Squatters and Squatter Settlements in Kuala Lumpur

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# SQUATTERS AND SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS IN KUALA LUMPUR*

## S. ROBERT AIKEN

THIRD World urban areas will contain approximately 64 percent of the urban residents on the earth by the year 2000, if recent population trends continue.[1] In the Third World, the urbanized population rose from 257.3 million persons to 775.1 million persons between 1950 and 1975, while the count in the developed countries increased from 457.3 million to 782.6 million. The increase was 201.2 percent in the Third World, 71.1 percent in the developed countries.[2] High rates of natural increase in urban areas and rural-to-urban migration account for the "explosion" of urban dwellers in the less-developed two-thirds of the world. Numerous problems have accompanied this rapid growth of the urban population in the Third World: among them are marked housing shortages, increased numbers of squatters, unemployment and underemployment, widespread poverty, persistent disease hazards, traffic congestion, and environmental pollution.[3] The same problems exist in Western cities, but rarely to the acute degree found in the Third World. Squatter settlements, alternatively labeled peripheral, spontaneous, uncontrolled, unauthorized or autonomous, house millions of urbanites in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.[4] The squatter settlement is a major element in the physical fabric of Third World cities and a vivid reminder of the glaring contrasts that exist between the living conditions of the rich and the poor.

Squatters are unauthorized occupants of private or governmental land. Although squatters obviously constitute a legal problem, the basic issue at stake, I contend, is their human condition. Squatting is often initiated by migration of refugees whose motivations are fear, hunger, or rural depression, by the quest for subsistence in the burgeoning urban areas, or by simple opportunism. Surplus rural labor and the need for labor in urban centers combine to

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[1] Global Review of Human Settlements, A Support Paper for Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1976), p. 20.

[2] Global Review of Human Settlements, Statistical Annex (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1976), p. 22.

[3] Charles Abrams, Man's Struggle for Shelter in an Urbanizing World (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1964); Kingsley Davis, Asia's Cities: Problems and Options, Population and Development Review, Vol. 1, 1975, pp. 71–86; D. J. Dwyer, The Third World City, Geographical Magazine, Vol. 50, 1978, pp. 519–522; D. W. Fryer, Cities in Southeast Asia and Their Problems, Focus, Vol. 12, 1972, pp. 1–8; N. G. Gratz, Mosquito-borne Disease Problems in the Urbanization of Tropical Cities, Critical Reviews in Environmental Control, Vol. 3, 1973, pp. 455–495; Alan B. Mountjoy, March of the Peasants from Land to City, Geographical Magazine, Vol. 46, 1974, pp. 208–215; and Yue-Man Yeung, Southeast Asian Cities: Patterns of Growth and Transformation, in Urbanization and Counterurbanization (edited by Brian J. L. Berry; Beverley Hills, Cal.: Sage Publications, 1976), pp. 285–309, reference on pp. 294–297.

[4] Kemal H. Karpat, The Gecekondu: Rural Migration and Urbanization (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 13–14.

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encourage migrations. When there is no housing for the migrants, they appropriate land, often publicly owned land, from which there is less fear of being dislodged than from private property.[5]

In Kuala Lumpur, as elsewhere in Peninsular Malaysia, squatting is essentially a result of poverty, which is in turn related to differential patterns of regional development, occupational structure of the labor force, interethnic and intraethnic income disparities, high levels of unemployment and underemployment, and ultimately low incomes. The existence of a large squatter population in Kuala Lumpur is a reflection not only of conditions in the city but also of economic imbalances in Peninsular Malaysia.

The rapid growth of Kuala Lumpur, the federal capital, has overtaxed the capacity of the city to provide a large segment of its inhabitants with employment opportunities, housing, and basic services. The rural population of Peninsular Malaysia, meanwhile, continues to increase and thus provides a swelling reservoir of potential migrants to the city.[6] A substantial number of new migrants and many of the urban poor who were born in the city will be absorbed by squatter settlements.

### GROWTH AND ECONOMY OF KUALA LUMPUR

Located at the confluence of the Klang and Gombak rivers, Kuala Lumpur has long been a center of trade and commerce. Tin mining was responsible for the early rapid growth of the town, and its administrative role began in 1880 when the British transferred the capital of Selangor from Klang to Kuala Lumpur. In 1896 Kuala Lumpur was chosen as the capital of the Federated Malay States (Selangor, Perak, Pahang, and Negri Sembilan), a choice that added important political and administrative functions to the rising commercial significance of the city.[7] Between 1896 and 1910 road and rail networks were centered on Kuala Lumpur, and the city began to emerge as a major commercial focus for the developed west-coast lowlands (with the exception of Singapore).[8] By the late 1920s the population of Kuala Lumpur reached 100,000 and by 1947 was almost 176,000. The rapid growth of the city during the interwar period was intimately associated with the varied fortunes of tin and rubber production, the two mainstays of the economy, both of which relied heavily on alien immigrant labor. Many immigrants, the majority of whom came from China and India, found employment opportunities in Kuala Lumpur.

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[5] Abrams, footnote 3 above, p. 14.

[6] Robin J. Pryor, Internal Migrants in Peninsular Malaysia, *Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 46, 1978, pp. 61–75.

[7] W. J. Bennett, Kuala Lumpur: A Town of the Equatorial Lowlands, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, Vol. 52, 1961, pp. 327–333; J. M. Gullick, The Story of Kuala Lumpur (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1965); and Hamzah Sendut, The Structure of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's Capital City, *in* The City in Newly Developing Countries: Readings on Urbanism and Urbanization (edited by Gerald Breese; Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 461–473.

[8] C. A. Fisher, The Railway Geography of British Malaya, *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol. 64, 1948, pp. 123–136; Thomas R. Leinbach, Transportation and Modernization in Malaya (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Geography, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, 1971), pp. 34–71; and G. T. Missen, The Big City in Malaya: A Study of Kuala Lumpur, Capital of a New Nation, *in* New Viewpoints in Economic Geography: Case Studies from Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, North America (edited by J. Rutherford, M. I. Logan, and G. T. Missen; Sydney: Martindale Press, 1966), p. 394.

## GROWTH OF KUALA LUMPUR (1895-1974)

N

🐟 1895

——— 1903

••••••• 1924

— — — 1954
(Municipal Area)

—·—·— 1974
(Federal Territory)

——— Major Roads

PERLIS THAILAND
KEDAH
6°
PENANG PERAK
KELANTAN
TRENGGANU
PAHANG
4°
SELANGOR
Kuala Lumpur
★
NEGRI
SEMBILAN
MALACCA
JOHORE
2°
PENINSULAR        SINGAPORE
MALAYSIA
100°        102°        104°

0        60 MI.
0        60 KM.

