The Evolution of Squatter Settlements in Peninsular Malaysian Cities

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Squatter, and other vernacular,[1] housing is found in almost all cities of Peninsular Malaysia. In 1976 such dwellings accounted for the majority of all residences in most urban areas, with squatter housing constituting over twenty per cent of the total in several cities.[2] Squatter settlements are the most clearly defineable residential form outside of the modern sector and consequently their dimensions and history are better documented than others. These aspects of squatting provide the basis for this paper, by inference giving some insights into the evolution of all types of unconventional housing.

The growth of urban squatting in Malaysia is best understood using a holistic analytical approach in which urban phenomena are seen as the outcome of historical forces which differentiate urban society into groups separated by space, ethnicity, social class, and political power. All these factors influence the residential environment. The paper examines the forces that have influenced the character and present distribution of Malaysian squatter settlements, illustrating how and why this settlement form has evolved. It draws heavily on secondary sources, complemented by a limited quantity of primary material, and as a consequence focuses on Kuala Lumpur, although general data for a number of other cities are presented.

The Early Period: *c.* 1870–1920[3]

Vernacular style urban housing in Malaysia is not a new phenomenon. Palm-

[1] The term "vernacular" refers to an adapted form of traditional housing, often with some degree of institutional legitimacy, which is generally built in cities by artisans or small-scale construction firms. Squatter housing almost always involves extra-legal land occupation while vernacular housing tends to involve legal or quasi-legal tenure. Vernacular housing is more often built in accord with established building and planning regulations while squatter builders deliberately operate outside these regulations. Both squatter and vernacular forms are part of what I have called the unconventional housing sector because it has little or no contact with the modern institutions associated with the construction industry. It is unconventional in the sense that it is *not* based on the culturally artificial or formally imposed social standards of expatriate administrators or the local middle class and elites. ("Conventional" is defined by the concise Oxford Dictionary [6th ed.] as "dependency on conventions, not natural, not spontaneous". For a detailed discussion of these terms and how they fit into a model of the housing system, see M.A. Johnstone, "Access to Urban Housing in Peninsular Malaysia: Social and Spatial Distortions in a Peripheral Economy", [Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1979]).

[2] Ibid., esp. pp. 206–14.

[3] This section is drawn from several historical accounts of this period. See J.M. Gullick, "Kuala Lumpur, 1880-1895", *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28 (1955): 7–172; J.M. Gullick, *The Story of Early Kuala Lumpur* (London, 1956); J.C. Jackson, "Kuala Lumpur in the 1880s: The Contribution of Bloomfield Douglas", *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 4, no. 2 (Sept. 1963):24–30; T.G. McGee, "Malays in Kuala Lumpur: A Geographical Study in the Process of Urbanisation", (Ph.D. thesis, Victoria University, New Zealand, 1968).

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thatch (*attap*) roofed huts were built in Kuala Lumpur in the 1880s in response to the housing shortages, and before 1885 the city was portrayed as a "great Chinese village ... consisting almost wholly of wooden, *attap* or mud houses, arranged in the haphazard manner which had resulted from its rapid and unplanned growth".[4] This description is similar to that made in official reports on squatting eighty years later. The existence of numerous Malay *kampung*-style houses in Kuala Lumpur, as well as other traditional housing types such as Boyanese *pondoks*[5] were also noted by observers in 1890. By 1900 even the colonial administration was taking an interest in the existence of "higgledy piggledy" Malay slums and the need for "decent" accommodation.

There is little evidence of similar housing in other cities during the 1880s, although accounts of individual cities do refer to traditional style buildings. Thus, descriptions of Malay *kampungs* in Melaka and Kuala Trengganu[6] both suggest that indigenous housing dominated the embryonic growth of many cities. Alor Setar, for example, was characterized by Logan as a typical "residence of chiefs, with dirty slovenly *attap* houses".[7]

Most of the references to earlier periods were to residential forms constructed as part of the growth of ethnic communities in most cities. In the 1880s, for example, the nucleus of the trading settlement of Kuala Lumpur was a series of single storied *attap* huts bordered by a small Malay village (Kg. Rawa). The main difference between houses in the Chinese and Malay settlements, a difference which still exists today, was that the former were built on the ground while the latter stood on piles.[8]

The growth of the Malay community in Kuala Lumpur, including Indonesian migrants, has been well documented by McGee[9] who observed that apart from the legal settlement at Kg. Bahru, Malays settled in several areas surrounding the city. This settlement was related to the pattern of Malay landownership at the time. Many of these early locations, such as Kg. Kerinchi and Kg. Haji Abdullah Hukum (Fig. 2), later became the core for extensive areas of squatter housing. Kg. Haji Abdullah Hukum began in the 1880s and for forty years was administered by the District Office, while Kg. Kerinchi, established around 1900 by Sumatran migrants, offers an example of the British administration's attempt to permit the Malays to combine agriculture with urban employment because squatters were permitted to cultivate subsistence crops on nearby land.

Some Chinese squatter areas seem to have evolved in a similar manner, with tacit recognition by the administration, although corroborative evidence is not readily available. Ng, in one of the few studies of Chinese squatter communities, indicates that Chan Sow Lin is one of the oldest squatter settlements in Kuala Lumpur and

[4] Jackson, op. cit., p. 117.

[5] *Pondok* = longhouse.

[6] For accounts of Melaka and Kuala Trengganu, see respectively T.G. McGee, *The Southeast Asian City* (London, 1967); and C.C. Neil, "Kuala Trengganu: A Case Study of Economic and Non-Economic Rationalities as Determinants of Urban Behaviour", (M.A. thesis, Australian National University, 1966).

[7] Cited in J.A. Nagata, "Tale of Two Cities: The Role of Non-Urban Factors in Community Life of Two Malaysian Towns", *Urban Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1974): 1–26.

[8] Pao-chun Tsou, *Urban Landscapes of Kuala Lumpur: A Geographical Survey*, Monograph, Institute of Southeast Asia (Nanyang University, Singapore, 1967).

[9] McGee, *The Southeast Asian City*, pp. 335–46.

