Rural Villages as Socially Urban Spaces in Malaysia

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Summary. In Malaysia, Malay *kampung* or villages are modernity's significant other in contemporary discourse. In contrast to this rhetoric, which reinforces a sense of rural–urban difference, this paper argues that Malay *kampung* are socially urban spaces, in so far as the lived experience of their residents largely conforms to characteristics of social life typically figured as 'urban'. These include socioeconomic relationships characterised by occupational stratification, consumption and production based on commodification rather than subsistence, and social interactions marked by formal and attenuated social ties as much as informal and intimate relationships. Simultaneously nostalgic and derogatory narratives of modernity and urbanism fix *kampung* in social memory as sites marginal to and outside urban modernity. By contrast, the evidence presented in this paper suggests that the lives of *kampung* residents in contemporary Malaysia are substantially and qualitatively urban.

In Malaysia, Malay *kampung* (villages) are modernity's significant other in contemporary discourse.[1] In the politics of memory and forgetting, the *kampung* is a site of nostalgic memory, viewed in most popular discourse from dominant urban-centric élite perspectives embedded in new middle-class subjectivities (see Goh, 2002, 2004; Kahn, 1992). At the same time, frequent and repetitive references to *kampung*, figured as sites of rurality, backwardness, underdevelopment, naïveté and tradition, project them as sites outside the export-led capitalist growth economy. A strong, government-centred developmentalist discourse calls for the transformation of the 'traditional' rural Malay community into a 'modern' urban one. This transformation is meant, among other things, to 'urbanise' the Malay population taking them out of a '*kampung* mentality' and inserting them into a competitive national (and global) economy. In all of this, the *kampung* as a lived reality, historically situated within an evolving political economy is largely 'forgotten' and marginalised in contemporary consciousness.

In contrast to the pervasive rhetoric that reinforces a sense of rural–urban difference through nostalgic fixation, this paper argues that, with their integration into urban, industrial national circuits, which are in turn tied into regional and global economies, *kampung* in Malaysia today have become as much urban as rural spaces. With respect to production, consumption and social interaction, *kampung* display a variety of characteristics typically figured as 'urban'. The occupational structure of *kampung* residents displays a great diversity and with it a great degree of socioeconomic stratification. Consumption patterns depend on trade and commodification, with negligible subsistence

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activities. Social interactions among residents increasingly resemble a 'world of strangers', rather than intimate ties mutually reinforced through kinship, occupational similarity and frequent interaction. The social reality of the *kampung* contrasts sharply with the nostalgic rhetoric of rurality. As Louis Wirth suggested in reference to North America in the 1950s, such changes call "for a reexamination of the meaning of the concepts of 'urban' and 'rural' " (Wirth, 1956/1969, p. 169).

My primary argument here is that Malay *kampung* are socially urban spaces, in so far as the social lives of their inhabitants conform to the characteristics of urban life outlined in the preceding paragraph. In urban studies, 'urbanism' has always meant something more than mere population density (see, for example, Redfield, 1941; Wirth, 1938/1969; Young, 1990/1995). In this paper, I take 'urbanism' to signify a set of interrelated structures of feeling and social experience that is *qualitatively* distinct from other structures of feeling and experience.[2] In what follows, I focus on two particular qualities of urbanism: first, a socioeconomic system characterised by occupational diversity, stratification and commodity (as opposed to subsistence) production and consumption; secondly, social interactions characterised by relatively high frequencies of formal, role-based interactions as opposed to relatively informal, personal interactions. In many places, including Malaysia, these have been identified as hallmarks of 'urban' social life (for example, Provencher, 1971; Norazit, 1993).

Furthermore, I am arguing in this paper that the urbanism evident in supposedly 'rural' *kampung* Malaysia is not merely an effect of urban forms 'spreading' out into rural areas from urban centres or from the 'linkages' between rural and urban engendered through urban-bound or circular migration, urban-to-rural remittance economies, the experiences of "peasants in cities" or mass media broadcasting urban values into rural settings. All of these *are* important aspects of contemporary *kampung* life. However, this common portrayal of a rural idyll (inhabited, no less, by 'simple rural folk') invaded by an external urban onslaught capitulates to an urban (meaning city) centred narrative of modernity and modernisation. In this narrative, rural *kampung* are always marginal to and outside the urban, rather than part of urban society. I am writing *against* that narrative in seeking to demonstrate that in important ways the social and socioeconomic lives of *kampung* residents are *already* 'urban' in contemporary (late-20th-century and early-21st-century) Malaysia. In the context of that dominant narrative of city-centred modernity, *kampung* are forgotten places.

The case of *kampung* in Malaysia entails a particular kind of 'forgetting'. Eugene McCann (2002 and this issue) has demonstrated how the discourse of 'global cities' literature and research has made 'non-global' cities like Lexington become forgotten places in that discourse. Similarly, Yong-Sook Lee (this issue) shows us how a politics of inclusion and exclusion in the context of corporate debt-restructuring, played out at global, national and local scales, creates an ideological commitment towards forgetting a local community in South Korea. In both of these cases and others (for example, Bunnell and Nah, this issue), forgetting entails a sort of erasure from memory.

Kampung in Malaysia are not forgotten in this sense of erasure from a common social memory. Rather, a nostalgic imaginary of the *kampung* has become so prevalent that, through its continual reiteration combined with a general disinterest in particular histories of particular *kampung*, *kampung* as lived communities and the social and cultural conditions therein, have become 'forgotten' places in contemporary Malaysia.[3] In this case, forgetting is forgetting to look, forgetting to re-examine our assumptions in favour of comfortable frames of reference, such as the urban–rural dichotomy on which much of contemporary sociology and related social sciences as well as many aspects of cultural identity in Malaysia are founded. No one who has had contact with rural *kampung* in Malaysia over the past half-century could

reasonably argue that social and cultural life there has been unchanged or unchanging. Yet, if the continual reiteration of significant rural–urban difference to be discussed below is any guide, Malaysians and others seem reluctant to reconceptualise *kampung* as an integral part of 'urban' Malaysia rather than as an increasingly peripheral 'other'.

In other work, I have examined the conditions under which the ideological 'forgetting' of the history and contemporary conditions of particular *kampung* takes place in favour of a nostalgic imaginary (Thompson, 2002, n.d.). My main objective in this paper will be to examine one of these 'forgotten places' in rural Malaysia by taking a close look at the social conditions in a particular *kampung*. The analysis of this paper is based on fieldwork conducted during the mid to late 1990s in northern peninsular Malaysia.[4] Primary data from the author's study of a Malay *kampung* 45–90 minutes by road from the industrial areas of Kulim and Seberang Perai is supplemented with secondary data from similar studies over time and statistical data on industrial export-led growth to build a picture of the functional role of Malay *kampung* in Malaysia's national, globally oriented economy and increasing urbanism with regard to social interactions. In the following sections of the paper, I first introduce the *kampung* of Sungai Siputeh and the discourse of urban–rural difference within which it and other *kampung* in Malaysia are situated. In contrast to this discourse of difference, I then examine the demographic and ethnographic evidence emerging over the past three decades which indicates that *kampung* in Malaysia are no longer characterised by such difference from urban centres. Finally, I turn to evidence from first-hand fieldwork in rural Malaysia to illustrate the urban characteristics of village Malaysia.