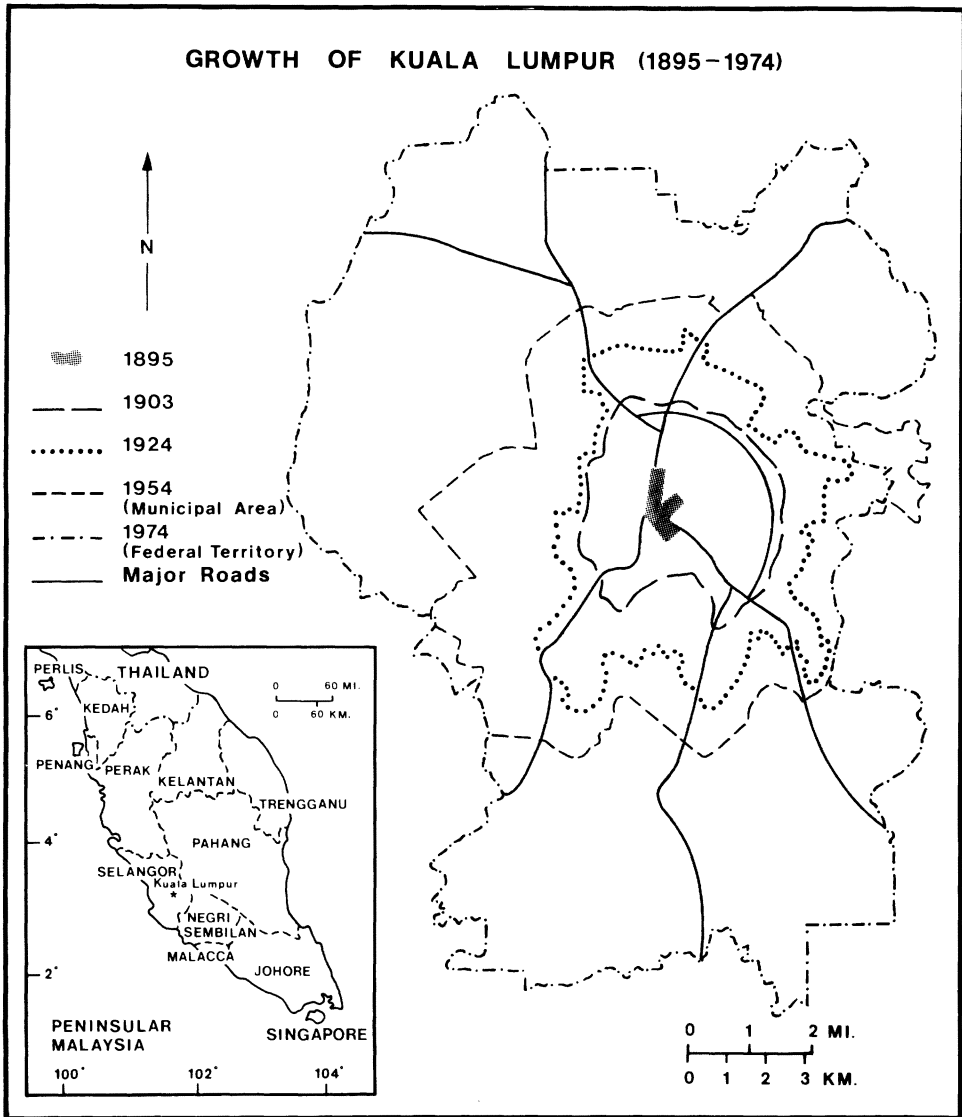0        1        2 MI.
0    1    2    3 KM.

FIG. 1—The growth of Kuala Lumpur, 1895–1974. *Source:* Aiken and Leigh, text footnote 9, p. 549.

Kuala Lumpur is now the religious, cultural, educational, political, and commercial center of Malaysia. No longer dependent on immigration, the city has grown through natural increase, annexation of adjacent areas, and rural-urban and interurban migration. After independence in 1957 the principal trends were the concentration of industry in and around Kuala Lumpur, the rapid suburbanization of the population, and, since 1965 when Singapore withdrew from the federation, the expansion of the hinterland of Kuala Lumpur to embrace the entire country. During the period 1957 to 1970 the population of the city increased at more than twice the rate of the total population of the pen-

insula. In 1974 almost all of the municipality of Kuala Lumpur with an area of thirty-six square miles was included in the ninety-four-square-miles area of the newly created Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur (Fig. 1). In 1977 the estimated population of the Federal Territory was 820,000. The almost continuous built-up region between Kuala Lumpur and Port Klang will increasingly dominate the settlement system of peninsular Malaysia.[9]

A fundamental difference between most Third World cities and Western ones is the urban economic structure. The rapid growth of the economically advanced urban areas was sustained by the creation of productive job opportunities, initially in manufacturing and later in retailing, services, and other branches of the tertiary sector of the economy. Recent experiences of most Third World countries differ. In Peninsular Malaysia, one of the richest regions in Southeast Asia, opportunities for productive employment have not kept pace with the growth of urban population.

The economy of Kuala Lumpur has two sectors: the capital-intensive, Western-style or formal sector, and the labor-intensive, traditional or informal sector. The informal sector comprises activities such as petty trading, food hawking, domestic service, and numerous small home-based manufactures, the last mostly confined to the Chinese-dominated parts of the city.[10] Only the informal sector has the ability to absorb a sizable number of the urban labor force, albeit at high levels of underemployment and low levels of income. This "involuted" sector of the urban economy employs the most people in Kuala Lumpur.[11]

Some indication of the importance of the informal sector in Kuala Lumpur may be obtained from the size of the hawker population. In major concentrations there were an estimated 13,000 or more hawkers, most of whom were born in the urban area or had lived there for ten or more years. The total number of licensed and unlicensed hawkers might be as high as 30,000.[12] Hawking and other informal activities are commonly the only source of employment for unskilled and poorly educated persons. These activities provide large numbers of people with cheap food products, dry goods, and services in an efficient distributive system. Although individual incomes in the informal sector are generally low, the total income generated may be substantial. In view of generally limited employment in industry and tertiary activities of the formal sector, penetration of the labor-intensive sector by the capital-intensive sector offers little except more unemployment.[13] In other words, benefits may be

[9] S. Robert Aiken and Colin H. Leigh, Malaysia's Emerging Conurbation, Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 65, 1975, pp. 546–563, reference on pp. 546–554; and Economic Report 1977/78 (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Finance, 1977), p. 164.
[10] Ali bin Esa, Kuala Lumpur, in Rural-Urban Migration and Metropolitan Development (edited by Aprodicio A. Laquian; Toronto: Intermet, 1971), p. 105.
[11] W. R. Armstrong and T. G. McGee, Revolutionary Change and the Third World City: A Theory of Urban Involution, Civilization, Vol. 18, 1968, pp. 353–378; and Clifford Geertz, Peddlers and Princes: Social Change and Economic Modernization in Two Indonesian Towns (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 28–81.
[12] T. G. McGee and Y. M. Yeung, Hawkers in Southeast Asian Cities: Planning for the Bazaar Economy (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1977), pp. 33 and 36–40; and The Star (Penang), April 11, 1977. Unless otherwise noted, all newspaper citations refer to Kuala Lumpur editions.
[13] Brian J. L. Berry, The Human Consequences of Urbanization: Divergent Paths in the Urban Experience of the Twentieth Century (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 93–94.