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was first settled in the early 1900s by tin miners.[10] Like Kg. Kerinchi and Kg. Haji Abdullah Hukum, Chan Sow Lin seems to have had some legal origins, and old residents claim their families paid land rent to the government. As additional land was illegally occupied in Chan Sow Lin, the early "legal" tenants ceased to pay rent and, consequently, were themselves classified as squatters.[11]

Vernacular housing forms dominated the early growth of Kuala Lumpur until the first attempt at urban development by Swettenham, the British Resident there between 1882 and 1899. The new building rules of 1884, which stipulated that dwellings should be constructed of more permanent materials, established building standards for the first time. These rules undoubtedly strengthened an administration's unfavourable view of traditional housing by determining what would be acceptable standards of construction.

The establishment of a conventional construction industry which, like today, had connections with landowners and the expanding capitalist sector indirectly encouraged the further development of unconventional housing. Gullick shows that as Kuala Lumpur expanded "an entire brick and tile industry had been created to make the change possible".[12] The main suppliers of construction materials were Yap Ah Loy, who was also the largest property owner, holding 35 per cent of all housing in 1880; Hill and Rathborne who were the major suppliers of timber; and Doraisamy Pillai, a mill owner.[13] The creation of capitalist control over the supply of building materials and actual construction in the 1880s laid the foundation for the conventional housing industry which has been described elsewhere.[14]

Two other factors involved in establishing the foundations of the building industry were the introduction of a regulated system of land administration in 1882 and the Torrens system of land titles registration in 1889. These facilitated the more efficient control and exchange of land. Legality of tenure became more important for landowners and the administration, and the concept of squatting as illegal occupation of land emerged as a significant issue. Thus, the city administrators' focus of attention changed from a concern with the physical condition of a dwelling to their legal status in relation to land settlement. Gullick describes how land sepculation by local capitalists and British administrators soon led to their controlling most urban land. For example, in 1892 Yap Ah Loy was reported to own two-thirds of the occupied land in Kuala Lumpur.[15]

By 1900 capitalists controlled most conventional construction. In contrast much of the housing built by indigenous groups became illegal as it contravened new building regulations and land law. Herein lie the roots of the current dualistic structure of the housing system. Those people who did not want, or could not

[10] Ng Lee Kiang, "The Squatter Problem in Chan Sow Lin, With Special Reference to Their Education" (B.A. academic exercise, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1976).

[11] Ibid., p. 21.

[12] Gullick, op. cit., p. 39.

[13] The latter's family went on to establish a nationwide real-estate and property conglomerate with branches in hotels, commercial development, and rubber plantations. See Gullick, op. cit., pp. 68–79.

[14] M.A. Johnstone, "The Conventional Housing Industry in Peninsular Malaysia: Social and Spatial Distortions", *Habitat* 4 (1979).

[15] Gullick, op. cit., pp. 78–81.

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afford, the increasingly costly conventional housing, or would not tolerate the overcrowded tenements, sought vacant land outside the city as their only alternative. After 1900 unconventional houses including those occupied by squatters became a prominent land use in Kuala Lumpur.

Economic Change and War: *c.* 1920–1945

In 1913 the *Report of the Kuala Lumpur Health Officer* stated that one-sixth of the total population, almost 18,000 people, inhabited "temporary" houses in the *kampungs* of the city.[16] The Report noted the poor sanitation, drainage, and communications, as well as the residential densities which exceeded 160 persons per hectare, with an average of fifteen people per house compared with 7.2 persons per dwelling for the whole city. It also emphasized that the existence of so many "hovels" reflected the inability of low income groups to pay economic rentals for minimum standard conventional housing.

During this period the colonial export economy was growing, accompanied by technological change, and an increase in urbanization. Fluctuations in economic growth were related to the vagaries of international trade, together with the Depression of the 1920s and 1930s. These forces, part of broad transformations at the national and international level, played a significant part in the growth of squatter settlements.

The combined effects of these changes brought increasing unemployment and decreasing wage levels. Thus, although plantation agriculture expanded, the area under cultivation fell — estate employment fell from some 258,000 in 1929 to 125,000 in 1932 because of the introduction of labour-saving processing technology. During the same period wages fell by over fifty per cent.[17] In many rural areas the number of landless peasants increased as land, previously used for subsistence cultivation was taken over by plantations and restrictions were placed on the farming activity of smallholders.[18] In the mining sector, as capital-intensive methods replaced Chinese labour, employment fell between 1922 and 1938 from 82,000 to 58,000 despite the continued increase in production and profits.[19] Retrenchment and unemployment on this scale during the Depression years resulted in large numbers of displaced families who needed to find new places of residence and accommodation.

During the Depression, many of the unemployed, particularly the Chinese, moved onto cultivated lands to grow subsistence and later cash crops. Some of these rural squatters found land near existing cities, which was later encapsulated by city growth. Others, having gained farming experience in remote areas, subsequently moved to the periphery of the towns to continue cash crop cultivation. Both sequences led to urban squatting, as did two other types of residential re-establishment. Unemployment relief camps were established by wealthy Chinese mine owners in many cities, particularly in Perak and Selangor, and the temporary mining camps

[16] Kuala Lumpur Town Board, "Report of the Health Officer", report (Kuala Lumpur, 1931).

[17] M. Caldwell, "War, Boom and Depression", in *Malaya: The Making of a Neo-Colony*, ed. Mohamed Amin and M. Caldwell (Nottingham, 1977), pp. 38–63.

[18] See P.T. Bauer, *The Rubber Industry: A Study in Competition and Monopoly* (1948) and Caldwell, op. cit.

[19] Caldwell, op. cit., p. 43.

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built on land surrounding cities, such as Ipoh, Taiping, and Kuala Lumpur, were later incorporated into the city area.[20] Housing in these camps, described as "rickety kerosene tin shacks or leaf hovels",[21] was clearly of poor quality.

