 100 of the low-medium cost flats are occupied by former residents of the adjacent Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukom squatter settlement and they are concentrated in block 94 (see Figure 1).² The incident was interpreted in both the Malay- and English-language press in terms of the maladaptation of former

squatters to life in modern high-rise blocks: on 31 May, another front-page report included the sub-heading, '*kampung* habits die hard' and noted that

although it has been nearly a year since they were relocated from Kampung Abdullah Hukom to the new flats, the residents never really discarded their habit of indiscriminate rubbish dumping (*Malay Mail*, 1997b).

Kampung ('village') habits and traits have been widely invoked in 'explanations' of inappropriate urban conduct among Malays in Malaysia. State-sponsored rural-urban migration for Malays from the 1970s was

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Figure 1. Putra Ria Flats, block 94 (author's photograph).

founded on a conception of urbanisation as a remedy for the supposedly socioeconomically debilitating effects of *kampung* life. Yet many such migrants, especially in and around the national capital, Kuala Lumpur, came to live in squatter *kampungs*. The nomenclature is significant: for city authorities, '*kampung*' signifies anti-urbanity. The very continued existence of the squatter settlement represents the failure of state attempts to urbanise the Malay and is an eyesore on Kuala Lumpur's globally oriented cityscape. In addition, as press coverage of the block 94 incident demonstrates, squatters who have been relocated to modern public flats are said to have taken their '*kampung* values' with them. *Kampung* has long been more than merely an undesirable space in, or feature of, the Malaysian urban landscape; it denotes those attributes, attitudes and modes of conduct deemed unsuitable for urban(e) life and for citizens of a would-be 'fully developed' nation.³

The aims of this paper are two-fold. First, it seeks to elaborate the government of

Malay subjects in relation to a problematic of *kampung*. I draw upon the burgeoning governmentality literature (Foucault, 1991; see Dean, 1999; and Rose, 1999, for recent overviews) to analyse attempts to (re)shape individual and collective Malay conduct. Successive governmental strategies, from the state promotion of Malay rural-urban migration to the construction of low-cost public flats for the rehousing of squatter settlements, have impacted upon the landscape of the federal capital. This leads on to a second aim which concerns combining insights from 'governmentality' with work on landscape in cultural geography. If landscape, for cultural geographers, has been understood as both a 'work' and as something that 'does work' (Mitchell, 2000, p. 94), this does not of course imply a simple reversion to environmental determinism. Rather, David Matless (1994, p. 129), for example, has considered environmental 'practices of the self': how individuals sustain and remake themselves through their environment, which they in turn reconfigure.⁴ A process of landscape(d)

subjectification implies the existence of ‘cultural authorities’—a term extending beyond ‘the state’ and other conventional conceptions of political power—which shape conceptions of appropriate land use, ‘moral geographies’ (Matless, 1998). In this way, landscape is understood normatively: the way in which ideas about what is right and appropriate are ‘transmitted through space and place’ (Cresswell, 1996, p. 8).

The persistence of city *kampungs* and putatively ‘*kampung* conduct’ reveals both the limits and the limitations of the authoritative urban(e) code in contemporary Kuala Lumpur. On the one hand, it is precisely those spaces and social practices deemed ‘out of place’ that make known the boundaries of what is acceptable. Transgression is thus ‘diagnostic’ of the normative landscape (see Cresswell, 2000). On the other hand, the very fact of individual and collective transgressive acts attests to the limits of the effectiveness of the normalising governmental power of landscape. While governmentality is characterised by a belief that ever-new strategies, techniques and technologies can ameliorate society and set problematic conduct in desired directions, government is a “congenitally failing operation” (Miller and Rose, 1990, p. 18). As an “applied art” (Dean, 1994, p. 187), government is also inevitably bound up with contest and competition among individuals and groups. The governmentality literature highlights ways in which on-going contestation (re)constitutes rationalities through which (self-)government takes place. The on-going failure and problematisation of practices of government, in other words, gives rise to a reworking of rationality which is itself a source of future political inventiveness (Dean, 1994). In sum: “our present has arisen as much from the logics of contestation as from any imperatives of control” (Rose, 1999, p. 277). This includes the landscape, shaped by and shaping contestation.

This paper considers how ‘contested landscapes’ might be reconceptualised in terms of an analytics of government. It is divided into three main sections. The next section

sketches the emergence of a discursive formation in which it became possible to visualise and to know ‘the Malay’ (and ‘Malayness’) as a coherent object/subject to be governed and as one in need of new forms of government. In particular, section 2 considers how, within a politically dominant Malay nationalist rationality of government, *kampung* came to denote a ‘problematics of Malayness’. This rationalised successive governmental strategies oriented towards the ‘urbanisation’ of Malayness. The third section then considers the translation of this rationality into the contested landscape of contemporary Kuala Lumpur and to Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukom—Putra Ria in particular. Not only is *kampung* ‘out of place’ in an increasingly image-conscious, globally oriented national capital, but supposedly ‘*kampung* acts’ transgress authoritative conceptions of appropriate city conduct. In revealing ‘urban(e) limits’, *kampung* thus also brings into view the hegemonic moral order and ‘appropriate’ relations for individuals with their environment and with each other. The fourth section then takes a closer look at the contested emergence of a normative urban landscape. Somewhat paradoxically, ‘*kampung*’ is increasingly prominent in the norms and forms of urban(e) development in Malaysia. This points to the inadequacy of conceptions of *kampung* as everyday ‘resistance’ to a hegemonic developmentalist rationality of government (see Chua, 1995). The paper concludes by considering the broader significance of this form of analysis for the meaning of ‘contest’ in a rapidly changing Asian city landscape as well as the implications of emerging ‘*kampung* rules’ for Kuala Lumpur’s urban population, especially its poorer members.