derived from the careful planning and gradual upgrading of the informal sector, not from its rapid eradication.[14]

The existence of the two-sector urban economy with high rates of under-employment and unemployment, low incomes, and poor access to urban services and facilities in the informal sector is a major reason for widespread poverty in Kuala Lumpur. The poor, however, are not confined to the informal sector but rather are found throughout the secondary and tertiary activities of the formal and informal sectors of the economy.[15] Squatters are generally the poorest of the urban poor and the most economically depressed group of the population in the Federal Territory. In 1977 approximately 73 percent of squatter households in the territory had an income of less than US$141 per month; in contrast 49 percent of all households in the area was in this income category.[16] An additional problem is that the age structure of the population is heavily weighted in favor of the age group zero to fourteen years. Unemployment is a particularly serious problem for the age group fifteen to nineteen years. The large number of young persons results in a variety of strains on basic services such as education, health care, and housing.

SQUATTER CHARACTERISTICS

Before World War II squatting was not a major problem in the cities of Southeast Asia. During the war many persons migrated to urban areas in search of employment and safety. The rapid increase of squatters in Kuala Lumpur began during the Japanese occupation of Malaya from 1941 to 1945, when "an impoverished economy brought many people. . .into town in search of a living, and. . .greater security."[17] Several squatter settlements were constructed in close proximity to wealthy residential areas.

The squatter population of Kuala Lumpur fluctuated considerably during the past three decades, although the available information is not totally reliable. In 1954 the number was approximately 140,000, or 50 percent of the municipal population, but by 1961 the figures declined to 100,000 and 25 percent.[18] A survey by the municipality of Kuala Lumpur from 1966 to 1968 reported 26,000 squatter households, or 32 percent of all households, in the city.[19] On the assumption of an occupancy-rate ratio of 5.7 persons per household, the squatter population was estimated at 150,000.[20] By 1973 the number of squatter

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[14] T. G. McGee, The Persistence of the Proto-Proletariat: Occupational Structures and Planning of the Future of Third World Cities, in Third World Urbanization (edited by Janet Abu-Lughod and Richard Hay Jr.; Chicago: Maaroufa Press, 1977), pp. 257–270, reference on pp. 269–270.

[15] Government of Malaysia, Third Malaysia Plan 1976–1980 (Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1976), p. 167.

[16] Economic Report, footnote 9 above, p. 164.

[17] Bennett, footnote 7 above, p. 328; and Chong Seck-Chim, The Development of Kuala Lumpur District, Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography, Vol. 3, 1954, pp. 48–50.

[18] T. G. McGee, The Southeast Asian City: A Social Geography of the Primate Cities of Southeast Asia (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1967), pp. 146 and 157.

[19] Cited in Emiel A. Wegelin, Some Characteristics of Squatters in Kelang Valley Area, Development Forum (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Centre for Development Studies), Vol. 4, 1974, pp. 39–46, reference on p. 40.

[20] Ishak Shari, Squatters: The Urban Poor in Kuala Lumpur, in Some Case Studies on Poverty in

## SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS IN KUALA LUMPUR (1973)

N

_._._ Federal Territory
_ _ _ Municipal Area
~ Squatter Areas
_____ Major Roads
~~~ Major Rivers
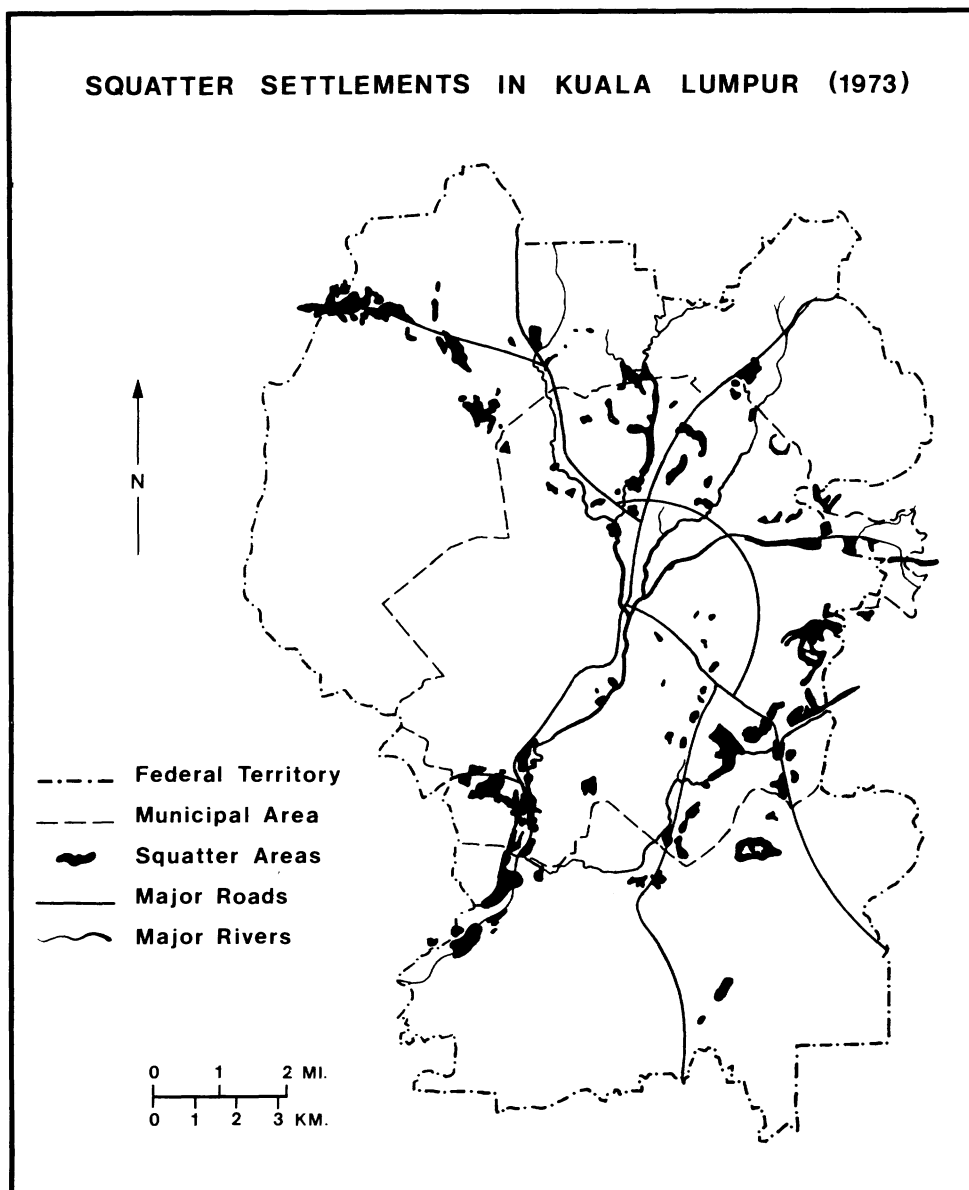
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0  1  2  3 KM.

FIG. 2—Squatter settlements in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, 1973. *Source:* Meade and Wegelin, text footnote 44, p. 53.

households had increased to 29,000, or 30.6 percent of the households in the city. Application of the occupancy ratio given above yields a squatter population of 165,000. The decline of the percentage of squatter households between 1968 and 1973 was the result of two factors: the clearance of squatter areas

Malaysia: Essays Presented to Ungku A. Aziz (edited by B. A. R. Mokhzani and Khoo Siew Mun; Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1977), p. 110.

inside the old municipal limits, and the settlement of many rural migrants outside the city limits.[21] The creation of the Federal Territory in 1974 increased the number of squatters counted in Kuala Lumpur because numerous peripheral squatter settlements were incorporated in the expanded city (Fig. 2).

There is little agreement on the number of squatters presently in the Federal Territory. Newspaper reports in the late 1970s gave figures between 200,000 and 226,000.[22] A government ministry stated that an estimated 175,360 squatters, or 21 percent of the population in the Federal Territory, were dispersed in 106 settlements with 29,308 housing units.[23] It remains uncertain how these estimates were determined, but the sources concur that the absolute number of squatters has increased in recent years, while the percentage of squatters as part of the total urban population has declined.

Squatters in Kuala Lumpur included persons from the three major ethnic groups of the peninsula. The 1966–1968 survey indicated that 67.2 percent of the squatters was Chinese, 20.4 percent Malay, and the remainder primarily Indian.[24] These ethnic proportions changed dramatically by 1977: 45 percent was Chinese, 44 percent Malay, and 11 percent Indian. In the same year the ethnic composition of the total population in the Federal Territory was 58 percent Chinese, 25 percent Malay, and 17 percent Indian.[25] Clearly the Chinese and Indian communities were underrepresented, and the Malays were overrepresented in the squatter population.

I will now examine the rapid increase of Malay squatters in Kuala Lumpur. In 1947 the Malay proportion of the population of Kuala Lumpur was 12.5 percent; by 1970 the figure had doubled. During the decade prior to independence, Malays were drawn to the city by opportunities for employment in the police, the armed forces, and the civil service. Available housing in the Malay sections of the city was soon exhausted by the rapid influx. By 1961 approximately half of the Malay population in Kuala Lumpur lived in scattered, but ethnically homogeneous squatter settlements.[26] After independence the Malays acquired political power, and the government initiated a program of rural development with improvement of Malay living conditions as a primary aim. Control of the urban capitalist economy was left largely to the Chinese. Rural modernization, however, did not stop the movement of Malays to the urban areas that were perceived as having preferable economic opportunities, but in which the Malays had to compete with the Chinese for limited employment, housing, and other facilities.[27]

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[21] Wegelin, footnote 19 above, p. 40.

[22] *Malay Mail*, July 1, 1977; and *New Straits Times*, June 14, 1976, and August 23, 1976.

[23] Economic Report, footnote 9 above, p. 164.

[24] Cited in Esa, footnote 10 above, p. 100.

[25] Economic Report, footnote 9 above, p. 164.

[26] T. G. McGee, Rural-Urban Migration in a Plural Society: A Case Study of Malays in West Malaysia, *in* The City as a Centre of Change in Asia (edited by D. J. Dwyer; Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1972), p. 114; and McGee, footnote 18 above, p. 161.

[27] Hamzah Sendut, Patterns of Urbanization in Malaya, *Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 16, 1962, pp. 114–130, reference on pp. 121–122; T. G. McGee, Beach-Heads and Enclaves: The Urban Debate and the Urbanization Process in South-East Asia, *in* Changing South-East Asian Cities: Readings on Urbanization (edited by Y. M. Yeung and C. P. Lo; Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 69; and Fred R. von der Mehden, Communalism, Industrial Policy and Income Distribution in Malaysia, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 15, 1975, pp. 247–261.

An important factor behind the movement of Malays to Kuala Lumpur is the continued identification of income, employment structure, differential regional development, and other characteristics of life in Peninsular Malaysia with the ethnically based plural structure of the society. As Wolfgang Kasper observed, albeit rather baldly, "Malays generally form the majority of the poorer income groups and regions and live in the rural areas, while the Chinese dominate the relatively better off income groups, regions, and urban areas."[28] This generalization was substantiated by data from the intercensal period 1957 to 1970 when relative incomes of rural dwellers, predominantly Malays, probably declined, and when the Malays suffered a higher incidence of poverty than the Indians and the Chinese.[29] These conditions, combined with the promises of the government to provide Malays with employment in industry and commerce in order to eliminate the longstanding association of ethnicity with particular economic activities, continue to lure Malays to the capital city. Many in-migrants, the bulk of whom are from states adjacent to Selangor, are poor, unskilled, and unable to afford conventional housing.[30] Thus in-migration of the economically deprived and incorporation of squatter settlements on the peripheries of the city account for the rapid increase of the percentage of Malay squatters in the Federal Territory.

The Chinese are generally more prosperous than their Indian and Malay counterparts, but poverty in Kuala Lumpur has no racial or ethnic barriers. Tens of thousands of poor Chinese are concentrated in central-city slum areas, and, at least until recently, the Chinese, who have always been numerically dominant in Kuala Lumpur, composed the majority of the squatter population.[31] Urban poverty is a relatively new experience for most Malay squatters. In contrast, 41.4 percent of the Chinese squatters were born in the city.[32] In both absolute and relative terms the Chinese squatter population has declined, while the size of the Malay squatter community has risen sharply. The Malay share of the squatter population in Kuala Lumpur will probably continue to increase because, of the three largest ethnic groups on the peninsula, the Malays are the poorest, constitute the largest reservoir of potential rural-urban migrants, have the highest propensity to migrate, experience the fastest rate of urban population growth, and are generally the least socially and economically mobile.[33]

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[28] Wolfgang Kasper, Malaysia: A Study in Successful Economic Development (Washington, D. C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1974), p. 36.

[29] D. R. Snodgrass, Trends and Patterns in Malaysian Income Distribution, 1957–70, in Readings on Malaysian Economic Development (edited by David Lim; Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 251–268.

[30] Town Drift: Social and Policy Implications in Eight Developing Countries (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1973), p. 51; and Suresh Narayanan, A Note on Internal Migration and Regional Growth Trends in Peninsular Malaysia, 1957–1970, Malayan Economic Review, Vol. 23, 1978, pp. 53–60.

[31] M. S. Sidhu, Chinese Dominance of West Malaysian Towns, 1921–1970, Geography, Vol. 61, 1976, pp. 17–23.

[32] Town Drift, footnote 30 above, p. 51.

[33] Suresh Narayanan, Patterns and Implications of Urban Change in Peninsular Malaysia, Malayan Economic Review, Vol. 20, 1975, pp. 55–71, reference on p. 66; and Robin J. Pryor, Malaysians on the Move: A Study of Internal Migration in West Malaysia (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Geography, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1972), p. 639.