By 1935 the colonial government was tolerating, even encouraging, squatters in the peri-urban areas because they were becoming the main suppliers of fresh food for many towns. When the outbreak of war threatened the import of necessary foodstuffs, the British continued to encourage squatter cultivators in, or close to, the large cities. The same occurred when the nation-wide "Grow More Food" campaign was launched.[22] The result of these campaigns, none of which specified where land could be occupied, was the illegal or partly authorized occupation of large areas of urban and peri-urban land. Several big squatter colonies were formed in Kuala Lumpur during this period, including Chinese settlements in Salak South and Sungai Besi, and Malay *kampungs* in the northern areas of Gombak and Setapak (see Fig. 1).

These factors affected all cities, and records reveal the existence of squatters, including peri-urban food growers, in many centres other than Kuala Lumpur.[23] For example, one report stated that in Ipoh "the real housing problem is in the shape of innumerable shacks and sheds erected by squatters ... these huts are dotted about and huddled together without trace of any plan ... or drainage".[24]

Until 1941 the population in most cities was increasing, but the Japanese Occupation of Malaya from 1942 to 1945[25] reversed this trend. This reversal was due to the general fear of the Japanese, the arduous labour drafts, a substantial fall in urban economic activity, declining health and sanitary conditions, and political persecution particularly of the Chinese.[26] The total effect "was a general exodus from the towns".[27] In Kuala Lumpur this upheaval caused a population movement out of the city to the peri-urban fringe or, for many Malays, back to the rural *kampung*. The number of squatters in Kuala Lumpur during the Occupation was higher than during the preceding four years.[28] This increase was probably due to the creation of

[20] Mohamed Rosli bin Buyong, "Housing Development and Urban Sprawl", in *Aspects of Housing in Malaysia*, ed. Tan Soo Hai and Hamzah Sendut, Low Cost Housing Monograph (International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, 1975), pp. 270–98.

[21] Cited in Caldwell, op. cit., p. 47.

[22] Malayan Union, "Grow More Food Campaign", unpublished records, File 607/46 (Kuala Lumpur, 1946); K.S. Sandhu, "The Saga of the Malayan Squatter", *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 5 (1964): 143–77.

[23] E.T. Williams, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of Kelantan 1939* (Caxton, 1940); Malayan Union, *Proceedings of the Advisory Council* (Kuala Lumpur, 1948).

[24] Federated Malay States, *Annual Reports on Social and Economic Progress of the People of Pahang, Selangor, Perak* (Kuala Lumpur, 1938–45).

[25] For descriptions of Malaya during the period, refer to F.S. Donnison, *British Military Administration in the Far East, 1943–1946* (London, 1956); J. Kennedy, *A History of Malaya* (Continental Printing, 1970); and David Latiff "Japanese Invasion and Occupation, 1942–1945", in Mohamed Amin and M. Caldwell (eds.), op. cit., pp. 84–94.

[26] Lee Tong Foong, "The MPAJA and the Revolutionary Struggle, 1939–1945", in Mohamed Amin and M. Caldwell (eds.), op. cit., pp. 95–119.

[27] Sandhu, op. cit., p. 149.

[28] V. Friel-Simon and Khoo Kay Kim, "The Squatter as a Problem to Urban Development: A Historical Perspective", (Paper presented to Third Convention of the Malaysian Economic Association, Aug. 1976).

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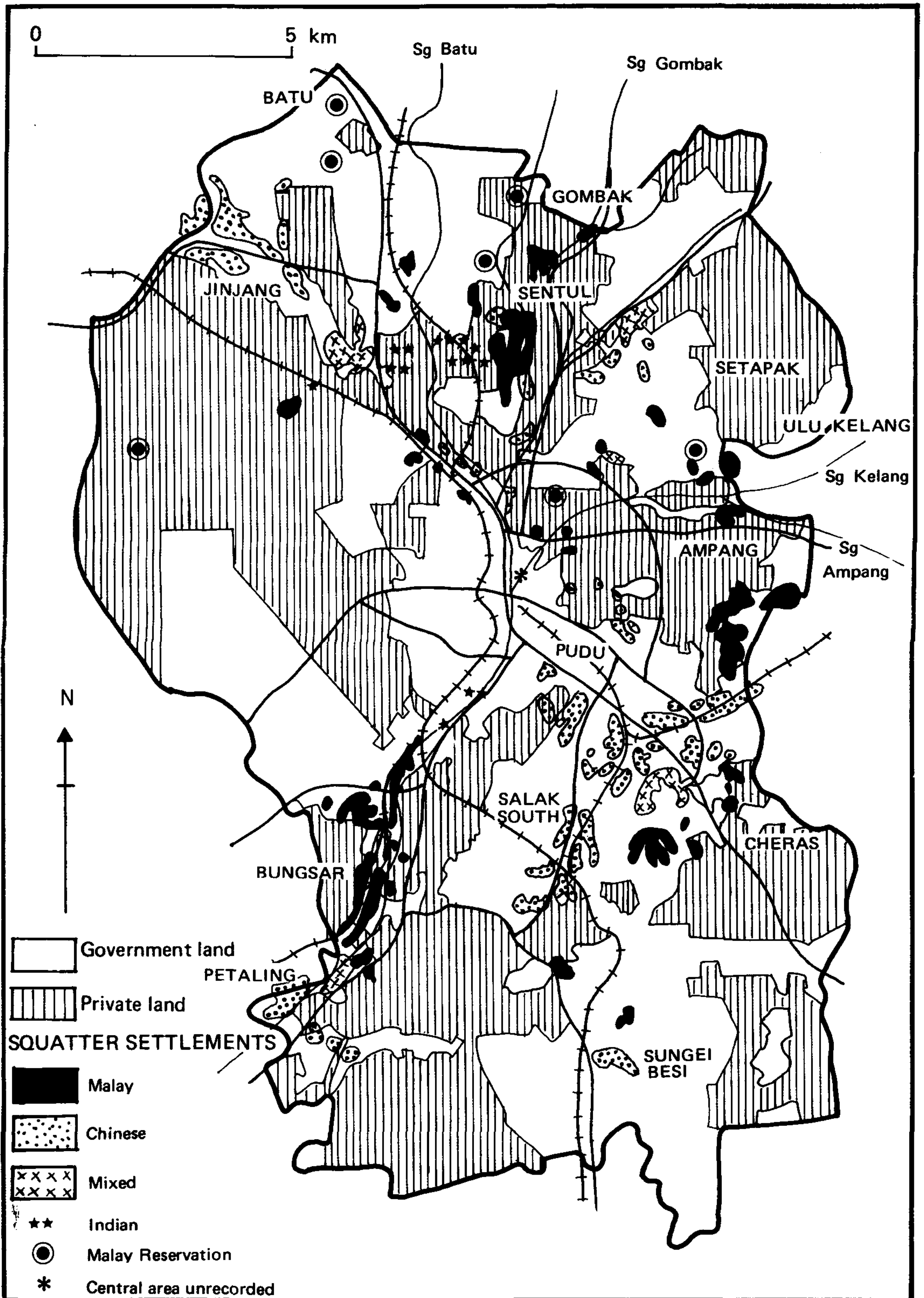