Introduction to a *Kampung*: First Impressions

My own impressions of *kampung* in Malaysia began forming well before I ever arrived in the country. In 1990–91, as I was

formulating a plan to conduct a preliminary research visit to Malaysia, I received a letter from a friend and former college room-mate (whom I call 'Aji', himself Malaysian). He wrote offering me the opportunity to stay with him in the rural *kampung* where he had recently been assigned to work as a primary school teacher. Of this place, he wrote

> Most of the people in this '*kampung*' are padi planters, rubber tappers and other farm-related workers. If you want to study Malay culture, this is a very good place because these people here really practise Malay tradition and culture.

From that time, up to the present, I have found little in the prevalent discourse in and about Malaysia concerning *kampung*—from official pronouncements, to authoritative texts, to everyday conversation, to academic writings—that would dissuade me from the image of the *kampung* as a rural, agricultural idyll, a place of "real Malay tradition and culture".

In the course of my fieldwork, primarily from 1993–95, with several return visits, particularly in 1996 and 1998, I found, however, that much of the practical everyday reality of rural *kampung* does not correspond with this oppositional figuring of *kampung*-as-mirror to the urban, modern, corporate capitalism of a future-oriented nation. Rather, as I will argue here, *kampung* such as the one in which most of my primary fieldwork was conducted, are integrated socially, culturally and economically into the national and global political economy. Moreover, the everyday reality of the *kampung* is characterised by multiple social, cultural and economic forms typically figured as 'urban'. The integration and urban character of the *kampung*, however, are made invisible through the operation of nostalgic and at the same time derogatory discourses of difference, in particular urban–rural difference.

An important question to address is—invisible to whom? I by no means make a claim to be able to see something that no one else has seen. We can find in multiple registers of official, everyday and academic dis-

course the recognition of the role of *kampung* in Malaysia's political economy, in the processes of industrialisation, urbanisation and 'development' (or *pembangunan*—the dominant rubric for these processes in post-independence Malaysia). At the same time, as I will demonstrate with several examples, this recognition is often muted or suppressed in a capitulation to the prevailing discourse of difference between urban and rural.

Discursive Structurings of Urban–Rural Difference

Shamsul (1991; 1998a, pp. 39–40) has argued that the *kampung* is primarily an administrative construct serving governmental ends and functioning within an 'authority-defined' discourse and social reality. His analysis is insightful, in so far as it critiques the concept of the *kampung* as primarily an indigenous settlement operating outside state discourses (see Kemp, 1988, 1991). However, the implication (which I find in Shamsul's concept of the 'administrative village') that the *kampung* is primarily and almost exclusively an instrument of state power and an administrative unit of state bureaucracy, strikes me as excluding a number of other registers—authority-defined, everyday and academic—in which the *kampung* figures as an important discursive and social construct. In fact, '*kampung*' is such a ubiquitous construct in Malaysia that I could not hope to address it comprehensively here.[5] Rather, in what follows, I will provide a number of examples of the deployment of *kampung* in authority-defined and everyday discourse, highlighting in particular how these discourses tend to figure the *kampung* as separate and apart from concepts (in Malay) such as 'urban' (*bandar*), 'modern' (*moden*), 'development' (*pembangunan*) and as a contrastive mirror to Malaysia's rapidly industrialising urban-centred economy.

Authority-defined Discourse

Government and official discourse on *kampung* appears frequently in newspapers, speeches, television programming, school curricula and elsewhere. While a comprehensive discussion is impossible here, two examples highlight key themes in this discourse. The first is the prevalent discourse on reshaping Malay identity in the 1990s, under the rubric of the 'New Malay' or *Melayu Baru*. I highlight this discourse here as an example of how the figure of the *kampung* appears as a marker of various traits, attitudes and socioeconomic conditions, in a discourse whose aim is not to understand or elucidate actual conditions in actual *kampung*, but rather utilises the *kampung* as an ideal (or perhaps we should say 'anti-ideal') space. The second example will be the portrayal of *kampung* (in contrast to urban) in Malaysian primary school textbooks. Here we see how the *kampung*, and a particular view of the *kampung*, is used as material for a variety of lessons (such as grammar, maths) and at the same time, these texts again elaborate an 'ideal' rather than 'actual' representation of *kampung*.

In the 1990s, in the wake of former Prime Minister Mahathir's call to bring about a 'New Malay'[6]—as corporate, entrepreneurial individuals to compete locally with Chinese and internationally with global capitalists—a tract under the same name *Melayu Baru* (New Malay) appeared, authored (or at least authorised) by a leading figure in the ruling United Malay National Organisation or UMNO (Muhammad, 1993). The first prescriptive chapter of the book was a call to '*membandarkan Melayu*' (urbanise the Malays). The stark contrast between *kampung* and urban values reflects themes found more generally in authority-defined discourse on the *kampung*, in which the *kampung* is a place for 'wasting time', sheltering Malays from competition with Chinese and others (competition necessary, with deep shades of social Darwinism, to improve 'the race') and trapping Malays within a backward mentality, economy and sociocultural milieu. All of these themes, and their ascendance in conceptualising the *kampung*, can be traced back at least as far as Mahathir's own well-known work *The Malay Dilemma* (1970; see also

Alatas, 1977; Bunnell, 2002; Rustam, 1993; Shamsul, 1998b).

The generally negative assessments of a 'backward' *kampung* mentality are at the same time played off not only against visions of progressive urban modernity, but also the *kampung* itself as site and retainer of residual traditional values, embodied most frequently in kinship ties, naturalistic environmentalism and especially *gotong-royong* or mutual aid among kin and neighbours.[7] These motifs appear as well in extensive references to *kampung* in Malaysian school textbooks. Textbooks collected by the author, and in circulation and use in the 1990s, make frequent use of a *kampung* motif in lessons teaching grammar, composition, mathematics and other subjects.

A detailed analysis of these textbooks reveals that *kampung* are portrayed as sites of respite from the hubbub of the city, where urban subjects experience traditional values, the hardships of rural life and positive environmental values. *Kampung* are sites of (temporary) return and reconnection with kin for nominally marked urban Malay subjects (but not for non-Malay subjects—who "*balik rumah*"—return home rather than '*balik kampung*'—return to the *kampung*). Conversely, rural Malay subjects in these texts travel to cities in search of work, worldly experience (*cari pengalaman*) and modernity (embodied— in tall buildings, basic amenities (*kemudahan asas*), traffic, etc.). School textbooks emphasise (over and over) the relationship of urban (*bandar*) and *kampung* as a relationship of difference and contrast. While occasional instances that run counter to this general structure of feeling can be found, they are far more the exception than the rule. Such is largely the case in everyday discourse as well.

Everyday Discourse

Everyday discourse in Malaysia is rife with reference to and contrastive use of *kampung* and its opposite, frequently unmarked and more diffusely figured as '*bandar*', '*pekan*', 'K.L'. (Kuala Lumpur) and other signifiers

(see Norazit, 1996 p. 178). Again, it would be far too much to attempt a comprehensive survey of the everyday use of *kampung* here (see Thompson, 2002). Rather, I will point out how the figure of the *kampung* operates ideologically and how its integration into an urban political economy is made invisible.