Most squatters have resided in the Federal Territory for more than five years. The longer association of the Chinese and Indian squatters with the city, compared with that of the Malays, is reflected in the differential size of households and the average age of household heads by ethnic group. Malay squatter households on the average are smaller than their Indian and Chinese counterparts, and the mean age of Malay heads of household is considerably lower than in the other two squatter communities. These facts convey an image of young families that recently migrated from rural areas.[34]

Squatters of both rural and urban origins move to the capital in search of employment, higher incomes, and better prospects for their children. A study of rehoused squatters in the Cheras Road Flats of Kuala Lumpur revealed that 45 percent of the migrants to the city were unemployed in their place of origin, 20 percent migrated because of low incomes in their home areas, and the rest either followed their parents to the city or moved there for further education.[35] A study of Kampong Setor, a Malay squatter settlement in Kuala Lumpur, reported that the majority of household heads was born in rural areas and was unmarried on arrival in the city. Later evidence suggested that the percentage of individuals who were married on arrival in the city had probably increased considerably during recent years.[36]

Most squatters lack the qualifications and the means to achieve more than a minimal livelihood. Two consequences are that socioeconomic mobility for the majority of the squatters is curtailed and that poverty may be perpetuated through one or more generations. Although some squatters in Kuala Lumpur are relatively affluent, own property, and rent to other squatters, the majority is poor or very poor. Because of inflation and the high cost of living in the city, the real income of all three ethnic squatter communities probably declined in recent years.

LOCATIONS AND LIVING CONDITIONS

Squatter settlements differ considerably in appearance and internal layout. They have been described as chaotic, haphazard, and slumlike. To one observer they were a spreading malady harboring "excessive squalor, filth, and poverty."[37] These perspectives, however, were based largely on comparisons with the Western city and tended to be grounded in the concept of the culture of poverty that Oscar Lewis initially expounded.[38] I offer a different perspective that emphasizes the role of the squatter settlement in the process of adaptation to urban life.

The inner and outer areas of Third World cities contain squatter settlements, but the large ones are usually on the periphery. Studies of squatter settlements

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[34] Wegelin, footnote 19 above, p. 41.
[35] Toh Kin Woon, Urban Poor: The Case of the Cheras Road Flat Dwellers, in Some Case Studies, footnote 20 above, p. 128.
[36] McGee, footnote 18 above, p. 164; and Town Drift, footnote 30 above, p. 98.
[37] Morris Juppenlatz, Cities in Transformation: The Urban Squatter Problem of the Developing World (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1970), p. 5.
[38] Oscar Lewis, The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family (New York: Random House, 1961), pp. xxiv–xxvii; and Charles A. Valentine, 'The Culture of Poverty': Its Scientific Significance and Its Implications for Action, in The Culture of Poverty: A Critique (edited by Eleanor Burke Leacock; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), pp. 193–225.

in Southeast Asian cities tend to emphasize two locational factors: availability of land, especially public land that is unsuitable for development purposes, and proximity to employment and markets.[39] In Kuala Lumpur there are a few large squatter colonies in outlying areas, numerous others around the fringe of the central city, and only a handful of small settlements in the central area (Fig. 2). Squatter settlements are found along roads, railroads, and riverbanks, on undeveloped land or wasteland at the periphery of the city, and on vacant land in the city. Several areas are subject to periodic flooding, and many have no access roads.

Proximity to employment is an important locational variable in Kuala Lumpur, and squatter colonies can generate their own employment opportunities. One observer noted that Chinese squatter settlements in the southern part of the city were "characterized by a multiplicity of tiny workshops engaged in such business as the repair of motor vehicles, metal and wood working and the manufacture of concrete products."[40] Some squatters close to the central commercial area or adjacent to commercial nodes along major arteries find employment in these areas, while other squatters are located near factories and other sources of employment. In Kampong Kelantan, 51 percent of the squatters lived less than three miles from their place of work.[41]

Squatter settlements in the Federal Territory have considerable diversity of age, density, and appearance. Houses in some areas are well built and substantial, but in others extremely flimsy. Malay squatters tend to live in settlements that resemble rural kampongs. In these areas traditional house styles are replicated; dirt paths link the houses and give access to the outside world; chickens scavenge for food; fruit trees and vegetables may surround the dwellings. Chinese squatters, on the other hand, commonly live in settlements that resemble urban slums. Evidence from a 1966 survey indicated that Malays tended to squat on public land, the Chinese on private land, most of which is in the central area; that rents were higher on private land than on public land; and that accessibility to electricity, water, and sewage facilities was much greater on private land than on public land.[42]

In 1973 an estimated 80 percent of the squatters had no electricity, 75 percent had no piped water, and 35 percent lacked sewage facilities.[43] Later estimates for conditions on government land were 90 percent lacking piped water and 94 percent lacking electricity. The same source noted the complaints of squatters about rats, mosquitoes, waste disposal, indoor crowding, and other problems.[44] Few squatters have hygienic toilets. The sewage system remains essentially unchanged since 1964.

[39] R. P. Poethig, The Squatters of Southeast Asia, Ekistics, Vol. 31, 1971, pp. 121–125; and Richard Ulack, The Role of Urban Squatter Settlements, Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 68, 1978, pp. 535–550.

[40] J. C. Jackson, Urban Squatters in Southeast Asia, Geography, Vol. 59, 1974, pp. 28–29.

[41] Shari, footnote 20 above, p. 115.

[42] Esa, footnote 10 above, pp. 100–101.

[43] Emiel A. Wegelin, Urban Low-Income Housing and Development: A Case Study in Peninsular Malaysia, Studies in Development and Planning (Leiden and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), Vol. 6, pp. 107–109.

[44] Melinda S. Meade and Emiel A. Wegelin, Some Aspects of the Health Environments of Squatters and Rehoused Squatters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Journal of Tropical Geography, Vol. 41, 1975, pp. 45–58, reference on pp. 51–54.

Because of the general absence of piped water, sewage facilities, and hygienic surroundings, squatters are subject to various disease hazards. A particularly serious problem for the young is the threat of dengue hemorrhagic fever (DHF), a relatively new viral disease that may result in mortality rates of 10 percent. The main vector of DHF, the mosquito *Aedes aegypti*, finds ideal breeding sites in household-water containers, discarded cans and tires, roof gutters, and other manmade habitats in squatter settlements.[45] Although filariasis is not now a problem in Kuala Lumpur, conditions in some squatter settlements provide potential-breeding sites for the vector of the disease, the mosquito *Culex pipiens fatigans*, that seeks larval habitats in cesspits and organically polluted stagnant water. Inadequate diets, crowded living conditions, and unsanitary surroundings result in high infant, child, and maternal death rates, malnutrition, and fecally transmitted and airborne diseases.[46]

## PERCEPTION OF SQUATTERS AND SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS

Planning for squatters in Kuala Lumpur, to be effective, not only should take cognizance of the perception of squatters and their residences by government officials, planners, and architects but also should embrace the squatters' perception of their own conditions, their values, their needs, their aspirations, and their human capabilities. To my knowledge these themes have not been systematically investigated. My discussion of them is admittedly suggestive rather than comprehensive or definitive.