Fig. 1 Location of Squatter Settlements in Kuala Lumpur and the Federal Territory, 1976

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new squatter areas in the urban periphery and the growth of existing settlements. At least two large Malay communities, Kg. Bukit Mati and Kg. Tangga China (Dato Keramat), originated during this period, while many Chinese settlers moved to Chan Sow Lin.

Thus, by 1945, the combined effects of the Japanese Occupation, the Depression, war induced food shortages, structural changes in the economy, and the general weaknesses in enforcing and administering land laws[29] had resulted in the rapid expansion of squatter settlements in Kuala Lumpur and many other cities.

The Post-War Period: *c.* 1945–1958

After the war the effects of rising unemployment, decreased wages, increasing prices, and continued food shortages were exacerbated by the introduction of regulations associated with the Emergency[30] and increasing landlessness among rural Malays.[31] The result was a considerable movement of population to the main cities, especially Kuala Lumpur, where there were severe housing shortages. There was a rapid increase in illegal land occupation, which resulted not only in the expansion of existing squatter settlements but also in the growth of annexes to existing concentrations and the creation of totally new settlements. This expansion was most apparent in Kuala Lumpur where the number of squatter houses more than doubled between 1946 and 1957 (Table 1).

By 1950 local and national governments, which until now had not considered squattering to be a problem, became noticeably concerned. This can be seen in the statement made by a member of the Advisory Council of the Malayan Union:

> Before the war the housing situation was already unsatisfactory. The influx of people from the villages and countryside during the war years into the various towns had almost doubled the urban population but there has been very little building activity to cope with this increase except in the mushroom growth of temporary buildings of a very inferior type ... erected ... without regard to the elementary requirements of sanitation, light and air.[32]

Minor resettlement programmes did little in the face of the influx of migrants into the city, particularly after the Emergency began in 1948. Between 1947 and 1951 an estimated 10,000 squatter houses accommodating 85,000 people, mainly Chinese, were built in Kuala Lumpur.[33] By 1954 the number of squatters was estimated to be between 75,000 and 140,000 (Table 1).[34]

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[29] For discussion of the last factor, see S.M. Barakbah, "The Problem of Illegal Settlers in Urban Areas of Kedah State, Malaysia", *Journal of Administration Overseas* 10 (1971): 201–9.

[30] For discussion of the Emergency period, see V. Purcell, *Malaya — Communist or Free* (London, 1954); A. Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948–1960* (London, 1975); M. Caldwell, "From Emergency to Independence, 1948–57", in Mohamed Amin and M. Caldwell (eds.), op. cit., pp. 216–65.

[31] R.L. Bach, "Historical Patterns of Capitalist Penetration in Malaysia", *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 6, no. 4 (1976): 458–76.

[32] Malayan Union, op. cit.

[33] T.A.L. Concannon, "A New Town in Malaya: Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur", *Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography* 5 (1955):39–43.

[34] Details of source material used in Table 1:
KLTB — Kuala Lumpur Town Board, 1931, op. cit.;
Kuala Lumpur Town Board, *Annual Report* (Kuala Lumpur, 1947);

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TABLE 1
ESTIMATED NUMBERS OF SQUATTERS IN KUALA LUMPUR, 1930–1979

Year	Squatter population	Squatter families	Squatters as proportion of total population		Proportion of total houses	Source‡
	Number ('000)	Number ('000)	%	Number ('000)	%	
1931	17		16	1.2	8	KLTB, 1931
1946	na			2.0		KLTB, 1947
1950	22		13	5.0		LC, 1950
1953	107	21.8	35	14.0	40	Ruddock, 1956
1953	75					Anthony, 1971
1954	140		50			McGee, 1967
1957	100		25	9.5		McGee, 1968
1964	105	20.0		11.0		McGee, 1968
1968	120	20.0	30	15.0		Sen, 1975
1966/68	175	26.0	30	17.5	22	KLM, 1969
1968/69	140	20.0	30	15.0		KLM, 1969 (App. D)
1968/69	230		50	24.2	46	KLM, 1969 (App. A)
1969	185	26.5	37	20.0	25	NOC, 1969
1969	156	26.0	30	20.0	25	MLGM, 1971
1973	174	29.0	35	20.0		Sen, 1975
1973*	270	45.0	30			Sen, 1975
1974†	153		20	22.7		Wehbring, 1976
1975†	222		30		30	Amato, 1975
1976†	149			26.6	24	KLM, 1976
1976†	226	39.0	25			EPU, 1977
1976†	198	36.0	25			MF, 1976
1979†	240	41.0	29			KLM, 1980

* For Kuala Lumpur district
† 1974 to 1979 data for the Federal Territory
‡ See footnote 34.