The sort of image of the *kampung* presented to me in my friend's letter quoted earlier was one I found to be common-place in the *kampung* itself. When I made my first visit to the *ketua kampung* (village head) of Sungai Siputeh, to introduce myself and discuss my fieldwork, his description of the *kampung* was quite similar to that of Aji's. He reiterated that the main income-generating activities of the residents were rubber tapping, *padi* planting and other '*kerja kampung*'. Although he and others are aware (as it is right before their eyes—which I will discuss in more detail below) that much economic activity unrelated to agricultural pursuits takes place in the *kampung* and by *kampung* residents, that activity is seen as marginal to the 'real' *kampung*.

This ubiquitous figuring of the *kampung* as essentially 'rural/agricultural' but also as a location of public safety and community—while, again, not always corresponding to empirical reality—is taken into account by residents and migrants in actualising a variety of practices. Young people—for example, repeatedly told me in interviews and discussions that there was 'no future' for them in the *kampung*, that migration out of the *kampung* was inevitable (Thompson, 2003). Similarly, some rural to urban migrants returned to live in the *kampung* when they were older and had teenage children in order to raise them in a 'safer' environment (both in terms of criminal activity and morality) (Thompson, 2002).

Thoroughgoing Urbanisation and Rural Change

While a contrast of rural–urban difference dominates everyday and official discourse in Malaysia, a wide variety of evidence suggests that the *kampung* is highly integrated

into rather than separate and apart from a wider urban-centred national and global system. A 'thoroughgoing urbanisation' (Jones, 1997) of Asia and specifically Malaysia, economic survey data and the ethnographic record of rural Malaysia all cast doubt on the validity of a sharp rural–urban divide. This section lays out some of these general trends, to be followed by a closer examination of the case of Sungai Siputeh and how these trends are reflected and played out in that particular location.

Most of Asia has experienced rapid urbanisation over the past century. In one respect, as Reid (1993, pp. 67–68) has argued, for south-east Asia this represents the re-urbanisation of an area de-urbanised due to the effects of colonialism. Nevertheless, the extent of urbanisation in the late 20th century is unprecedented. Global economic forces and export-oriented industrialisation have spurred urbanisation in south-east Asia generally and in Malaysia in particular (Lee, 1995). Most studies of this phenomenon have focused, not surprisingly, on cities and increasingly on 'mega-urban' regions (see, for example, Bishop *et al.*, 2003; Bunnell *et al.*, 2002; Ginsberg *et al.*, 1991; McGee and Robinson, 1995). However, the shift from predominantly rural-agricultural settlement to urban-industrial has not been isolated in cities alone.

The effects of urbanisation and industrialisation have seen the end of rural isolation through the extensive development of transport and communication networks (Jones, 1997, pp. 240–241, 245–246). The expansion and extension of urban forms and influence have for several decades been conceptualised as a form of 'creeping urbanism' (Guyot, 1969; quoted in Evers and Korff, 2000). Perhaps the most prominent formulation of this idea is found in McGee's concept of the 'desa-kota' (lit. countryside-city) region (McGee, 1991). McGee locates *desa-kota* both conceptually and geographically between urban centre and rural periphery. It is not suburbanisation along North American models, but is the point of articulation between rural and urban and a region of the

reworking of rural spaces into urban ones (see Lee, 1995). The 'thoroughgoing' urbanisation that Jones (1997) writes of, however, should not be seen as confined merely to the ever-expanding fringes of mega-urban regions. In peninsular Malaysia, the transport and communications networks Jones (1997) discusses extend into and throughout most so-called rural areas. Urbanism has not been creeping. It has been leaping.

Changing Rural Economies

By 1987, rural households in peninsular Malaysia derived only a quarter (25.7 per cent) of their annual income from agricultural activities (Shireen, 1998, p. 207). Non-agricultural income was derived from social services (24.2 per cent), manufacturing (13.7 per cent), trade (13.2 per cent), and a variety of other sources (23.2 per cent) (Shireen, 1998, p. 207). Given that industrialisation, economic growth, transport systems and the like have all continued to expand since 1987, the share of non-agricultural income has increased over the past decade and a half, while the number of *kampung* residents engaged in agriculture has probably continued to decline. Numerous, independent ethnographic studies of *kampung* over the past half-century lend support to these nation-wide trends, while also illustrating how these changes are playing out in particular rural localities.

While the rhetoric of *kampung* as a site of alterity to the modern world continues to be prevalent in contemporary discourse, close study of rural *kampung*, mainly in the form of ethnographic description and analysis, have challenged the view of *kampung* as tightly knit, egalitarian, corporate communities (see Kemp, 1988, 1991). Syed Husin Ali's study of leadership in Malay peasant society (1975), as well as the later work of James Scott (1985) and Shamsul (1986), show rural *kampung* to have a distinct socioeconomic class stratification. Husin Ali argued that this class division was exacerbated by the extension of colonial and later state bureaucracies during the early 20th cen-

tury. But even prior to such intervention, class stratification was apparent. The changes of the second half of the 20th century, should be viewed in this light; not as the distortion of an idyllic, egalitarian *kampung* into a newly stratified one, but rather as a transformation from a form of rural, agricultural stratification into an urban, industrial one.

The occupational structure and sources of income of particular *kampung* are widely varied, depending on such factors as the agricultural base, for example, paddy planting, rubber tapping, oil-palm harvesting or fishing (see Bailey, 1983)—the relative distance to urban centres or industrial sites, macroeconomic fluctuations and so on. Nevertheless, the overall character of rural Malaysia was described as predominantly agricultural up to the 1960s or 1970s (for example, Tham, 1977) but predominantly non-agricultural by the 1980s (Shireen, 1998). These trends are seen in the ethnographic record as well. Studies conducted prior to the 1970s frequently report rural *kampung* to be predominantly or overwhelmingly agricultural, with 70 per cent, 80 per cent or more of the inhabitants dependent on agricultural production (for example, Husin Ali, 1975, pp. 3–5; Provencher, 1971, p. 11). Studies of rural *kampung* since the 1970s indicate the increasing significance of non-agricultural income and occupations (for example, Ong, 1987, pp. 60–61, 82–84; Peletz, 1988, p. 182). Several long-term studies of particular *kampung*, comparing the occupations of their residents at two or more points in time, bear this out as well. Rogers' (1993) comparison of Sungai Raya in Johor from 1966 to 1987, De Konick's (1992) comparison of Paya Keladi and Matang Pinang in Kedah and Penang State between 1972 and 1987, Tsubouchi's (2001) study of Golok in Kelantan from 1971 to 2000 and Wan Hashim's (1988, pp.153–157) observations on Ulu Kenderong in upper Perak State between 1974 and 1980, all provide evidence of a trend shifting away from agricultural production and income and towards a more diverse occupational structure, despite the fact that the *kampung* they study are widely divergent geographically and in other respects.[8]

Changing Social Interaction

A fundamental argument in the study of urban life is that urbanisation and urbanism are not merely a matter of population density. Rather, studies of urbanism argue that urbanism implies a qualitative change in human relationships. Although debates have ranged widely over exactly what these qualitative changes are (see, for example, Kasinitz, 1995; Low, 1999; Sennett, 1969), a basic view is that urban density correlates with a greater degree of functional, role-based social interaction and loosely knit social networks, as opposed to multidimensional, intensive interactions and tightly knit social networks (for example, Wellman, 1999). Even where tightly knit social networks or sub-cultures are found (see Gans, 1962; Fischer, 1982), they are embedded in a broader, impersonal urban space.