2. Kampung as Problematic of Malayness

How did the Malay(s) become known as an object and subject of government? ‘Malayness’ as a political category is a colonial construction. ‘Malay’ was one of three broad ethnic categories—the other two being ‘Chinese’ and ‘Indian’—cemented through the

nature of British colonial economic development and the evolving labour market. The colonial economy also promoted a spatial divide which mutually reinforced ethnic or racial distinctions. For the most part, Malays lived in rural *kampungs* ('villages'); Indians worked on the British plantation estates; and the Chinese on smaller plantations and in the mines. Given that a number of tin mining areas, including parts of what is now Kuala Lumpur, subsequently became nodes for urban development, this colonial division later manifested itself as one of a generalised Chinese urban, versus Malay and Indian rural, inhabitation (Sioh, 1998).

The post-independence Alliance government not only inherited colonial constructions of ethnic groups or communities as knowable entities, but also shared the colonial administration's prejudices against—and conception of appropriate means of ruling—the Malays. For the aristocratic, British-educated first Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunjku Abdul Rahman, rural Malays were poor, but nonetheless happy and contented. Development, he argued, might actually make the rural poor disgruntled: "My experience tells me that everybody wants to continue to live the life they have been living" (quoted in Sardar, 2000, p. 163). *Laissez-faire* policies more broadly—particularly in the economic domain—played into the hands of British capitalist interests. Limited domestic participation in the national economy continued to be predominantly 'non-Malay', and especially Chinese. Reflecting the locus of the electoral support of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), what interventionist state initiatives did exist focused on rural development (Gomez and Jomo, 1997).

The early 1970s saw the political crystallisation of distinct new aims and means of Malay government. These certainly shared colonial and Alliance government prejudices about the Malay as 'lazy native' (see Alatas, 1977), but also differed in (at least) two ways. First, Malayness was labelled problematic. A new generation of Malay political leaders saw in colonial characterisations of

Malayness the need for reformation through governmental intervention. The political ascendancy of this Malay nationalist mode of thinking was marked by Abdul Razak's takeover as Prime Minister and UMNO President (Shamsul, 1996) as well as by the far stronger role of UMNO in the new Barisan Nasional ('National Front') coalition than in the Alliance which it replaced.⁵ Secondly, and relatedly, new modes of government were founded on a belief in the *possibility* of intervention—setting Malay conduct in desired directions. In his polemical book, *The Malay Dilemma*, (now Prime Minister) Dr Mahathir Mohamad combined an environmental determinist account of Malay 'backwardness' *vis-à-vis* the Chinese with understandings from evolutionary biology. Thus, on the one hand,

If we want to examine the development of the Malays in Malaya we must first study the geography of Malaya and determine its effects on them (Mahathir, 1970, p. 20).

On the other hand, the supposedly debilitating effects of Malay heredity and environment can be overcome by a "systematic and co-ordinated orientation of the Malays towards progress" (Mahathir, 1970, p. 113).⁶ If British colonialism constructed 'Malayness', then increasingly powerful Malay nationalist political thought rendered it in need of rehabilitation.

'*Kampung*' featured prominently in this problematics of Malayness and resultant new governmental prescriptions. In *The Malay Dilemma*, the Malay *kampung* ('village') is singled out as the locus for 'primitive' social practices and values: 'Malay partiality towards inbreeding' (Mahathir, 1970) in the *kampungs* is contrasted not only with the Chinese—whose 'custom decreed that marriage should not be within the same clan' (Mahathir, 1970)—but also with 'town Malays' who intermarried with Indian Muslims and Arabs. Related to this is a spatial dimension to Mahathir's understanding of Malay "exclusion from the commercial life of the country" (Mahathir, 1970, p. 37). Noting the "importance of urbanization in the

progress of a community” (pp. 79–80), he argues that the colonial economy condemned Malays to static, backward, rural areas. Malay ‘backwardness’, then, is, in part, interpreted as a consequence of the geography of colonial development and a planned programme of Malay urbanisation is considered crucial if the Malays are to ‘master’ modern ways

The fact of urbanisation alone involves a process of physical and psychological uprooting of the Malays from the traditional rural society. There can be no doubt that with this uprooting, old values and ways of life must give way to the new (Mahathir, 1970, p. 113).

The urban is thus imagined as a potential incubator of modern Malayness, a remedy for pathological values of the *kampung*.

Mahathir’s conception of the beneficial effects of urban environment and living on Malay conduct was echoed in subsequent state policy documents. The *Second Malaysia Plan 1971–75* (MP2), for example, considered exposure to the “influences of an urban environment” as necessary for the modernisation of Malays (Malaysia, 1971, p. 45). In addition to introducing modern industries to rural areas, therefore, the plan identified a need to develop new urban growth centres in new areas and for the migration of rural inhabitants to existing urban areas (Lee, 1987). More and more Malays did become classified as ‘urban’ during the MP2 period: Malays accounted for some 37.9 per cent of the total urban population by 1980 as compared with only 27.6 in 1970 (Malaysia, 1983, p. 21). More than two-thirds of the rural–urban migrants during the 1970s were Malays (Mohd. Razali, 1989). The Malay rural–urban ‘drift’ was partly a result of ‘push factors’ such as decreasing access to *kampung* land and declining smallholder productivity, but it was also, according to the Malaysian Home Affairs Minister at that time, “a deliberate ... social engineering strategy” (quoted in Ong, 1987, p. 145). Government efforts included the establishment of 59 industrial estates during

the 1970s, 9 of which were free trade zones (FTZs). Export-oriented manufacturing subsidiaries of foreign transnational corporations were lured to these zones on the condition that at least 40 per cent of their workforce was *bumiputera* (Ong, 1981).⁷