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The creation of New Villages during the Emergency period after 1948 to resettle rural squatters and villagers displaced from high risk areas[35] had a significant impact on the development of unconventional housing. Many such villages were located near or within existing urban areas, such as Segamat, Kuantan, Taiping, and Kuala Lumpur, and generally housed up to 1,000 inhabitants in most rudimentary dwellings. Jinjang, the largest New Village with 13,000 people, was, for example, incorporated into the Kuala Lumpur city area as a result of the 1957 boundary changes. The incorporation of these settlements within the urban boundary resulted in a sharp increase in the quantity of unconventional housing in the cities affected. While New Villages were legal settlements established by the Government, much of their housing did not meet local authority standards. Moreover, the villages attracted more unauthorized housing, especially squatter dwellings, most of which were indistinguishable from the legal buildings. Noticeable concentrations of squatter huts centred in New Villages are currently found in many cities, for example, Jinjang in Kuala Lumpur, Kg. Bahru in Kuantan, and Kg. Simee in Ipoh, and most centres which incorporated this settlement form generally have the highest proportion of unconventional dwellings.

In an attempt to overcome some of the problems associated with the creation of New Villages, and extend the jurisdiction of local town councils, a series of laws was introduced after 1948 which gave councils greater powers to regulate building, collect rates, issue by-laws, and change boundaries.[36] The boundary alterations that

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Legislative Council, "The Squatter Problem in the Federation of Malaya", Council Paper no. 14 B98 (Kuala Lumpur, 1950);

G. Ruddock, "Town Planning in Kuala Lumpur", report to the Government of Malaya (Kuala Lumpur, 1956);

J.A. Anthony, "Urban Politics in Malaysia: A Study of Kuala Lumpur", (Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1971);

McGee, "The Southeast Asian City";

McGee, "Malays in Kuala Lumpur";

M.K. Sen, "The Rehousing and Rehabilitation of Squatters and Slum Dwellers, with Special Reference to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia", in Tan Soo Hai and Hamzah Sendut (eds.), op. cit.;

KLM [Kuala Lumpur Municipality], "Summary of the Reports on the Surveys of Unauthorised Buildings on State Land and Public Land", report (Kuala Lumpur, Valuation Department, 1969);

NOC [National Operations Council], "Rehousing and Resettlement of Squatters to Kuala Lumpur", report of the subcommittee on squatter rehousing and resettlement (Kuala Lumpur, 1969);

MLGH [Ministry of Local Government and Housing], "Squatters in Kuala Lumpur", report, File KKTP 1232/D (Kuala Lumpur, 1971);

K. Wehbring, "Squatters in the Federal Territory: Analysis and Program Recommendations", report (Kuala Lumpur, Urban Development Authority, 1976);

P.W. Amato, "Housing Needs and Programmes in the Federal Territory, 1975–1990", report (Kuala Lumpur: Urban Development Authority, 1975);

Kuala Lumpur Municipality, "Surveys of Squatter Settlements in the Federal Territory", records (Town Planning Department, Kuala Lumpur, 1976);

EPU [Economic Planning Unit], "Low Cost Housing in the Federal Territory", Document #5 in BPE 61/2/13 (Prime Minister's Department, Kuala Lumpur, 1977);

MF [Ministry of Finance], *Economic Report 1976/1977*, The Treasury (Kuala Lumpur, 1976);

Kuala Lumpur Municipality, Untitled, unpublished records (Master Plan Unit, Kuala Lumpur, 1980).

[35] Hamzah Sendut, "Patterns of Urbanisation in Malaya", *Journal of Tropical Geography* 16 (1962): 114–30; Sandhu, op. cit.; J.M. Gullick, *Malaysia* (London, 1969).

[36] For example, *The Municipal Ordinance 1948*, *Local Authorities Ordinance 1950*, *Local Authorities Ordinance 1952*, and *The Straits Settlement Act (No. XXVII) 1957*.

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occurred provide a good example of how government had used formal institutions to restructure society. Boundary extensions meant that many areas of vernacular and squatter housing, previously outside the city, became incorporated into the area of urban authority. In smaller cities this resulted in housing problems which previously had not been recognized because the poor quality residential areas concerned lay outside the local councils' jurisdiction. While the general opinion held at the time was that such housing was a "menace" and a "nuisance", the desired policy of "condemnation and demolition" had to be curtailed because of the overall shortage of housing.

The case of Ipoh is illustrative of the processes operating at the time. When the area under the jurisdiction of the Ipoh Town Board was enlarged in 1954, several large New Villages were encapsulated. The *Ipoh Town Board Annual Report* of that year stated, in regard to the boundary extension, that

> The enlargement brought with it many problems not the least of which was the inclusion of newly built houses ... the houses, previously outside the jurisdication of the Town Board were erected without proper consideration of roads, drains, and sewerage and their improvement set an immediate problem for the new Council....[37]

In the same year only 420 conventional houses were built, of which 222 were for government officers, and it was observed "that existing housing production is failing to meet at least half the housing need arising from natural increase in population".[38]

By the mid-1950s, squatting was clearly an established phenomenon in many secondary cities, as well as in Kuala Lumpur. In Kuala Lumpur, at this time, two broad groups of squatter settlement could be identified. There were those with legal origins which subsequently became illegal, for example, Kg. Haji Abdullah Hukum, Chan Sow Lin, and Kg. Kerinchi. The first of these was established on the urban periphery in the pre-war period and administered by the District Office. Like the legal settlement of Kg. Bahru, it acted as a focus for additional residential construction, much of it illegal. All of these areas attracted more squatters in the early post-war period and grew to become large illegal settlements with considerable subdivision of land and illegal extension of houses. As McGee suggests, "Many of the problems of Malay accommodation in the city were to stem from the fact that Kg. Bharu — the desired settlement for many Malays entering the city — could no longer absorb them."[39]

The second group of settlements in Kuala Lumpur were those illegal *kampungs* established during and immediately after the Japanese occupation, often on sites outside the city boundary. Large areas were settled by Chinese agricultural squatters during this period, some of which remain today. One example is Kg. Cochrane which was originally occupied during the war by Chinese cultivators. In 1976 this settlement contained over 500 houses and is still the centre of a thriving market gardening area. Many of the squatter areas established during the period are the largest in their respective cities and acted as a focus for growth after independence,

[37] Ipoh Town Board, "Annual Report", Report no. N.A. BK/A/MBI (Ipoh, 1954).

[38] Ibid., p. 4.

[39] McGee, "The Southeast Asian City", p. 360.

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while many new settlements were created to accommodate the expanding urban population.