In Malaysia, social researchers have made similar arguments about the effects of urban environments and the difference between rural and urban social interaction. Two aspects of this rural–urban difference are: different standards of conduct in rural and urban spaces; and, more tightly knit social networks among *kampung*-dwellers. Drawing out trends and changes in these aspects of social life from the ethnographic record is not as easily done as for the realm of economics. However, evidence for social change in rural *kampung* can be gleaned from the sources available. Work on Malaysia up to at least the 1970s tended to suggest that a sharp rural–urban divide accounted for a very different world view and different social interaction among *kampung*-dwellers and urbanites (for example, Provencher, 1971; Nagata, 1979; Norazit, 1996; Tham, 1977; Wilder, 1982; Wilson, 1967). More recent studies indicate that changes in social interaction are taking place parallel to those in the economy.

Ronald Provencher (1971) provides the most detailed and explicit account of differences in urban and rural social interaction to

date. Based on fieldwork conducted in the mid 1960s, he argued that important differences could be observed between interaction styles of Malays living in urban and rural settlements. Provencher observed that the similarity of agricultural occupation among residents and sparse settlement of the rural *kampung* he studied accounted for a generally more familiar or '*kasar*' style of interaction, when compared with the relatively formal or '*halus*' interactions among urban Malays (see Carsten, 1997, pp. 54–56; Wilson, 1967). This general difference in social interaction appeared most prominently in the conduct of *kenduri*, or feasts held for weddings and other special occasions.

In urban areas, Provencher (1971, pp. 140–143) describes how individuals interact in a more formal and *halus* manner during social visits and interactions that accompany *kenduri*. The reason, according to Provencher, is that urban *kenduri* are attended by a wider set of social acquaintances. In interacting with individuals who are less personally well known to them, Malay urban-dwellers are more likely to fall back on and assume roles defined by rules of hierarchy, status, etiquette and refined deportment. *Kenduri* are also a setting for the establishment of social status and hierarchy through the formal interaction and role-playing that takes place at these events, particularly among males.[9] By contrast, social interaction in the *kampung*, again mainly among men, takes place more often in the space of coffee shops (see Carsten, 1997). The latter sort of interaction emphasises informal, *kasar* companionship rather than formal, *halus* status and hierarchy, which residents of rural *kampung* engage in less frequently than their urban counterparts.

A closely related difference in social interactions is the relative extent of urban and rural social networks. Provencher's (1971, p. 57) work again suggests that rural social networks, especially based around work, were more circumscribed than those of urban-dwellers. As agriculturalists, working in

close proximity to their residences and alongside fellow members of the *kampung* community, rural inhabitants were not as stratified and segmented by their occupational experience, nor were they in contact with as wide a range of co-workers as urbanites. Similarly, William Wilder's study of a rural *kampung* in the state of Pahang, based on fieldwork in 1964–1966, suggested that personal networks of *kampung*-dwellers were largely confined to relationships within the *kampung* (Wilder, 1982, p. 141). More recently, Norazit Selat has argued that, while intimate relationships such as those defined by kinship and community, continue to have cultural and social salience among urban-dwelling Malays, social relationships have become increasingly commoditised and mediated by monetary calculations (Norazit, 1996). As with Provencher, Norazit (1996, p. 178) sees this as a specifically urban pattern based on an organisation of social life that is no longer tied to a rural, *kampung*, food-producing economy.

Evidence from the last decades of the 20th century indicates that these rural–urban differences are no longer as distinct as they might have been in the past and that residents of *kampung* experience social interaction along the lines of urbanites described by Provencher, Norazit and others (for example, Nagata, 1979). In the following section, I turn to the case of Sungai Siputeh, where my own primary fieldwork was carried out in the mid 1990s, to illustrate further these points. I will first discuss the economy and occupational structure found in the *kampung*. Then I turn to a discussion of social interactions among residents of the *kampung*. The situation in Sungai Siputeh shares much in common with the descriptions of urban life provided by Provencher and Norazit. In addition to commoditisation of relationships and more generally loosely knit social ties, sites of social interaction, particularly wedding feasts, involve a greater degree of formal rather than intimate interactions, which marked a specifically Malay and Malaysian urbanism in Provencher's analysis.

Urbanism of the *Kampung* Economy

The economic activities of residents of the *kampung* did not reflect the image of the *kampung* inhabited by "padi planters, rubber tappers and other farm-related workers". The results of a survey of half the households in Sungai Siputeh belie this perception of a rural idyll presented as a mirror to the urban, industrial modernity of contemporary Malaysia. In the *kampung*, and in Malaysia more generally, much attention is given to the impact of out-migration, particularly among youths in their late teens and twenties. The survey that I conducted during my fieldwork from 1994–95 indicates that out-migration is having an impact on the demographic structure of the *kampung*. The ages of the 273 residents from 58 households captured in the survey display an hourglass-shaped distribution, both top- and bottom-heavy. The smallest portion of the population are adults from their early twenties into their forties, while the number of children under 15 and particularly adults over 40 is disproportionately large (see Tsubouchi, 2001, pp. 143–145). This distribution is markedly different from the tapered demographic pyramid for the population of Malaysia as a whole (see WhiteKnight, 1997, p. 12). Young adults are not absent from the *kampung*, but do constitute the smallest age-set among the residents of Sungai Siputeh. But out-migration was not the only sign of urbanism's influence on the *kampung* economy. Just as significantly, the structure of occupation and economic experience of *kampung* residents themselves—those who remained in the *kampung*—mirrored a diverse, stratified, urban economy, in the shape of a commuter *kampung*, production for urban markets and the supplementary role the *kampung* played as a refuge for those who did not or could not succeed in urban economic competition.

Commuter Kampung

The effect of urban industrial employment is felt not only through out-migration, but in the structure of the *kampung* workforce and an urbanisation of *kampung* labour. By '*kampung* labour' I mean the labour of residents of the *kampung*—those who were living in the *kampung* at the time of the survey, which does not include the labour of those who had left the *kampung* to live elsewhere. The movement of these individuals could be considered another (perhaps the most explicit) case of the urbanisation of labour from the *kampung* and closely related to the process of urbanisation of *kampung* labour discussed here.

Early morning activity around the local coffee shop, the buses and vans that come to transport school children, factory workers and others out of the *kampung*, provide evidence that, in addition to the large number of young people who migrate from Sungai Siputeh to live in urban areas, many who continue to live in the *kampung* leave it on a daily basis. Survey evidence bears this out (see Table 1). The working population of the survey is 110 (meaning those generating income through employment). Fifty-two residents engage in *kerja kampung* (lit. village work) as their primary occupation, while another 22 residents work in factories, commuting to and from their workplaces—between 45 minutes to 90 minutes away—on a daily basis. These two groups constitute the two largest classes of workers in the *kampung*. The others, in order of size, are: government employees (13), self-employed entrepreneurs (12), loggers (4), shop workers (3), transport workers (3) and one construction worker. In addition, 32 women in the survey were classified as *suri rumah* (housewives), who were generally not considered to be generating income.