The position of the government on squatting, officially at least, is legalistic. As one minister stated, "To occupy any State land illegally is wrong and against the law. We must be firm and try to stop such things from taking place."[47] Any other position would be tantamount to extending security of tenure to the squatter population. In Malaysia, as in many other Third World countries, squatting is perceived negatively by the government. Illegal settlements, it is contended, harbor criminals and racketeers, pose fire and disease hazards, impede the orderly development of the city, result in a loss of revenue from assessment rates, tarnish the image of the capital at home and abroad, and, if not cleared away or at least disapproved of, simply encourage additional squatting; furthermore, squatting promotes juvenile delinquency, challenges the status of the government as the source of law and order, and threatens the economic, social, and political stability of the city.[48]

The overall import of these contentions is that Kuala Lumpur does not match the government image of the ideal city, that is, does not resemble the Western model. Although the incidences of fires and certain diseases are higher in squatter settlements than in low-cost housing schemes, the same pattern cannot be demonstrated for crime rates.[49] The negative images, furthermore, fail to

[45] S. Robert Aiken and Colin H. Leigh, Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever in South-east Asia, *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, Vol. 3, 1978, pp. 476–497, references on pp. 479 and 484.
[46] Khairuddin Yusof and T. A. Sinnathuray, Medical Index of Poverty, *in* Some Case Studies, footnote 20 above, pp. 41–52.
[47] *New Straits Times*, June 14, 1976.
[48] Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, Squatters in Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lumpur, n.d., pp. 6–7.
[49] Wegelin, footnote 43 above, pp. 200, 253–256, and 265–276.

recognize the role of the squatter settlement in the process of adaptation to urban life or the contribution of squatters to the economy of the city. Unofficially the government often ignores squatting, probably for various reasons, including humanitarian considerations, social and political pressures, magnitude of the squatter population, and financial, administrative, and personnel constraints únder which the government operates.[50]

The perception of the squatter "problem" by architects and planners is not clear from the available evidence. Some clues, however, may be obtained from one of their major preoccupations in recent years—the planning of new towns and suburbs in the Klang Valley. The plans incorporate rigid land-use and zoning regulations and tend to emphasize the physical components of planning rather than the socioeconomic, environmental, and communal aspects of urban development. Residential areas are laid out largely in accordance with Western, especially British, planning practices. Low-income housing in the new towns and suburbs is invariably beyond the means of squatters, and no attempt is made in these areas or in squatter-resettlement housing to incorporate indigenous architectural styles and arrangements of interior spaces in the planning process. There may be some truth in the charge that architects and planners perceive squatting as a "wasteful and costly use of urban land 'grabbed' by the squatters which could be used for alternative and more profitable purposes."[51]

How do squatters perceive their lot? The available fragmentary evidence indicates that the majority of squatters in Kuala Lumpur is satisfied with their present circumstances. Squatters from rural areas are predominantly Malays who tend to view their life in the city as preferable to their previous one and as better for their children. Initially the Malays probably find the city less attractive than do their Chinese counterparts, many of whom are experienced urban residents. Because the first years of living in a city are usually the most difficult in terms of adaptation, some Malays display a willingness to return home. For the majority of squatters, satisfaction with life in the city is measured not only in terms of individual economic betterment but also in relation to the presence or the absence of community life and values. In Kuala Lumpur, as in other Third World cities, less attention is given to the quality of housing than to employment opportunities, to proximity to work and schools, and to available utilities and services.[52]

## PLANNING IN KUALA LUMPUR

Planning in Kuala Lumpur has been haphazard, desultory, and primarily confined to paper. Planning was introduced in 1921 with the "objective of controlling, guiding and determining the proper planning of all land in the town."[53] The controls imposed, however, tended to be negative rather than positive because they emphasized the avoidance of problems rather than the encouragement of the best possible development of land in the city. The first

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[50] Chan Kok Eng, Lim Heng Kow, and Tunku Shamsul Bahrin, Urban Squatters—An Adaptation to Poverty?, in Some Case Studies, footnote 20 above, pp. 99–108, reference on p. 102.
[51] Shari, footnote 20 above, p. 121.
[52] Town Drift, footnote 30 above, pp. 7–8, 111–112, and 123–124.
[53] Ghazali Mohd. Ali, Recreation/Open Space (Kuala Lumpur Perspective), *Majallah Akitek*, No. 3, 1975, p. 10.

plan for Kuala Lumpur was prepared and published in 1939 and remained in force, despite subsequent changes in the growth and the composition of the city, until the early 1960s, when the provisions in the plan were outmoded. A new master plan, consisting of three documents on land use zoning, residential density, and central-area development, was published in 1967. In 1970 the National Operations Council officially promulgated Emergency (Essential Powers) Ordinance No. 46 to regulate planning in Kuala Lumpur. Henceforth the development of Kuala Lumpur was to be guided by a set of Comprehensive Development Plans that were similar to the 1967 documents. The plans, however, have been roundly criticized because they are ambiguous, are not master plans, and have "caused more disorders and confusions to the physical development of Kuala Lumpur than desirable results."[54]

With the creation of the Federal Territory, a new master plan became necessary. During the past few years newspaper reports asserted that the new plan would be ready in two years. Recent evidence indicates that an up-to-date map of the city has been prepared and that the provisions of the City of Kuala Lumpur (Planning) Act of 1973, which superceded the Emergency (Essential Powers) Ordinance but retained the original comprehensive plans, have been extended to areas outside the old municipal boundaries that are now in the Federal Territory.

Because squatters have generally been perceived by the government to have no place in the well-ordered city of the future, they have been subject to *ad hoc*, largely uncoordinated, planning strategies. For the most part, rigid land-use exercises and planning for physical structures take precedence over planning for people. Late in 1979 the government announced that a new master plan for Kuala Lumpur would be completed in 1980 and that in the plan "special consideration would be made for squatters living in the capital." The announcement noted that "squatters had a role to play in the development and economic progress of the capital."[55] Positive statements such as these are relatively new and hopefully signal the emergence of new attitudes on the part of the government toward the squatter population.

Planning for squatters in the Federal Territory is the responsibility of the federal government and its appointed agencies. To solve the so-called squatter problem in Kuala Lumpur, the government has pursued a number of policies: relocation in conventional low-income housing schemes, eviction without alternative housing or compensation, upgrading of existing settlements through the provision of utilities such as electricity, piped water, and drainage facilities, and site-and-service projects. Of these policies, the first forms the centerpiece of the government-planning objectives; the second, because of humanitarian considerations and political pressures, is probably not widely invoked at present; the third, although it may become important, is generally pursued on an *ad hoc* basis; and the fourth has suffered a number of setbacks.