Post-Independence: *c.* 1958–1979

The Growth of Squatters in Kuala Lumpur

The processes which occurred prior to 1958 set the broad pattern for the continued growth of squatting in the post-independence period. To this foundation two other important components were added: the rapid growth of large cities and increased Malay urbanization. This was particularly true of the national capital where both the number and the proportion of squatters have continued to rise despite the actions of the local authorities. By 1969 there were an estimated 20,000 squatter houses, 25 per cent of the total dwelling units, inhabited by 26,500 families or 37 per cent of the total.[40] Since 1969, though estimates vary (Table 1), squatter dwellings have constituted between 25 and 30 per cent of the total housing stock in Kuala Lumpur, and by 1979 the number of squatters appeared to have actually increased again.

Six forms of squatter settlement occurred in Kuala Lumpur during the post-independence period. The first involved the illegal occupation of land within, or near, existing communities, both illegal and legal. For example, new squatter areas such as Kg. Hanyut and Kg. Chendana developed near Kg. Bahru. In the mid-1950s, squatter settlements were also established along the main rivers and on railway reserves in the city, for example, Kg. Semerang, Stoney, Setor, Batu, Gombak, and Maxwell (see Fig. 2). These settlements offered an alternative for Malays who could not find accommodation in the established Malay areas or had to leave their previous residence. Some of the latter group were Malays who moved during or after the May 1969 disturbances from areas dominated by non-Malays. For example, Kg. Keramat Hujong Mara near Kg. Kilat.

The third settlement form to evolve in the post-war period was the establishment of new squatter areas, sometimes through organized invasions in areas which were later incorporated into the Federal Territory. Kg. Konggo and Kg. Selamat, for example, were settled in the mid-1950s by groups of ex-serviceman, some of whom also settled in Kg. Jaya and Kg. Medan near Petaling Jaya.

Squatter housing built by speculators for rent is another residential form, and has become the core for several large settlements. Kg. Malaysia and Malaysia Tambahan, for example, created new foci of squatting in a previously unoccupied area of the city. A fifth form is the large multi-ethnic settlements created as members of different groups settled in areas previously occupied by only one community, or as separate settlements merged with each other, for example, Kg. Puah, Kg. Sentul, and Kg. Sentosa. Although multi-racial, these communities tend to be subdivided into mono-ethnic zones.

The final settlement type involved the movement of tenants, who could not afford the regular financial costs, from public housing schemes into squatter areas. These communities, such as Kg. Siam, Kg. Dato Keramat, and Kg. Pandan, were generally found close to the government quarters from which the settlers moved. In 1970, there were over 2,000 squatter dwellings in eight contiguous *kampungs* which

[40] National Operations Council, "Rehousing and Resettlement of Squatters to Kuala Lumpur".

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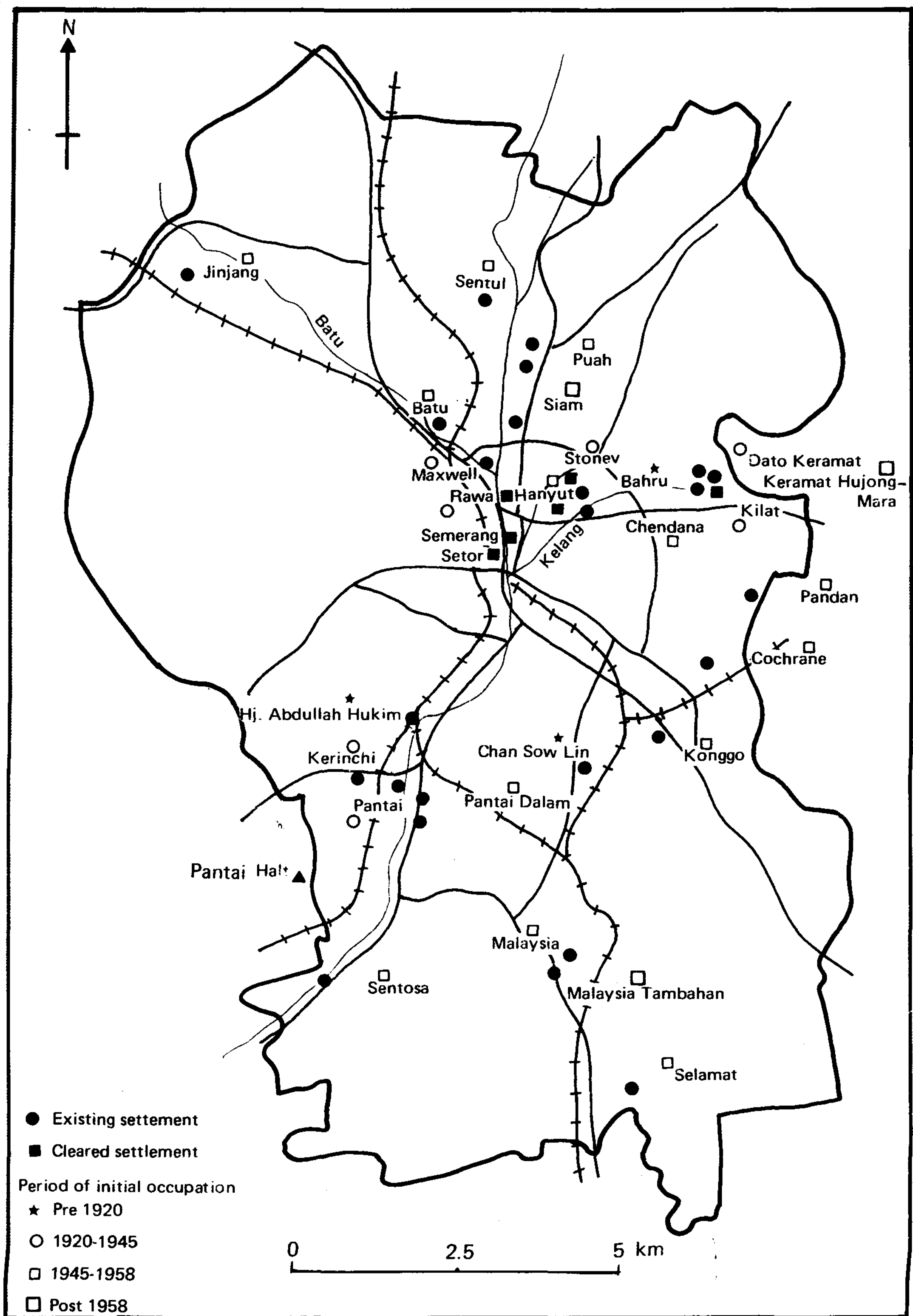

Fig. 2 Location of Named Squatter Settlements and Period of Settlement

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centred on the Kg. Dato Keramat public housing project,[41] and despite vigorous clearance operations since this date some 1,250 houses remained in the area in 1976.