The diversity of employment alone suggests an economy very different from a rural peasantry, implicitly tied through similarity of experience and practice in a Durkheimian 'mechanical solidarity' (Durkheim, 1933/1964) and bound by a 'moral economy' (Scott, 1976) and communal *gemeinschaft* (Tönnies, 1957). The residents of the *kampung*—to say nothing of those who are non-resident out-migrants—were, in the 1990s,

Table 1. Types of work among residents of Sungai Siputeh, 1994

Type of work	All	Women	Men	Average income (RM)
Kampung work	52	14	38	189
Factory work	22	16	6	385
Government	13	2	11	721
Entrepreneur	12	5	7	742
Loggers	4	0	4	525
Shop workers	3	1	2	217
Taxi/Bus	3	0	3	417
Construction	1	0	1	850
Total[a]	110	38	72	376

[a] Not included are the 'non-working' working population (137 individuals, children, elderly and invalid) and 32 'housewives' (*suri rumah*).
Source: Based on a survey of one half (58) of the households of Sungai Siputeh.

pursuing a wide range of economic, income-generating activities. The second-largest occupational class—factory workers—engaged in the very high-profile, export-driven industries which were both the showpiece and anchor of Malaysia's high-growth national economy in the 1990s.

While Malaysian industrialisation and the corresponding growth of the industrial workforce had been well underway since the 1970s, one feature of the form of integration of rural *kampung* into this node of contemporary economic globalisation was the shift among companies away from on-site dormitories to house workers (predominantly young and female—see Ong, 1987; Ariffin, 1994) and towards the use of fleets of buses and vans that plied the back roads of industrial hinterlands to facilitate a commuter population. Thus, in *kampung* such as Sungai Siputeh, a constant flow of commuters made up a substantial portion of the *kampung* population.

Other major occupational categories found in Sungai Siputeh signal the integration of the *kampung* into the wider national economy as well. 'Government workers' covers a range of occupations, including several individuals who (much like the factory workers) were commuters, moving daily to the town of Selama and elsewhere to work as clerks and police officers at administrative centres. Others—teachers, *imam* (mosque officials),

the *ketua kampung* (village head)—operated as representatives of the government within the *kampung*, seeing to various aspects of governmentality in what Shamsul (1991) calls the 'administrative village'. Self-employed entrepreneurs (shopkeepers, fishmongers, etc.) along with their assistants (shop workers) carved out a niche in moving goods between towns and *kampung*—primarily for consumption in the latter. Loggers were another kind of commuter, or temporary migrant, living in Sungai Siputeh, but going to work for long stints in logging operations around the peninsula. And transport workers (in this survey, representing two bus conductors and a taxi driver) earned a living by facilitating the flow of people between the *kampung* and its urban counterpart.

Kampung Production for Urban Consumption

While making up slightly less than half of the 'working population' of the *kampung*, those engaged in *kerja kampung* (village work) still constituted the largest single category of worker (as organised based on the survey). But here too, rather than finding a rural, *gotong-royong*, subsistence economy, apart from and counterposed to the urban industrial economy, the *kerja kampung* activities of Sungai Siputeh were largely integrated into the latter. *Kerja kampung* covered

a wide variety of activities and most individuals for whom this was their main occupation engaged in several of these activities. The primary ones in Sungai Siputeh were rubber tapping, *padi* planting and harvesting fruits and forest products.

Rubber tapping, a major industry in Malaysia since the early 20th century, obviously involves *kampung* workers in commodity production for the world market. British colonial attempts to shield rural Malays from colonial capitalism and maintain a base of peasant farmers producing for subsistence and to meet local needs for rice and other food crops quickly gave way to smallholder initiatives (at first illegal) to enter the commodity market in rubber production (Nonini, 1992; Stevenson, 1975). Forest products collected in the vicinity of Sungai Siputeh, such as rattan for furniture production and products that go into the making of perfumes in India and the Middle East, likewise make *kerja kampung* a part of a global market economy much more than a part of a local subsistence one.

Food crops in the *kampung* are harvested both for local consumption and as cash crops. A variety of evidence, however, points to the latter taking precedence over the former. In addition to the forest products mentioned above, a wide variety of fruits (rambutan, durian, petai and others) are produced and harvested in the *kampung* and surrounding forests-cum-orchards (the line between the two is usually clear to locals, if not to visitors; although sometimes locally as well the line is a bit blurred). While certain fruits, such as durian, have had an exchange value for a long time, residents of the *kampung* report that it has only been in the latter decades of the 20th century that a market has developed for most of the common fruits. Speaking of rambutan—for example, one resident noted (as he was in the process of collecting a substantial payment for several gunny sacks of rambutan), in the past 'who would have bought rambutan, everyone had their own rambutan trees'. When rambutan ripened, the surplus was left to rot on the ground. Here urban growth, and with it the

increasing percentage of the population (including residents of Sungai Siputeh) who cannot or do not grow their own food, has correspondingly created a market and income-generating opportunity in *kampung* such as Sungai Siputeh.

Rice production in Sungai Siputeh was done in a relatively small way in the 1990s, using human labour and sometimes water buffalo for ploughing; but rarely mechanised equipment. Residents of the *kampung* produced rice for their own consumption, but this activity was clearly subordinate to other income-generating activities. During my stay and return visits to Sungai Siputeh, the irrigation systems essential to wet-rice paddy farming were frequently in a state of disrepair. Due to this, and a lack of labour, rice harvests were sporadic. A minority of households actually grew and harvested their own rice. And of those that did, almost all supplemented their own rice with rice purchased in the market. The purchase of this basic staple foodstuff was one sign of the larger circuit of consumption which accompanied the integration of the *kampung* workforce into a urban market economy.

Kampung as Supplement

In Malaysia's rush towards 'fully developed' status as a nation, Sungai Siputeh and other *kampung* serve as a kind of social security net for the Malay population in the increasingly industrial economy. The very young, the very old, the temporarily unemployed and the permanently unemployable make up a large segment of the *kampung* population. In the *kampung*, they can take advantage of relatively low prices and the low income necessary to maintain a moderate standard of living. A small number of young men and women choose to stay in the *kampung* and have neither desire nor aspirations to seek employment in cities. More have spent some time working in urban areas, but have returned to live and work in the *kampung*, in some cases because they did not like urban life, in others because of failure to succeed in the city. Many of those who remain in the

kampung lack the skills and abilities to succeed in the cities. A number of residents in the *kampung* suffer from mental or physical handicaps that prevent them from striking out on their own.

In the survey of *kampung* households, 19 adult residents (age 18 and over) were described as not working (*tiada kerja*). Of these, 6 were men and 13 were women. In most cases (14), residents described as 'not working' were elderly parents living with adult children or other relatives.[10] Details from the lives and situations of the 5 younger adults described as 'not working' illustrate the refuge the *kampung* provides. In answering that their children did not work, fathers in two households volunteered that the reason was because their offspring (in one case a son, the other a daughter) were not mentally well (*otak tak sihat*). The household survey did not directly ask for information on mental or physical handicaps, and these two cases alone are not a significant number out of the population reflected in the survey of 157 residents age 18 or older in the *kampung*. Still, on a day-to-day basis in the *kampung*, one encounters a remarkable number of mentally or physically handicapped individuals, many of whom have income-generating occupations, working at local shops or engaged in *kerja kampung*.