Rural–urban migration, however, was not necessarily synonymous with Malay urbanisation. Malay rural migrants arriving in Kuala Lumpur–Klang Valley after 1970 came to live in squatter settlements, either moving to existing squatter areas, or opening up new ones on government or privately owned land (Syed Husin, 1997). Along the Klang Valley, Malay villages on the edge of former tin mines, in particular, became cores of new squatter settlements (Brookfield *et al.*, 1991). Terry McGee’s important work in Southeast Asia in general had long posed doubts about the conventional distinction between urban and rural (McGee, 1967). Certainly, many Malays living in and around Kuala Lumpur in the 1960s and 1970s, including those in Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukom, did not fit neatly into the category of ‘urban’ (McGee, 1976). *Petempatan setinggan* (‘squatter settlements’) are still frequently referred to simply as *kampungs* (‘villages’) (Mohd. Razali, 1993). Azizah Kassim (1982) traces the first official reference to ‘Malay squatters’ back to 1966 but notes that, by the early 1980s, squatting in Kuala Lumpur had become a predominantly ‘Malay problem’.⁸ It was the city *kampung* or, more accurately, the squatter city *kampung* which came to be known as the site of a new urban problematic of Malayness.

City *kampungs* have been rendered problematic by a diversity of ‘experts’ ranging from state policy-makers and international agencies to academics and religious authorities. The very continued use of the term ‘*kampung*’ in the context of UMNO-centred Malay nationalism signifies failed urbanisation. Rather than contributing to the modern, urban(e) life of the nation, Malay squatters are, at best, perceived to have brought the village into the city. One academic report in the mid 1970s, for example, noted the “primitive level” of rubbish disposal at

Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukom and other predominantly Malay squatter *kampungs* (Pirie, 1976, p. 56). What Nooi *et al.* (1996, p. 133) have more recently termed the “dark side” of the *kampung* refers to a wide range of supposedly ‘inadequate’ or ‘improper’ living conditions and issues of urban poverty. There have been various authoritative interventions to address such problems, some, such as the so-called Sang Kancil project, working through existing community organisations (Mohd. Razali, 1989, p. 78). Yet most *in situ* development has been related to more conventional conceptions of ‘political power’. Squatter *kampungs* form potentially significant vote-banks which have been won by the provision (or at least promise) of a range of basic amenities (Guinness, 1992; Yeoh, 2001). Such patronage also conferred some protection against eviction and demolition which were the initial focus of post-1970 urban managerial strategies. In fact, *in situ* governmental interventions such as Sang Kancil were responses to recognition of the difficulty of resettlement and rehousing, particularly with regard to the generation of sufficient public funds (Mohd. Razali, 1989). This policy preference has changed again as *kampung* has increasingly been considered ‘out of place’ in the moral landscape of Malaysia’s main metropolitan centre.

3. Urban(e) Limits

The problematisation of *kampung* in the city landscape in the 1990s remained a matter of aesthetic and moral as well as of strictly economic (or political economic) calculation. Certainly, the increased urgency of squatter resettlement and the eradication of their *kampungs* are associated with rapid urbanisation and industrialisation in the Mahathir era (Syed Husin, 1997). Seen from the perspective of the developmentalist Malaysian state, the squatter *kampung* has become a ‘waste of space’ as demand for city land has risen (see Scott, 1998). However, the inadequacy of such ‘economic’ explanations may be understood in two ways. First, squatter settlements

have no place in Kuala Lumpur City Hall’s idealised vision of the national capital (Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 1993) and attempts to (re)image the city and nation globally (Bunnell, 1999). A second problematisation concerns undesirable social conduct. *Kampung* Malays’ supposed maladaptation to modern, urban life is manifested in new ‘social ills’ such as *dadah* (‘drug abuse’) and *lepak* (‘loafing’) (see Malaysia, 1996). In the authoritative imagination, therefore, squatter *kampungs* are sites which both signify and propagate inappropriate Malay conduct. The repeated official goal of making Kuala Lumpur into a ‘squatter-free’ city⁹ is therefore bound up with broader governmental attempts to realise *Melayu Baru* (the ‘new Malay’) through appropriate urbanisation (see Muhammad, 1993). City Hall’s stated policy is, “to resettle the squatters into planned residential environment [*sic*] with all modern amenities and facilities” (Mokhtar, 1993, p. 17).

The proliferation of low-cost high-rise blocks in the Kuala Lumpur cityscape thus represents a programme of modernist regeneration which may be considered moral as much as infrastructural. The choice of high-rise flats as the appropriate solution to the ‘squatter problem’ in Kuala Lumpur, as elsewhere, of course, is to a large extent determined by cost (see Morshidi *et al.*, 1999). Nonetheless, as technologies of government, these landscape artefacts are intended as means to Malay urbanity. Referring to the process of squatter ‘modernisation’, the Deputy-Director in City Hall’s Economic Planning and Social Amenity Department suggested that “slowly their [squatters’] attitudes are changed in the flats”.¹⁰ Low-cost blocks are imagined as the residential equivalent of the high-rise office; architectural technologies for modern practices of living standing alongside those for modern practices of working. The tragic incident at block 94, however, heightened national awareness of the ‘failure’ of high-rise apartment blocks in realising modern Malays.