Each of the six squatter settlement forms described above was a product of the social, economic, and political changes which had been operating both before and after independence. The changes produced some distinct modifications in the residential patterns of the city and squatting continued to proliferate wherever land could be found. In this respect, those affecting the ethnic and locational distribution of squatters were the most important and illustrate how squatting has been affected by the impact of rapid urban growth and by increasing public intervention.

The Locational Pattern of Squatters in Kuala Lumpur

Squatters in Kuala Lumpur, like the total population, have always been residentially segregated.[42] In 1947, Chinese squatting corresponded to the general concentrations of Chinese population in the central city, Pudu, Sungai Besi, Salak South, and Cheras (Fig. 1). Since the mid-1950s these concentrations have expanded and several new areas of Chinese settlement, resulting from migration and the growth of predominantly Chinese New Villages, were created in Setapak, Ulu Klang, Petaling, Segambut, and Jinjang. However, in the last ten years there has been little change in the locational concentration of Chinese squatters, with the exception of evictions from the central city.

Malay squatters are also segregated and are located in a belt centred on Kg. Bahru which fans out in the northeast towards Kg. Pandan, Ampang Jaya, and Gombak and in the southwest towards Kg. Kerinchi. More recent settlement is found in Sungei Besi, Cheras, Salak, and Petaling Jaya. In contrast, Indian squatters are generally less segregated than the other two groups, although there are small concentrations in Sentul and Brickfields (see Fig. 2).

Squatter settlements in Kuala Lumpur are found along railway lines, on flood plains and poorly drained land, on disused mining land, and on marginally useful land in outlying areas (Fig. 1). In addition, most of the small pockets of squatters which remain in the central city lie between the historically separate centres of downtown Kuala Lumpur and Pudu, areas in which the Chinese population have been concentrated.

There are two discernible differences in the locational evolution of Chinese and Malay squatter settlements. First, Chinese squatters occupy more private land than Malays, respectively 55 and 15 per cent. Although only 23 per cent of land occupied by squatters is privately held, Chinese inhabit 76 per cent of it. This pattern has been modified since 1969 with the eviction of squatters from private land in the inner city of Kuala Lumpur. The clearance programme provides a good example of the effect that public policy has had on the distribution of squatters, particularly Chinese, in Kuala Lumpur.

[41] Azizah bte Ozman, "The Squatter Problem in Kuala Lumpur, with Special Reference to Dato Keramat", (B.A. academic exercise, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1970).

[42] See McGee, "The Southeast Asian City"; T.G. McGee, *The Urbanization Process in the Third World* (London, 1971); and Lee Boon Thong, "Patterns of Urban Residential Segregation: The Case of Kuala Lumpur", *Journal of Tropical Geography* 43 (1976): 41-48.

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TABLE 2
POPULATION CHANGES, KUALA LUMPUR, 1947-80

Community Group	Population 1947		Population 1957		Population 1970		Estimated proportion total population 1980	Annual Increase	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	%	1946-57	1957-70
Malay	21,988	12.5	47,615	15.0	113,642	25.1	30	11.7	10.7
Chinese	111,693	63.5	195,822	62.0	247,474	54.7	53	7.5	2.0
Indian	31,607	17.9	53,505	16.9	84,043	18.6	16	8.9	4.4
Other	10,672	6.1	19,288	6.1	6,651	1.6	1	8.0	na
All groups	175,961	100.0	316,230	100.0	45,810	100.0	100	7.9	3.3

Sources: Malaya, *A Report on the 1947 Census of Population* (Kuala Lumpur, 1947); Department of Statistics, *Census of Population of the Federation of Malaya, 1957*, Report No. 1 (Kuala Lumpur, 1957); Department of Statistics, *Community Groups: 1970 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur, 1972); K. Wehbring, "The Distribution of Community Groups in the Federal Territory", unpublished report (Urban Development Authority, Kuala Lumpur, 1976).

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The second notable difference between Chinese and Malay settlements is the stronger orientation of the former towards employment sources, while the latter tend to be associated with the traditional social-kinship and cultural-religious locations of their community, particularly Malay reservations. As shown, however, Malay settlements are also found near public housing schemes and army bases. Chinese squatter areas have been attracted to four main employment types, each of which has been linked historically with the growth of the Chinese community in Kuala Lumpur. The most notable locational association of Chinese communities with employment has been the establishment of many small-scale industrial enterprises in several squatter areas, especially along Jln. Sungei Besi, Jln. Kelang Lama, and in Kepong. Such settlements contain both residential and industrial squatters. Squatters have also built houses near the many large industrial plants in the same locations, because of the employment opportunities in them.