As has already been suggested above, the population of Sungai Siputeh was unusually top- and bottom-heavy, with a disproportionate number of school-age and younger children and older adults. A large number of adults in their 40s, 50s or 60s returned to retire to the *kampung* after years living and working elsewhere, most often in urban centres. The young children made a complex mix of the youngest children of older adults and children whose parents lived in the *kampung*, commuted and/or had migrated elsewhere but left their children with grandparents. The life-trajectory of such children was one almost inevitably destined to take them out of the *kampung* after they left school (see also Thompson, 2003). For retirees, the *kampung* afforded a relatively low-cost place to live. In 1998, during follow-up fieldwork, it was clear that the *kampung* also served as a buffer for many rural to urban migrants during the post-Asian financial crisis economic recession. Unemployed or underemployed young men and women would return home intermittently, again to take advantage of the lower cost of living in family homes.

Urbanism and Social Interactions

The urbanism displayed in the economy and occupational diversity also appears in social interactions in *kampung* Malaysia. While the more intimate, informal interactions, which Provencher argued characterised rural Malaysia, are not absent, formal, role-oriented interactions in contemporary *kampung* life appear more common than not. In wedding feasts, still a central site of Malay social interaction, in places like Sungai Siputeh, such features as interactions with relative strangers and commoditisation of relationships are characteristic. Similarly, the *gotong-royong* spirit of the *kampung* is one that increasingly has to be manufactured through government and economic incentives, rather than communal mutual self-help. And generally, for many residents, social ties to immediate neighbours are relatively attenuated, while at the same time they maintain ties to broader social networks.

Contracting Kenduri

During my fieldwork in 1994–95, the first *kenduri kontrak* (catered wedding feast) in the history of Sungai Siputeh was held. While *kenduri kontrak* is now standard in urban Malaysia and widespread in many rural areas as well, this first occurrence in Sungai Siputeh proved to be somewhat contentious. Haji Hussein, one of the wealthiest residents of the *kampung*, staged this feast to celebrate his daughter's wedding. While he was a prominent individual in the *kampung*, he had lived most of his adult life outside Sungai Siputeh and had risen to very high ranks in the government before retiring back to the *kampung*. His decision to use caterers

from a distant town, rather than call on local help in staging the *kenduri*, was based on several considerations. Having lived most of his life in towns and urban areas, he had become more comfortable and familiar with the *kenduri kontrak* as opposed to the *kenduri kampung* (a term used in contrast, to indicate the calling together of local, volunteer labour for the feast). He felt unsure about his ability to call upon the residents of the *kampung* to stage the feast, as he had only recently resettled there.

Within a month of Haji Hussein's feast, another *kenduri* of equal magnitude was held in Sungai Siputeh, this by Pak Zahir, another *kampung* luminary and *bomoh* (spiritual healer) of great renown (not only in the immediate area but widely throughout northern peninsular Malaysia). As with Haji Hussein's feast, Pak Zahir's was one of the largest in living memory and attracted guests including state-level political leaders and dignitaries. Pak Zahir, however, organised this *kenduri*, to celebrate his only son's wedding, along the lines of *kenduri kampung*—using exclusively local labour and purchasing rice, chickens and other commodities through local channels.

In the aftermath of the two wedding feasts, residents made distinctions between the styles of *kenduri kontrak* and *kenduri kampung*, very much favouring the latter. While I spoke to no one who explicitly condemned Haji Hussein for hosting a *kenduri kontrak*, it was clearly seen as problematic on multiple levels. Many thought that the caterers did not adequately understand the style and timing of *kenduri* locally; thus during the morning and afternoon, food was either not prepared on time or already cold when people were arriving to eat. More importantly, the *kenduri kontrak* seemed to violate norms of local reciprocity. As one resident complained, it was fine for Haji Hussein, who was wealthy, to hire outside caterers, but what would happen when other, poor families wanted to stage *kenduri* and could not call on him to help because he had not called on them? By contrast, no such complaints were heard regarding Pak Zahir's *kenduri*.

Both the *kenduri* hosted by Haji Hussein and Pak Zahir were exceptional in the amount of food prepared, number of guests and the amount of money spent on each. While Pak Zahir's *kenduri* conformed to *kampung* norms by mobilising local labour, it was more elaborate than most *kenduri* held in Sungai Siputeh. At the same time, apart from Haji Hussein's use of caterers, neither *kenduri* strayed far outside the expectations for a wedding ceremony. But these expectations have changed substantially during the 20th century. Although the *kenduri* discussed above were exceptional in terms of their size, the characteristics of inviting a wide range of guests from inside and outside the *kampung*, producing printed wedding cards, buying food and other supplies from distant markets and paying specialists for their services are all fairly common in less elaborate wedding *kenduri* as well.

When discussing the conduct of *kenduri*, older residents of Sungai Siputeh note numerous changes in the timing, duration, cost, economics and social dynamics of weddings and *kenduri* that have occurred in their lifetimes. All of these changes are related to broader social and economic trends, and not in small part to the effects of urbanism in the *kampung*. The length of *kenduri* and the events surrounding *kenduri* have become shorter. Elderly residents of the *kampung* recall *kenduri* in the past that lasted for three days or more. Now *kenduri* are generally one-day events and timed to coincide with school holidays and weekends, so that relatives who have moved to urban areas can attend. Scheduling *kenduri* at weekends also facilitates the mobilisation of local labour. As we have seen, a substantial portion of the *kampung* workforce is involved in occupations that require them to leave the *kampung* on a regular basis. Most factory and government workers have a day off on Sunday and a half-day on Saturdays, when they can participate in activities in the *kampung* or attend *kenduri* elsewhere.

In the 1980s and 1990s, it became more common for couples to pay for weddings largely using their own funds and to choose

their own spouses. Some parents still pay for their children's wedding *kenduri* and related expenses. But this tends to be more true among wealthier families, such as for Pak Zahir and Haji Hussein.[11] In these cases, parents also tend to have a greater say in their children's choice of spouse. But in general, the burden of wedding expenses has devolved to the groom himself. Sometimes, the groom's fiancée will help him cover the expenses, especially if she has a factory job or other income-generating employment. In such cases, though, the bride provides financial support to the groom by surreptitiously 'lending' him money. In order to conform to a confluence of Malay custom and Islamic belief, the groom or groom's family must appear to be providing the money for wedding expenses, even when the bride may have the highest income of any of the parties involved (i.e. more than the groom or either set of parents)—as may be the case when both bride and groom come from rural or working-class families and the bride works in a factory or similar employment.

Wedding feasts are carefully budgeted and very expensive, relative to any given family's wealth (see Jones, 1994, pp. 316-320). As important, the means of provisioning for *kenduri* has shifted from one of subsistence-level, mutual aid to one mediated by markets and cash income, not only for *kenduri kontrak*, but for feasts which are considered to be *kenduri kampung* as well. Older residents in the *kampung*, when describing their own weddings, often discuss how families would pool resources by contributing rice, chickens and other foodstuffs to the wedding feast as well as contributing labour for preparing and presenting the feast. Now, however, it is rare for food to be contributed. Rather, the rice, chickens and other necessities are purchased at market. And while most of the labour which goes into the feast is voluntary, often the chief cook (*tukang masak*) and his (or more rarely her) assistants are paid a moderate wage (*upah*) for their services. In particularly large feasts such as Pak Zahir's, those who contribute to dishwashing and other ac-

tivities are also sometimes paid. These features—the importance of the cash economy in exchange relationships and the general difficulty of mobilising *kampung* labour in order to host a *kenduri*—extend to other *gotong-royong* activities as well.