The completion of the three 22-storey Putra Ria apartment blocks in 1995 marked

the culmination of a series of overlapping attempts at urban(e) regeneration in and around Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukom. In the mid 1980s, squatters from around the city, including Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukom, were resettled across the Klang River from the original settlement that dates back to the end of the Second World War (Sager, 1997). Resettlement at the site of what is now the Mid-Valley development took the form of low-cost 4-storey blocks and (supposedly temporary) *rumah panjang* ('longhouses') (see Figure 2).¹¹ The nine 4-storey Sri Putra blocks, along with 12 blocks of longhouses, were in turn served an eviction order in 1993 to clear the way for Mid-Valley, a joint venture between Kuala Lumpur City Hall and IGB Corporation, a property and investment holding company.¹² Residents of the Sri Putra flats accounted for some 552 of the 660 units at Putra Ria; a further 8 units were allocated to squatters on the Mid-Valley site which was not part of Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukom. The remaining 100 of the 660 units were purchased by squatters directly from Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukom and they are concentrated in block 94.¹³ The squatter *kampung* borders the new flats between Jalan Bangsar and the new Light Rapid Transit (LRT) track on one side and the Klang River on the other side (see Figure 2). The river separates Putra Ria—Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukom from the Mid-Valley Megamall which opened in November 1999 (see Figure 3). A new series of access roads for 'Asia's largest mall', indeed, make pedestrian access from across the river virtually impossible.

Despite this spatial divide, the landscape provides few visible clues as to the contest that went into its current stage of 'regeneration'. Eviction which was scheduled for December 1995 was delayed as 111 families at the Sri Putra flats refused to move to the low-medium cost Putra Ria apartments. The label 'low-medium' (*sedehana rendah*) carried a price tag of between RM36 000 and RM41 000 depending on position and size¹⁴ as compared to RM 25 000 for low-cost flats (Ghani and Lee, 1997). This was considered

too expensive for a group of residents led by Sri Putra flat *surau* committee chairman, Ahmad Baba (*New Straits Times*, 1996). Contest also included an NGO fighting for squatters' housing rights, 'Urban Pioneers Support Committee' (*Jawatankuasa Sokongan Peneroka Bandar*, JSPB). The term 'urban pioneer' was coined to emphasise the important historical role that these communities have played in the development of the city.¹⁵ JSPB assists and advises squatter communities 'resisting' eviction in the absence of 'fair' compensation and was involved in the Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukom area from the early 1990s.¹⁶

Resistance to resettlement at Sri Putra resulted in the City Hall cutting off water supplies on 15 April 1996. The water supply was reportedly restored after residents visited the mosque where the Lord Mayor attends prayers on Fridays complaining that they were unable to perform prayers themselves in the absence of water for ritual ablutions.¹⁷ However, on 2 August, some 300 City Hall personnel backed by two truck-loads of the Federal Reserve Unit arrived at the scene to evict the residents. Forceful eviction on this occasion was only prevented by the intervention of local Member of Parliament, Shahrizat Abdul Jalil. Of the 111 families, 109 agreed to move that evening, while 2 refused saying that they could not afford the offer. Demolition began on 6 August after the remaining 2 families agreed to move to Putra Ria (Singh, 1996).

The incident at Putra Ria flats on 31 May 1997 is of course to be distinguished from the opposition of former squatters to eviction and resettlement. This mortal transgression is not so much 'resistance' to an authoritative regime as diagnostic of broader aims and means of government of a contested moral order. On the one hand, the incident was readily narrated in terms of an existing discourse of undesirable *kampung* conduct in the Malaysian urban landscape—'inappropriate' garbage disposal, 'backward' values, 'apathetic' attitudes and 'immoral' conduct. On the other hand, the tragic consequences have elevated Putra Ria to a symbolic cen-