Population Change among Squatters in Kuala Lumpur

Data relating to the ethnic breakdown of the squatter population in Kuala Lumpur before 1965 are not available, but it is clear that the majority were Chinese. However, over the last ten years the proportion of Malays in the total population has increased substantially (Table 2), and between 1968 and 1974 the number of Malay squatters almost doubled (Table 3). While the Malay population in the city increased by an average annual rate of over 10 per cent, compared with 2 per cent for Chinese, the annual rate of increase for Malay squatters has been approximately 11 to 12 per cent. By 1980 it is estimated that Malays will constitute over 50 per cent of the total squatter population in the Federal Territory, compared with 30 per cent in the overall population.[43]

In contrast, there are signs that the rate of growth of Chinese squatters is slowing down, to such an extent that there has been an absolute decline of some 24,000 since

TABLE 3
ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF SQUATTERS, KUALA LUMPUR, 1968–75

Ethnic Group								
Malay	37,740	20.4	43,500	25.0	62,262	40.6	67,042	38.2
Chinese	124,320	67.2	112,230	64.5	69,586	45.3	100,912	57.5
Indian	21,275	11.5	16,530	9.5	6,089	4.0	7,546	4.3
Other	1,605	0.9	1,740	1.0	15,505	10.1	na	na
All groups	184,940	100.0	174,000	100.0	153,442	100.0	175,500	100.0

Sources: NOC, op. cit.; Sen, op. cit.; Wehbring, "Squatters in the Federal Territory" and "Distribution of Community Groups".

[43] Wehbring, "Squatters in the Federal Territory".

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1968 (Table 4).[44] The main reasons for this decline are the eviction and resettlement of Chinese squatters into public housing, and the decreasing Chinese component of population growth in Kuala Lumpur. Not only is the Chinese birth rate declining but the percentage of Chinese immigrants to the city has fallen from 59 per cent before 1959 to 35 per cent in 1970.[45] Given that migration contributes over 70 per cent of population growth in Kuala Lumpur, this decrease is significant. However, those Chinese squatting in Kuala Lumpur have usually been there much longer than Malays, with the result that both the settlements and their inhabitants are generally older.

TABLE 4
CHANGES IN THE NUMBERS OF CHINESE SQUATTERS, KUALA LUMPUR, 1968-1975

	Chinese squatters		Population change	
Year	Number	Proportion of total population %	Number	Annual %
1968	123,320	67.2	– 12,090	– 1.9
1973	112,230	64.5	– 54,732	– 7.3
1974	69,586	45.3	– 23,048	– 2.6
1975	100,912	57.5		

Sources: As for Table 3 and KLM, 1976, op. cit.

Growth of Squatters in Secondary Cities

The evolution of squatter settlements in secondary cities is less well documented, although in most aspects the locational pattern is similar to that observed in Kuala Lumpur. However, in smaller cities, squatters generally first occupied land on the urban periphery, rather than in inner city areas. These were incorporated into the built-up areas as the city grew. Most settlements were located outside inner city areas, mainly along river, drainage and railway reserves, on swamps or mine tailings, and in and around New Villages and Malay Reservations. In Alor Setar the vast majority of squatter settlements were located on public land, while in Kuantan an estimated thirty-five per cent of land occupied by squatters was privately owned.

Data pertaining to the growth of squatters in secondary centres were more difficult to obtain than those relating to Kuala Lumpur. However, using fragmentary evidence from Kuantan and Alor Setar, the growth in numbers can be traced.

[44] This estimate is corroborated by data collected by several sources. See Kuala Lumpur Municipality, "Surveys of Squatter Settlements", and Ministry of Finance, op. cit. In contrast Wehbring ("Squatters in the Federal Territory") estimates a decrease of over 44,000 between 1968 and 1974. This latter study, however, does not explain how this figure was derived or explain the decrease.

[45] S. Narayanan, "Urban In-Migration and Urban Labour Absorption: A Study of Metropolitan Selangor", (M. Econ. thesis, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1975).

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Between 1948 and 1958 there were an estimated 250 to 300 squatter dwellings in Kuantan and another 300 unconventional dwellings in Kg. Bahru, while in Alor Setar there were some 300 squatter dwellings in 1970[46] and 1,300 in 1976 (pers. comm., 1977). In Alor Setar the number of squatter dwellings was placed at 400 in 1968,[47] 800 in 1971[48] and 1,029 in 1977.[49] One report suggested that squatters in Alor Setar accounted for sixty per cent of the total housing stock in 1972.[50] However, while providing an indication of the extent of unconventional housing, this seems to be an over-estimation of squatter numbers. On the basis of fieldcounts the total number of squatter houses in Alor Setar in 1977 was between 2,000 and 2,200.

Squatter settlements in Alor Setar and Kuantan had their origins in the socio-economic and political changes that occurred before independence, but growth has continued since 1958 in the wake of increased displacement of rural population into towns and cities. On the whole the forces affecting the evolution and location of squatters appear to be the same in all cities, although in secondary centres specific local forces such as varying systems of land administration and local government policy have also intervened and created variations. Only in a few cities is there evidence of mass invasions of land, such as have occurred in Latin America, and squatter settlements have evolved basically through the illegal occupation of land (both public and private) and construction of houses by individuals and small groups.

Conclusions

This paper has examined the evolution and distribution of squatter settlements and other vernacular housing in Peninsular Malaysia and emphasized the importance of such housing in secondary cities. Forces operating at the national level have created the preconditions for the emergence of squatter settlements but variations in the character of squatting, as a component of low income housing systems, are associated with local factors. The most important of these are the variety of land tenure forms, the operation of specific administrative mechanisms regulating housing, differentiated labour and employment systems, and the diverse character of migration in each city/region.

Despite the obvious importance of squatter and vernacular housing types in most Peninsular Malaysian cities, governments at all levels have been uncertain in their attitudes and responses to these predominantly low income residential areas, with the exception of squatter settlements. Because of its illegal occupation of land, squatter housing has received considerable attention, particularly in larger cities, and public housing policy has, until most recently, been largely concerned with the control, clearance, and resettlement of squatters.

[46] Kuantan Town Council, "Unauthorised Buildings (*Rumah Haram*)", unpublished records, #12a in File 117/A (Kuantan, 1970).

[47] Commissioner of Lands and Mines, Kedah State, personal communication, Alor Setar, 1977.

[48] Secretary, Kota Setar District and Town Council, personal communication, Alor Setar, 1977.

[49] Kedah, State Secretariat, "Urban Squatters in Kedah", draft report (Economic Planning Unit, Alor Setar, 1977).

[50] Kedah, Department of Town and Country Planning, "An Analysis of Alor Setar's Squatter Population", report, File K1/1094/Pt. 111 (Alor Setar, 1972).

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