A study of relocation in low-income housing schemes in the Klang Valley demonstrated that rehousing provides squatters with security of tenure and with vital services. Social benefits such as improved performance at work and

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[54] W. Y. Chin, The Traffic Dilemma of Kuala Lumpur, *Majallah Akitek*, No. 4, 1976, p. 12.
[55] *Malaysia*, September, 1979, p. 5; and *New Straits Times*, June 15, 1979.

school, lowered incidence of fires, and decrease in incidents of illness can also result. Other problems, however, may arise or continue: increased distance from work places, poor construction standards, high noise levels in multistory apartment buildings, and crowding. Crime is not reduced by rehousing, and electricity, water, and rent must be paid from often meager incomes. Interracial tolerance is perhaps promoted in integrated low-rise and terraced-housing projects, but not in high-rise structures. The advantages and the disadvantages of conventional low-income housing are recognized by squatters and rehoused squatters.[56]

To date low-cost housing schemes have been insufficient to meet the demand for minimum-standard housing in Kuala Lumpur. From 1968 to 1973, when the number of squatter households in the city increased, only 8,500 units of low-income housing were completed in the greater Kuala Lumpur area, and fewer than half of them went to squatter families.[57] During the period of the Third Malaysia Plan (1976–1980), M$156 million, or US$73.3 million, were to have been allocated to the construction of more than 13,000 housing units in the Federal Territory, not all of which were for squatters.[58] Early in 1979 the number of completed units was well below the projected target. Demand greatly outstrips supply: 14,000 persons applied for 676 units in the Cheras Road Flats.[59]

Although the government has recently shown an increased interest in low-cost housing, the number of units completed in the Federal Territory has not been sufficient. This situation is unfortunate, because construction of conventional low-income housing is an efficient economic policy. This viewpoint is supported by a small, but growing number of scholars who contend that allocation of financial resources to housing, contrary to the opinions of some economists, contributes significantly to economic development.[60] Although Malaysia should increase its expenditure on public housing, this policy alone will not solve the housing problem. Rural-urban migration will continue apace, and a sizable proportion of the urban poor cannot afford the rents and the other expenses that must be incurred even in heavily subsidized public housing. In terms of these circumstances, there is a strong case for improving squatter settlements rather than for ignoring or abolishing them.

Squatters throughout the world are capable of housing themselves.[61] From this perspective, squatter settlements account for a "significant proportion of the real physical capital" in developing cities.[62] Furthermore, squatter settlements also contribute to the urbanization process, because they perform im-

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[56] Wegelin, footnote 43 above, p. 148.
[57] Wegelin, footnote 43 above, p. 110.
[58] *New Straits Times*, November 16, 1976, April 12, 1977, August 17, 1977, and March 20, 1979.
[59] *New Straits Times*, November 16, 1976.
[60] Wegelin, footnote 43 above, p. 196; and Hugh Stretton, Urban Planning in Rich and Poor Countries (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 96–116.
[61] Karpat, footnote 4 above, pp. 92–95; William Mangin, Latin American Squatter Settlements: A Problem and a Solution, *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 2, 1967, pp. 65–98; Geoffrey K. Payne, Urban Housing in the Third World (London: Leonard Hill, 1977), pp. 71–81 and 185–216; and John Turner, Lima's Barriadas and Corralones: Suburbs versus Slums, *Ekistics*, Vol. 19, 1965, pp. 152–155.
[62] William L. C. and Margaret F. Wheaton, Urban Housing in Economic Development, *in* The City, footnote 26 above, p. 143.

portant urban functions. In addition to providing cheap or rent-free housing for the lowest income groups, squatter settlements act as "shock absorbers" or "reception centers" for recent urban migrants and ease the transition to urban life. These settlements generate employment opportunities in a variety of small-scale enterprises, offer housing close to places of work, supply various social-welfare services, and encourage ongoing improvements in housing, services, and utilities, where security of tenure exists.[63]

The basic idea behind the site-and-service projects that have been implemented in areas around Kuala Lumpur since 1965 is to provide the urban poor with building lots, services such as water, drains, and roads, and, in some cases, community facilities. Squatters are then expected to build their own houses and to improve their living conditions over a period of time, as circumstances warrant. Thus far, site-and-service projects in the Kuala Lumpur area have had only limited success. Distance from work, lack of adequate services, and, perhaps most importantly, the absence of coordinated planning have apparently resulted in the unpopularity of the schemes.[64] If the intentions of the Third Malaysia Plan are realized, inhabitants of site-and-service schemes will receive housing lots and basic housing shells, and financial assistance will be available for procurement of building materials. The plan also points to the need for coordinated planning of housing development. In mid-1977 a low-cost pilot-housing project was launched at Salak South in the southeastern part of the city. The scheme includes core-housing units that later can be enlarged, house sites, drains, roads, other services, shops, and industrial sites, and provision will be made for the upgrading of existing squatter areas.[65]

Upgrading schemes have been undertaken in areas such as Ampang, Kepong, and Petaling Valley where there are dense and large concentrations of squatters. These peripheral areas have been supplied, in varying degree, with services such as roads, water, and electricity. Standpipes serving between fifty and one hundred households have been provided in approximately half of the squatter settlements in the Federal Territory, and there are plans to upgrade nine squatter settlements that cover 686 acres. Upgrading schemes, according to the Third Malaysia Plan, are to receive greater emphasis in the future. This policy would seem to imply that security of tenure may be extended to some squatters under certain circumstances. At present, site-and-service and upgrading schemes have resulted only in modest improvements to the living conditions of squatters. The potential of these policies has yet to be realized.

The current policies for planning by the government recognize that squatter settlements differ considerably in location, housing density, environmental conditions, and other respects. These policies need further clarification, as well as better coordination and administration. They require a strong foundation of accurate information, continuing research, and analysis of the costs and benefits of different policy options. Because of widespread poverty in rural and

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[63] Mangin, footnote 61 above, p. 74; and Colin Rosser, Housing and Planned Urban Change: The Calcutta Experience, *in* The City, footnote 26 above, p. 186.
[64] Wegelin, footnote 43 above, pp. 91–92.
[65] Government of Malaysia, Mid-Term Review of the Third Malaysia Plan 1976–1980 (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer, 1979), p. 213; and *New Straits Times*, January 22, 1979.

urban areas and the likely continuation of in-migration by the poor, squatting will persist in Kuala Lumpur for the foreseeable future. Planning should therefore be oriented both to the present and the future needs of the squatters in the city. Future-oriented planning will require acquisition and development of urban land in advance of need, new and imaginative land-management policies, extension of services and utilities to new settlements, creation of job opportunities, and programs for inexpensive public transportation. Meanwhile, problem solving should emphasize the eventual integration of existent squatter settlements in the physical and social fabric of the city.