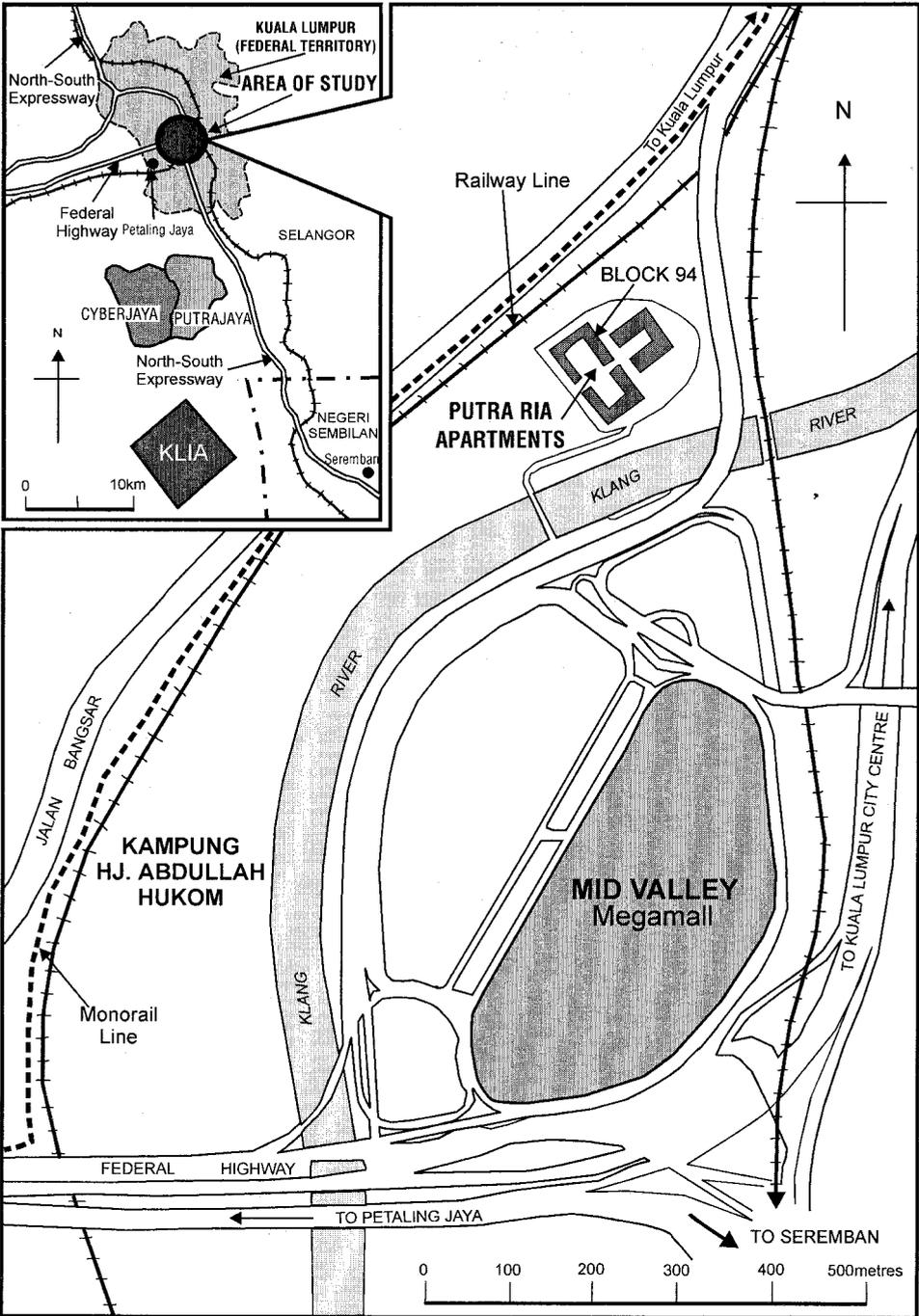


Figure 2. Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukom and surrounding areas.

trality in authoritative evaluation of city conduct. The 'killer litter' incident was the defining transgression of urban(e) limits in the city. Thus, when Prime Minister Ma-

hathir angrily rebuked Malaysians who had 'turned Jalan Bukit Bintang into a dump' some three months later, the 'high-rise littering' at Putra Ria was specifically mentioned



Figure 3. The construction of Mid-Valley Megamall (author's photograph).

alongside other supposed symptoms of 'slow social development': horrific public toilets, illegal dumpsites, vandalism of public utilities and river pollution (Amry, 1997a). The following month it was confirmed: in terms of vandalism and high-rise littering incidents, the Putra Ria flats were 'the worst' in the city (*New Straits Times*, 1997a).

Diverse explanations of problematic high-rise conduct form part of the on-going contested elaboration of appropriate aims and means of government. On the one hand, for city officials, the problem was precisely the lack of discipline and civic consciousness among inhabitants of low- and low-medium-cost dwellings. Acknowledging the failure of high-rise flats as technologies of Malay modernisation, the Deputy-Director of City Hall's Planning and Social Amenity Department complained of "problems caused by undisciplined people who still live like they did in the *kampungs*".¹⁸ Yet this '*kampung* values' explanation of the block 94

incident runs against previous reports on Putra Ria in the state-owned press. Only six weeks earlier, for example, the *New Straits Times* had featured the 'plight' of squatters relocating from Kampung Haji Abdullah Hukum to Putra Ria (Hisham, 1997). This noted not only the crippling price of the 'low-medium' cost flats for poor squatter families, but also the flats' inadequate 'pigeon hole' size, the lack of recreational space for children and the more general poor state of repair of the buildings. One resident is cited as saying

The place is in a sorry state. There are no rubbish chutes and those living on the 22 floor have to come all the way down and go up again, and when the lifts are jammed it's such a problem. And the lifts are always jammed. Then you get people throwing their rubbish from the top floor and you see cars with their windscreens smashed. You see rubbish strewn all over

and we have to pay maintenance costs (quoted in Hisham, 1997).

Urban pioneer NGOs also point to inadequate conditions in the public housing estates. As Syed Husin Ali, JSPB adviser, puts it, such housing usually consists of

two or two and a half room flats in high rise buildings between 18 and 22 stories, and built close to one another with poor workmanship. More often than not there is no playground for children. Garbage collection is irregular and inefficient and soon the environment becomes polluted. These low cost housing areas also turn into a new slum (Syed Husin, 1998, p. 97).

Contest here cannot be adequately framed in terms of a dichotomous opposition counterposing state authorities and their critics. Rather, a range of authorities including local religious leaders, MPs and NGOs are actors entangled in the contested elaboration of land (ab)use as well as means to its regeneration.

It is possible to trace previous and proposed governmental modifications to induce public-flat dwellers to dispense with their 'kampung ways'. On the one hand, the flats currently being built in Kuala Lumpur are a 'third-generation' design.¹⁹ On-going amendments to City Hall government housing estate and building design reflect a governmental faith that future conduct can be finely tuned in desired directions through modern architecture and planning as technologies of government. On the other hand, a range of suggestions for new modes and methods of government in the city emerged from press coverage of the event at block 94. In addition to a more stringent enforcement of existing regulations—one tenant was evicted for throwing a bicycle from the Sri Sabah flats in Jalan Cheras (*The Star, Metro*, 1997a) and there were numerous threats of court action against tenants who failed to pay maintenance arrears for the repair of vandalised public utilities (*New Straits Times*, 1997b)—new surveillance technologies of (self-) regulation were introduced. This included the installation of closed circuit television

at four flats to prevent vandalism (*The Star, Metro*, 1997b) and even 'binocular surveillance' of errant tenants (*Malay Mail*, 1997c) by City Hall! Finally, there were calls for more 'liberal' measures to induce appropriate conduct in residents. The father of the block 94 victim, for example, is reported as advocating "educational programmes ... particularly for squatters or new occupants of high-rise before they are relocated" so that they can "adapt to the new surroundings" (*Malay Mail*, 1997d). This last example is crucial: Malay subjects are shown to have interiorised the rationality that constructs them as in need of new forms of (self-)government on account of their 'kampung ways'. 'Kampung folk' seek to conduct themselves within urban(e) limits.