Political Economy of Gotong-royong

One Thursday morning during my stay in the *kampung*, I noticed a group of men working on the rickety wooden suspension bridge spanning the Selama river connecting Sungai Siputeh to the *kampung* across the river. The bridge was desperately in need of repair. Heavy motorcycle, bicycle and foot traffic had left gaping holes in the bridge surface. Missing and broken wooden planks made for a hazardous crossing. The dozen or more men involved in the project worked in pairs spread out along the span of the bridge, removing cracked and broken planks along with rusty nails, and replacing them with new planks. The group was composed of older men in their 40s, 50s and 60s. When I joined in and talked with some of the men involved, they said that none of the younger men from the *kampung* could help out because they were off working elsewhere.

The bridge repair project reflected the sort of *gotong-royong* activity of rural *kampung* that is valorised in Malaysian popular culture and discourse. The group approached the work in *ad hoc* fashion, without a particular leader or overall plan of action. Men simply pitched in and worked at repairing whatever gaps or worn, broken sections of the bridge came to their attention. The men were volunteering their time and said that they were not receiving *upah*—such as the payments given to those who help prepare and organise *kenduri* or for other kinds of work done around the *kampung*.[12] Still, the bridge repair project did not suddenly spring spontaneously from among the men involved. I was told that the *Jawatankuasa Kampung* (JKK) or *kampung* committee for the *kampung* had organised the activity. The wooden planks used to repair the bridge came from a separate bridge construction project going on

above the *kampung* in conjunction with a larger water reservoir construction project. Although the JKK did not provide *upah* for the men involved, they did pay for drinks for all the men at a small stall adjacent to the bridge.

As with *kenduri* in Sungai Siputeh, the bridge repair activities point to elements of the political-economy underlying the *gotong-royong* spirit associated with *kampung* in Malaysia. While popular representations associate a spontaneous *gotong-royong* spirit with rural Malaysia and the need for government intervention to produce similar activity in urban areas, evidence from *kenduri*, bridge repair and other activities suggests that economic and social relationships beget *gotong-royong* activities, rather than any essential character of place or people. Urbanisation of *kampung* labour has made it more difficult to engage residents of places like Sungai Siputeh in *gotong-royong* activities. As my host father pointed out, with 'all the young people gone', basic maintenance of the *kampung* infrastructure, particularly maintenance of the paddy fields and irrigation system, which residents previously conducted in *gotong-royong* fashion, now goes unattended for lack of labour and initiative. Much of the labour power in the *kampung* is expended on urban and urban-oriented employment—working in urban areas or producing goods for urban markets. With the thoroughgoing penetration of a cash economy, a material standard of living in which televisions, refrigerators and motorcycles are considered basic necessities, and a wide range of employment opportunities, most residents place a higher value on income-generating work as opposed to basic subsistence activities. The government usually carries out infrastructure maintenance by employing road crews or contracting-out work in urban and rural Malaysia—the *gotong-royong* bridge repair was more the exception than the rule.[13] Moreover, the commoditisation of social relationships, which Norazit associates with urban experience, appears equally at work in the *kampung*.

Loosely Knit Social Networks

Different residents of the *kampung* have very different social networks, some more tightly knit and intimate than others. It is common, however, for social networks to extend far beyond the immediate, largely kinship ties of the *kampung*. Factory workers, entrepreneurs, government workers and others all develop important social relationships with co-workers, business partners or other civil servants. In the case of factory and other workers, a great deal of socialising takes place at work, in markets located near work-sites, or in the time spent commuting in vans or buses which commonly service a number of dispersed, residential *kampung*. Entrepreneurs who buy goods wholesale in urban centres for retail sale in the *kampung* generally establish multiple relationships with suppliers. Even among those involved in agricultural, *kerja kampung*, the fact that they are essentially commodity rather than subsistence producers means that many will establish relationships with middlemen who purchase their latex, fruits, rattan or other goods.

At the same time, it is possible to find a degree of alienation and anonymity among *kampung* residents with regard to their social ties to others in the *kampung*. As with other aspects of the discourse about *kampung*, almost all residents will say, when asked to characterise the *kampung*, that everyone is related to everyone else. But there are numerous exceptions to the explicit discourse of kinship ties—for example, the nurse, who runs the local government clinic, and a taxi driver, who finds it convenient to live in the *kampung* for purposes of his taxi licence. While these are exceptions to the rule, they do demonstrate that *kampung* residence is not absolutely tied to kin relationship. More significantly, kinship ties do not automatically mean that everyone is closely bonded to everyone else.

The high degree of mobility, whether among commuters, return migrants or others, means that although related to one another by kinship, residents do not necessarily feel a strong bond to others, apart from their im-

mediate relatives. Commuters, especially younger adults, often express reluctance to engage in much social interaction in the *kampung*, other than among a few close friends. Return migrants also register a degree of alienation from other residents of the *kampung*, even as they are cognisant of kinship relationships. As with Haji Hussein, return migrants often do not feel closely attached to their neighbours and distant kin and, as was demonstrated in the case of Haji Hussein's *kenduri*, often do not feel comfortable engaging them in relationships of long-term mutual reciprocity. One return migrant, on comparing social interaction in Sungai Siputeh with the apartment block where he lived in Kuala Lumpur for many years, summed up his experience by stating ironically, that the apartment block was more like a *kampung* than the *kampung* (see also Thompson, 2002, pp. 70-71).

Kampung Urbanism in a Forgotten Place

Evidence from national-level economic and demographic data, the ethnographic record of the past half-century and my own interviews and observations in Sungai Siputeh all suggest that rural, *kampung* Malaysia is a socially urban space. Despite the relatively sparse population density of the place that marks it as rural, the everyday social reality of its inhabitants is more akin to social life that is conceptually urban than not. In part, this is an effect of communication and transport technology. Time–space compression, which writers such as David Harvey (1990) analyse on a global scale, is apparent in *kampung* Malaysia as well. The effects of urbanism no longer necessitate the spatial density of urban dwelling when distance is easily surmounted by superhighways and telephone lines. This is not to say that social life in Sungai Siputeh is just like Kuala Lumpur or Penang, or for that matter Tokyo or New York. However, in important ways, it is perhaps more like the social life of such urban centres than it is like the imagined rural idyll that appears in official discourse,

everyday narratives and even some academic writing.

To what extent is this case of Sungai Siputeh 'generalisable' to Malaysia as a whole or any particular part of the country? I would not extend this argument outside peninsular Malaysia—not because the same processes might not be going on there (see, for example, Metcalf, 2001, 2002), but because of well-known differences in social, economic and other fields. On the peninsula as well, important contrasts hold between—for example, the east coast and west coast, north and south, rubber-tapping and palm-oil producing *kampung* (like Sungai Siputeh, see also, Banks, 1983; Rogers, 1993; Shamsul, 1986; Tsubouchi, 2001; Wan Hashim, 1988), areas of vast commodity rice production (such as the Muda Irrigation scheme; see De Konick, 1992; Scott, 1985; Wong, 1987), fishing villages (see Carsten, 1997), sites more or less distant from urban and industrial hubs, the richly documented 'matrilineal society' of Negri Sembilan (for example, Peletz, 1988, 1996; Stivens, 1996) and so on. As I have noted, Sungai Siputeh lies in the north-west of the peninsula and (perhaps most importantly in terms of the occupation structure found in Table 1) in the 'catchment area' from which the Kulim-Perai industrial zone draws most of its workforce.