In outlying districts of the Federal Territory, land should be reserved for site-and-service schemes. Because extension of electricity, sewage, water, and other necessities to these areas will be expensive, investigation of feasible, cheap options, or at least temporary relief, should be undertaken. The options might include standpipes and public washhouses rather than individually piped household-water supplies, public latrines and septic tanks rather than pipes and pumping stations, and low-capacity electrical systems that are suitable for lighting and small appliances but not for cooking and heating, for which kerosene is adequate and commonly used.[66]

Squatters have already made a considerable contribution to the stock of urban housing in densely settled areas, most of which are located between the central commercial area and the former municipal boundaries to the north, east, and south (Fig. 2). Little, except an increased shortage of dwellings, will result from eradication of these settlements in favor of conventional low-income housing. In these areas services and utilities should be upgraded, self-help housing and employment schemes encouraged, and increased security of tenure extended to the inhabitants. In some of these areas and the squatter settlements in the central city, the high cost of land and the demand placed on it for other urban functions will necessitate the resettlement of squatters in high-density walk-up or multistory apartments. Such housing, which largely precludes self-help building programs, will be required in order to maintain current proximity to work places, schools, markets, and other facilities.[67] However, the appropriateness of high-rise dwellings in the multiethnic context of Kuala Lumpur and the question of whether there are interethnic variations in adaptation to high-rise living conditions are debatable topics.[68]

At this point it is important to note that squatters constitute only a portion of the urban poor. Thousands of slum dwellers reside in substandard, mostly prewar structures in the old sections of the central city. Densities are high; work is frequently in the home; the incidence of communicable diseases is probably higher than elsewhere in the city.[69] Although slum dwellers have access to piped water, electricity, and sewage, in other respects their living

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[66] Town Drift, footnote 30 above, pp. 196 and 198.
[67] Wegelin, footnote 43 above, p. 93.
[68] Alvin Rabushka, Integration in Urban Malaya: Ethnic Attitudes among Malays and Chinese, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 6, 1971, pp. 91–107; and Alvin Rabushka, Racial Stereotypes in Malaya, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 11, 1971, pp. 709–716.
[69] James C. Jackson, The Chinatowns of Southeast Asia: Traditional Components of the City's Central Area, *Pacific Viewpoint*, Vol. 16, 1975, pp. 45–77; and Syed Hussin Aljoofre, Towards Environmental Planning, *Majallah Akitek*, No. 6, 1973, pp. 30–34.

conditions are comparable to those in squatter settlements. Minimum-standard, low-income housing would appear to be appropriate for high-density sections of the central city.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

The lack of accurate, up-to-date, relevant data for Third World countries is a perennial problem. To provide a firm foundation for research and planning in Peninsular Malaysia, there is an urgent need for continuing collection and analysis of comprehensive data about the socioeconomic, cultural, demographic, and other characteristics of squatters. Also required is a typology of squatter settlements based on dwelling types, building materials, physical conditions, and degree of security of tenure. This typology could yield useful comparative information about squatter settlements and may provide a basis for studies of changing living conditions.

Rural-urban migration will continue to augment squatting in Kuala Lumpur. Most migrants will be Malays. Because of rapid economic development and modernization, villages, small towns, and cities in Peninsular Malaysia are increasingly being drawn together in a single, interdependent, socioeconomic and political system. In the context of this interdependence, the push-pull model of migration and the folk-urban continuum model, both of which draw dubious distinctions between rural and urban lifestyles, have limited analytical utility for the study of squatters in Kuala Lumpur.[70] The folk-urban model assumes that migrants to a city suffer from anomie, alienation, breakdown of group affiliations, and other problems of adaptation.[71] Although some of these conditions exist, many studies demonstrated that migrants in squatter settlements are generally capable of adapting to urban life.[72] The ethnically and culturally diverse squatter population of Kuala Lumpur offers many possibilities for cross-cultural studies of urban adaptation.

Studies of the origins of recently arrived squatters should deal not only with socioeconomic factors but also with the effect of return migration, the circulation of information about living and working conditions in Kuala Lumpur, the perception and the evaluation of this information, the selectivity of the migration process, and the kinship networks that link migrants with a city. Personal networks are highly efficient in helping migrants to establish themselves in urban areas. Conversely migrants outside networks of mutual assistance and security lack a sense of belonging and are likely to endure difficult problems of adaptation.

The patterns of intraurban movement of squatters, the differential roles of kinship, friendship, voluntary associations, political parties, and other institutions in the adaptation process, and the issues of community values, atti-

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[70] McGee, footnote 26 above, pp. 109–110.

[71] R. E. Pahl, The Rural-Urban Continuum, Sociologia Ruralis, Vol. 6, 1966, pp. 299–326.

[72] Janet Abu-Lughod, Migrant Adjustment to City Life: The Egyptian Case, American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 67, 1961, pp. 22–32; Edward M. Bruner, Urbanization and Ethnic Identity in Northern Sumatra, American Anthropologist, Vol. 63, 1961, pp. 508–521; L. Alan Eyre, The Shantytowns of Montego Bay, Jamaica, Geographical Review, Vol. 62, 1972, pp. 394–413; Robert V. Kemper, Migration and Adaptation: Tzintzuntzan Peasants in Mexico City (Beverly Hills, Cal.: Sage Publications, 1977); and Aprodicio A. Laquian, Slums are for People: The Barrio Magsaysay Pilot Project in Philippine Urban Community Development (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1969).

tudes, and preferences are complicated by the cultural diversity of Kuala Lumpur. Intraurban movement is one example. A thesis in certain studies of Latin American and other cities is that migrants initially go to central-city locations and then, after gaining some urban experience, move to the peripheries.[73] Is this model applicable to Kuala Lumpur migrants who are likely to be channeled first to ethnically segregated residential zones and then to ethnically homogeneous squatter settlements? Or perhaps another model, also based on observable trends in Latin America, is appropriate for Kuala Lumpur: recent migrants settle in intermediate and peripheral areas rather than the central city?[74]

A study of squatter settlements in the southern Phillipines concluded that old squatter settlements had higher socioeconomic status and better locations with respect to employment and amenities and played a more positive role in the life of the city than did new settlements.[75] Is this conclusion true for Kuala Lumpur? Have the attitudes of government officials, planners, and other individuals whose decisions shape the lives of the poor changed towards squatters in recent years? The topics requiring further research are legion. Researchers, planners, and officials should remember that in many instances a squatter settlement is a solution to a problem, an investment in the future, a center of shared values, and a home.

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[73] John C. Turner, Barriers and Channels for Housing Development in Modernizing Countries, *in* Peasants in Cities: Readings in the Anthropology of Urbanization (edited by William Mangin; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), pp. 1–19; and Turner, footnote 61 above, pp. 152–155.
[74] Kemper, footnote 72 above, p. 109.
[75] Ulack, footnote 39 above, pp. 548–549.