4. *Kampung* Rules

Not everyone, of course, imagines *kampung* as synonymous with Malay anti-citizenship against which urbanity is defined. Urban pioneer organisations valorise squatter housing and community in opposition to the 'pigeon holes' and 'artificial society' of public housing.²⁰ JSPB volunteers point to the fact that in the *kampung*—even in the squatter *kampung*—houses may be built and rebuilt according to specific and changing needs. *Kampung* housing is thus understood literally to accommodate culture, allowing it to develop and flourish. High-rise flats, in contrast, are said to consist of an inappropriate, standardised design imposed 'from above'. This provides inadequate public space for cultural festivities essential for community well-being. *Kampung* community, indeed, is said to be dismantled once its members are 'put away' in the flats. Connotations of criminality are more than coincidental here;²¹ the lived consequences are said to be confinement, isolation. Finally, urban pioneers no longer enjoy the fruits (and vegetables) of the land that they have 'greened' and 'improved' once they are resettled. *Kampung* here, then, denotes not modes of conduct to be overruled by self-discipline and/or edu-

cation, but a rationalised preference over 'pigeonholing' in modern flats.

However, I suggest that the seductive simplicity of labelling these *kampung* imaginings as 'resistance' in opposition to a developmentalist authoritative rationality oversimplifies the contested government of urban Malayness. Any such dichotomy is clearly untenable given the valorisation of *kampung* in a range of contemporary urban development projects, from private-sector condominiums to state-sponsored 'intelligent cities' under construction in Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor (see Bunnell, forthcoming). *Kampung*, in fact, has long symbolised the seat of traditional Malayness, a retreat or haven from processes of capitalist modernity. This was mobilised in the 1970s, for example, by the Islamic *dakwah* movement which called for a reaffirmation of *kampung* morality (see Kessler, 1980). The contemporary urban (re)valorisation of *kampung*, however, is rather different. Its concern is not with 'traditional' opposition or resistance to Malay modernisation, but with *kampung* as a resource for the contested reworking of the prevailing dominant rationality of government. '*Kampung*', in other words, signals not the failure of governmental strategies for Malay urbanity, but a series of codes for modernity articulated in Malay and even *Malaysian* terms. *Kampung* rules define norms and forms of Malay(sian) modernity.

These aims and means of development emerge, in part, as a result of what might be understood as the 'identity problem' of Malaysia's modernising urban landscape. Identity 'loss' is perhaps most frequently lamented in relation to the modern buildings in which an increasing proportion of Malays live and work and which together constitute a 'placeless' urban milieu. This lamentation has, in fact, been prevalent since the early 1980s during which time it prompted a search for Malay-centred national identity in Malaysian architecture and urban design (Ngiom and Tay, 2000). A common response has been the incorporation of putatively 'local' motifs into modern buildings. '*Kam-*

pung-style' has featured prominently in landscaped national identity-building as evidenced from the entrance to Hijias Kasturi's Maybank Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. *Kampung* symbolism has been widely employed in both the new Federal Government Administrative centre, Putrajaya, and the recently opened Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) (on the latter, see Kurokawa, 1999) (see Figure 2). As regionalist architects have suggested, however, buildings with *kampung* references 'tacked on' function no differently from their modernist international-style denominators (see Yeang, 1989). Certainly, the government of landscape cannot be reduced to the imagination or construction of a recognisable urban form. *Kampung* is also bound up with the (re)definition and promotion of appropriate urban conduct among modern Malays.

Perhaps the most prominent invocation of *kampung* rules for Malay urban(e) conduct concerns the fostering or rekindling of neighbourly interaction and a sense of 'community'. The convenient English translation of the word *kampung* as 'village'—denoting a physical or administrative area—arguably misses a sense of the word as a set of relations between people, a community (Shamsul, 1988). Official texts on Malaysia's new electronic federal government administrative centre, Putrajaya, borrow (at least rhetorically) from '*kampung*' ideas of social organisation. One describes how so-called neighbourhood units are "designed to promote increased social contacts and neighbourly interactions which sadly is rapidly eroding in our pursuit of material progress" (Azizan, 1997, p. 3). The intended result is "a community way of life that encourages high moral values" (Amry, 1997b). *Kampung* is thus valorised in relation to morally problematic Malaysian city life characterised by a lack of civic consciousness and community spirit. An article in the UMNO-controlled *New Straits Times*, following the reported prompting of suggestions by Prime Minister Mahathir, called for "Malaysians migrating from kampungs to urban areas to practice their culture and lifestyle in their new sur-

roundings” (Shukor Rahman, 1996, p. 8). Mahathir, the archetypal proponent of Malay modernisation through urbanisation, is credited with the following characterisation: “The kampung lifestyle is founded on mutual help whereas in the urban areas even immediate neighbours do not know each other” (quoted in Shukor Rahman, 1996). The same article thus suggested that it was “essential that kampung traits like neighbourliness, co-operation, willingness to help, gotong-royong and courtesy be cultivated in city living” (Shukor Rahman, 1996). *Gotong-royong* (‘shared labour’ or voluntary mutual assistance), in particular, is exalted as exemplifying collective *kampung* conduct—appropriate ways of dealing with one another and with ‘others’—informing appropriate Malayness in the urban context.

The government of landscape here extends beyond the (re)shaping of city sites and spaces to foster *kampung* social interaction. Rather, the moral geography of *kampung* rules is also bound up with definitions of appropriate uses of, and interrelations with, the urban environment. In the debate following the ‘shame’ of Jalan Bukit Bintang, one article contrasted the ‘culture of rubbish’ in the city where public places are considered to ‘belong to nobody’ with the cleanliness of the village with its strong sense of collective ownership (Nelson, 1997). Sociologist Norani Othman is cited as prescribing *kampung* as a model of collective environmental responsibility to be translated to the urban context. While the imagined village referent here is clearly not the urban *kampung setinggan*, even the latter has instructive human-environmental relations. In his ‘kampungminium’ project in Rawang, north of Kuala Lumpur, the architect Jimmy Lim ensured that all residents would be allocated a plot enabling them to ‘bond with the environment’²² and thus enjoy what urban pioneers’ groups referred to as the ‘subsidy of the land’.²³ Of course, often such *kampung* reconnections are either marketing gimmicks or else, as Norani points out, ‘done to impress some politician’. Yet these practices and critique of them, I suggest, form part of

the contested emergence and reshaping of the rules of *kampung* government.

The nostalgic marketing of *kampung* should not obscure the fact that *kampung* rules are oriented towards the definition and realisation of Malaysian modernity (see also Kahn, 1992). Three issues exemplify how the *kampung* is harnessed to modern urban(e) development goals. First is a goal of urban sustainability. The design rationale for Malaysia’s new technopole (or ‘intelligent’ city), Cyberjaya (see Figure 2), cites the *kampung* as an example of a

landscape in which human settlement maintains a sustainable level of development, in balance with the natural environment. Resource use does not exceed the regenerative powers of the land (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 1997, p. 46; see also Bunnell, forthcoming).

Similarly, Lim Jee Yuan’s popular *The Malay House: Rediscovering Malaysia’s Indigenous Shelter System* describes *kampung* housing as being “designed with a deep understanding and respect for nature” (Lim, 1987, p. 143)—a “design-with-nature approach” (Lim, 1987, p. 68). Second, is an imperative of investible city visibility. In addition to the incorporation of *kampung* design features into prominent buildings on the city skyline, *kampung* is invoked as the model for civic responsibility and, with it, a sanitised global image. Thirdly, as Patricia Sloane’s work has shown, for many corporate Malays, “Being Kampung” defines a “modern Malay identity” (1999, p. 89).

While the *kampung* encompassed no past economic behaviours that could be utilized in the present, and Malay feudal society had no social behaviours applicable to modern life, the *kampung*, now exalted as a kind of idyllic community, has, to my informants and their political leaders, instructive power in conducting modern relationships (Sloane, 1999, p. 89).

Kampung here is seen as having less to do with Sloane’s informants’ past experiences

than with a crucial definition of their modern, urban(e) identity. If urbanisation has long been considered necessary to overcome *kampung* mentality, a new urban generation looks to the *kampung* as inspiration for conduct befitting Malay(sian) modernity.

The use of parentheses here, finally, demands further explanation. On the one hand, as Sloane's work suggests, *kampung* continues to inform a specifically Malay system of urban(e) conduct. On the other hand, political changes in Malaysia have arguably served to reconfigure relations between 'Malaysian' and 'Malay' in state versions of the nation (Khuo, 1995). While the Malay 'special political position' has been founded upon the Malay *bangsa* (or 'ethnic') as the 'rightful inhabitants' of Malaysia, Mahathir's 'Vision 2020', announced in 1991, envisaged 'Bangsa Malaysia' (Mahathir, 1993). The long-term significance of the current 'multi-cultural rescripting' of Malaysian national identity is a moot point (Bunnell, 2002a). However, the very fact that ethnic Chinese professionals alluded to above are among those authorities seeking to incorporate *kampung* into contemporary urban development is perhaps significant. It suggests not only a role for non-Malays in the (re)definition of aims and means of 'national' development, but also that *kampung* is potentially central to such trans-ethnic reworking. Certainly, *kampung* here no longer signifies "an unadulterated haven against non-Malay worlds" (see Ong, 1987, p. 57). *Kampung* increasingly comes to inform Malaysian, as opposed to exclusively Malay, national rules of urban(e) land use.

5. Conclusion

I have examined '*kampung*' in terms of the contested government of urban(e) Malayness. *Kampung* is understood as both a physical space in the Malaysian urban landscape and a code for how (not) to conduct oneself appropriately in the city. Two versions of *kampung* are shown to co-exist in the moral geography of contemporary Kuala Lumpur. In the first, *kampung* denotes sites

and conduct rendered 'out of place' in the city, transgressing and thereby revealing authoritative urban(e) limits. In the second, *kampung* informs emerging norms and forms of Malay, and increasingly Malaysian, modernity. '*Kampung* rules' of landscaped urban Malay(sian)ness may thus be considered as an increasingly powerful system of evaluation in opposition to a developmentalist rationality of government (see Murdoch, 2000) which has long rendered *kampung* problematic.

However, analysis at the level of rationalities of government unsettles existing conceptualisations of power and contest in urban landscapes (see, for example, Chua, 1995; Ockey, 1997). Writing on Singapore, Chua Beng Huat (1995) has noted the potential for nostalgic everyday imaginings of *kampung*—spaces which have largely disappeared from the 'real' landscape of the city-state—to constitute 'resistance' against a modernising, materialistic present. Such imaginings, according to Chua, are in turn countered by an all-powerful development-oriented state. This binary analytical distinction between the state and its opponents is clearly inadequate in Malaysia and, I would argue, elsewhere too. First, work on governmentality has unsettled taken-for-granted notions of the unity and coherence of state power (Foucault, 1991). Even to the extent that the state can be recognised as a unified actor, in Malaysia at least, it is one which participates in cultural valorisation of *kampung* as well as its problematisation. Yet, more fundamentally, 'government' in Malaysia (and even in Singapore) is the work of a range of authorities *including* the state (see Rose, 1999). In the contested landscape of contemporary Kuala Lumpur, as we have seen, this includes architects, planners, sociologists, NGOs, city government officials, planners and property developers, some of whom are politically opposed to the *Barisan Nasional* government. Secondly, it is misleading to see these authorities as constitutive of 'power' acting upon and/or resisted by everyday individuals and groups. I have charted the contested (re)construction of appropriate urbanity and

means to achieving it. The failure of programmes and strategies gives rise to an ongoing reworking of aims and means of government. In this way, a multiplicity of actors, from errant resettled squatters to the Lord Mayor, are bound up in the refashioning of Kuala Lumpur's normative landscape.

This reworking of 'contest' is not, finally, to dismiss urban inequalities relating to an emergent Malay(sian) rationality of '*kampung* rules'. On the one hand, the *kampung* imaginings of resettled squatters and their advocates appear to be echoed in new ideals and objectives of architects, urban planners and even political authorities. On the other hand, we might ask to what extent the valorisation of *kampung* translates into tangible benefits for the urban poor, of whatever ascribed ethnicity. The exclusive 'kampung-minium' (*Real Estate Review*, 1993), the would-be 'multimedia utopias' of Malaysia's new 'intelligent cities' (Bunnell, 2002b), even 'being kampung' (Sloane, 1999), all imply new social landscapes of division and exclusion. *Kampung* rules are thus bound up with social and spatial 'dividing practices' (see Rose, 1996) centred upon individual and collective (in)abilities of urban(e) self-realisation. In this highly inequitable, contested moral geography, it is no surprise that a rationality of government valorising *kampung* is rising to prominence while the *kampung setingan* disappears from the city landscape at an accelerated rate.

Notes

1. The Malay-language *Utusan Malaysia* (1997) also carried the story, although only on page 3.
2. Personal communication with Officer, Department of Housing Management, Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 8 September 1997.
3. This is the national development, 'Vision 2020' (Mahathir, 1993).
4. The notion of the agency of individuals in (re)making themselves here is crucial. Critical arguments against Michel Foucault's radical decentering of 'the subject' are well rehearsed, but it was precisely through the concept of governmentality that he sought to overcome these in his later work (McNay,

1994). The theme of governmental power is to be distinguished from earlier concerns with the formation of domains of knowledge and with punitive rationalities in its concern with 'rehabilitating agency' (Barnett, 1999, p. 383). As Mitchell Dean puts it

Government concerns the shaping of human conduct and acts on the governed as a locus of action and freedom. It therefore entails the possibility that the governed are to some extent capable of acting and thinking otherwise (Dean, 1999, p. 15).

Work on landscape in cultural geography may be understood as extending these insights through a consideration of spaces of government.

5. Shamsul (1996) distinguishes UMNO 'administrators' from two other factions with the Malay nationalist movement: an Islam faction and the Malay left. Despite this useful distinction, and UMNO's national political success, I consider each of these groups as part of a broader contested 'government of Malayness'.
6. This would appear to draw, in particular, on a neo-Lamarckian belief in the inheritance of acquired characteristics which suggests that modifications can be built up and the tempo of evolution increased (see Livingstone, 1992, p. 189).
7. A term referring to Malays and other constitutionally defined 'indigenous' groups.
8. Even in 1980, in fact, more than half of the squatters in Kuala Lumpur were Chinese. What distinguished Malay squatters as problematic was their relatively rapid rate of increase, especially in the 1970s and their association with urban poverty (Mohd. Razali, 1993). In the year 2000, Malays still did not account for the majority of the total population of the national capital (48.3 per cent) (Mohd. Razali, 2000).
9. Interview with Officer, City Economic Planning Unit, Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 6 August 1997.
10. Interview with Deputy-Director, Economic Planning and Social Amenity Department, Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 15 August 1997.
11. Low-cost housing provision has consistently failed to keep pace with demand with the result that many squatters have been forced to live in *rumah panjang* ('longhouses') while waiting for flats to be made available. Delays and much of the shortfall are routinely attributed to private companies who fail to realise housing quotas set in return for 'development' of squatter *kampung* land. In the 1980s, the failure to realise low-cost

- housing targets was attributed to public-sector inefficiency thus prompting a shift to private-sector provision. By the *Seventh Malaysia Plan* period (starting in 1996), the entire burden of building low-cost housing had been shifted to the private sector (Malaysia, 1996).
12. The Mid-Valley Development is said to be a 'visionary city within a city'. Mid-Valley 'is spread over 50 acres of land and offers over 18 million sq ft of mixed commercial space' (Mid-Valley Sdn. Bhd., 1997). Kuala Lumpur City Hall is a joint-venture partner in the project.
 13. Personal communication with Officer, Department of Housing Management, Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 8 September 1997.
 14. Personal communication with Officer, Department of Housing Management, Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 8 September 1997.
 15. Interview with former JSPB Chairman, 1 August 1997.
 16. Interview with JSPB volunteers, 28 July 1997.
 17. Interview with JSPB volunteers, 28 July 1997.
 18. Interview with Deputy-Director, Economic Planning and Social Amenity Department, Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 15 August 1997.
 19. Interview with Director, Architecture and Special Projects Department, Kuala Lumpur City Hall, 27 August 1997.
 20. Interview with JSPB volunteers, 28 July 1997. The remainder of this paragraph draws upon material from this interview.
 21. One of the reasons why NGOs use the term 'urban pioneer' is precisely because of the connotations of illegality associated with 'squatters' (Syed Husin, 1997).
 22. Interview with Jimmy Lim, 10 July 1997.
 23. Interview with JSPB volunteers, 28 July 1997.

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