While no two *kampung* in Malaysia share identical histories and general trends (such as fluctuations in rubber prices or encroaching urban sprawl) affect some *kampung* and not others, the evidence I have presented here from my own research and other studies leads me to believe that the various aspects of urbanism which I have outlined above pertain to some degree to most if not all rural *kampung* on the peninsula. The argument I have presented here reiterates and substantiates the challenge to the prevalent discourse of rural–urban difference not only in Malaysia, but elsewhere as well, which has been floated by writers from Louis Wirth (1956/1969) to Gavin Jones (1997). Such a challenge is important and productive for several reasons. First, it challenges naïve analysis that continues to take *kampung* (and

more generally the 'rural') as somehow standing outside and apart from something (usually) called 'modernity'. Secondly, analysis which avoids capitulating to the dominant discourse of taken-for-granted urban–rural difference is better able to help understand the conditions, constraints, problems and possible solutions in the everyday lives of rural *kampung* residents (see Shireen, 1998). The politics of forgetting in Malaysia, through simultaneously nostalgic and derogatory imaginaries, displace other narratives of the histories and social lives of these residents and the *kampung* settlements in which they dwell. By interrogating this 'forgetting' and engaging with lived experiences in contemporary *kampung*, we will, one hopes, move beyond the idea that rural residents and those with rural origins are 'backward' and unable to handle urban 'modernity' or that rural *kampung* necessarily maintain some sort of moral community and *gotong-royong* spirit and instead see more clearly the social realities of everyday life in so-called rural places.

Notes

1. Throughout this paper, I use the term *kampung* to refer to predominantly Malay, rural settlements. *Kampung* is used to refer to a variety of inhabitations by speakers of Malay (and its variants Bahasa Malaysia, Bahasa Indonesia). These include urban squatter settlements (see Evers and Korff, 2000; Yeoh, 2001) or old neighbourhoods/villages that have been engulfed by urban growth (Goh, 2002; Brookfield *et al.*, 1991). Here and more generally, there is a strong association and frequent deployment of *kampung* in a thinly veiled discourse about socioeconomic class (see especially Yeoh, 2001). Shamsul (1998a, p. 39, fn 2) has pointed out that the term *kampung* appears to be the linguistic forerunner to the English term 'compound' and can be used to refer to a single house or houses and the surrounding fenced-in yard or garden. In Indonesia, the term *kampung* is used to refer specifically to urban neighbourhoods in contrast to rural *desa* (see Evers and Korff, 2000, pp. 229–235). In addition, *kampung* has strong emotional resonance (akin to 'home', as opposed to say 'house', in English). All that said, the primary referent of *kampung* in contemporary Malaysian discourse is a rural Malay settlement.

2. My approach and terminology owe a great deal to the work of Raymond Williams (1973, 1977). Following Williams' attention to 'structures of feeling' (see also Thompson, 2003), I use urbanism in two ways. My inclination is to use it in a more narrow sense to signify the ideational aspects of a structure of feeling about place in which cities occupy a central and dominant position (Thompson, n.d.). However, in this work which focuses more on social *practices* than cultural ideas, I use it in a broader sense to include structures of feeling and *experience*. Here, I find myself echoing Williams' own ambivalence, on the one hand needing to disaggregate cultural ideas from social practices for analytical clarity, while on the other, recognising that they are inseparably bound together in everyday life (see Williams, 1977, p. 132). With regard to the term 'urbanisation', I use it here to signify the social and cultural *processes* associated with the structures of feeling and experience of urbanism.

3. Janet Carsten (1995) demonstrates a similar politics of forgetting in relationship to migration histories and migration narratives among Malay inhabitants of Langkawi, Malaysia. Carsten argues that a generalised narrative of a common yet highly unspecified origin of coming from poor and troubled places displaces historical memory of migration histories which might reveal more specific relationships (and possibly differences) among her informants. Carsten argues that this sort of nostalgic rather than specific past operates ideologically to provide Langkawi Malays with a shared, if somewhat vague, sense of migratory identity. In the case of *kampung*, discussed in this paper, the ideological implications of a nostalgic yet at the same time derogatory and generalised image of the *kampung* operate both as a basis for shared identity and a lever to wrench rural Malays out of agricultural pursuits and into a capitalist industrial economy.

4. References to Malaysia in this paper are specifically to peninsular or west Malaysia. As I note in the conclusion, I would hesitate to extend my claims to the east Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah, given the many apparent differences between the peninsula and those states on the island of Borneo.

5. One register of the ubiquitous nature of the term *kampung* is found in the fact that it is one of a handful of terms that commonly goes untranslated in Malaysian English. In my own experience, I have found it used, untranslated and unexplained, in all manner

of Malaysian English texts, from newspapers to school textbooks, and in everyday speech. The point being, the word is so common that any Malaysian, even one who did not speak Malay or did not speak it well, would be assumed to be familiar with the term *kampung*.

6. See: *Utusan Malaysia*, 9 November 1991, "Mahathir: Lahirkan Melayu Baru" [Mahathir: give birth to a New Malay].

7. While *gotong-royong* is widely praised and glorified in Malaysian discourse, in *The Malay Dilemma*, Mahathir could not even abide this aspect of the idealised *kampung*—positing it as a cause of Malay inability to appreciate the productive potential of money as capital and to operate in a capitalist system (Mahathir, 1970, pp. 167–168).

8. The one major exception to this trend in peninsular Malaysia seems to be the 'rice belt' of the north-west and, particularly, the Muda irrigation scheme (see De Konick, 1992; Scott, 1985; Wong, 1987). In that region, while the significance of agricultural income and occupations for rural residents has remained relatively high, a shift from independent small farming to larger industrial agriculture has seen the expansion of a 'rural proletariat'. Even so, non-agricultural occupations and income have become more significant in this area as well (De Konick, 1992, p. 177).

9. Provencher (1971), as well as others (such as Carsten 1997; Peletz 1996), examine the significant gender differences in expectations of *halus* and *kasar* behaviour. The many details of this subject cannot be addressed here, but in a very general way, because *halus* behaviour is expected in interactions with strangers and *kasar* behaviour is expected or at least accepted in interactions with familiars and because men are expected and allowed to interact with a wider range of strangers, men are generally involved in more situations where *halus* behaviour is expected than women. At the same time, trends such as the feminisation of the industrial workforce, which sees more women operating in 'public spheres' are arguably making them more subject to the expectations of *halus* behaviour (see Ong, 1987, pp. 179–193).

10. Of these 14, in one case it was an elderly adult living with a younger sibling and, in two cases, non-working elderly adults lived in their own separate household (one alone, one with a young grandchild) but had family members nearby and/or lived on remittances.

11. Pak Zahir spent up to RM12 000 for his son's *kenduri*. The total cost of the wedding (including *hantaran* and *mas kahwin*) came to over RM16 000; most of which Pak Zahir provided.

12. *Upah* is a payment given for the performance of a specific service; as distinct from *gaji*, which indicates an on-going payment for a person hired to fill a particular position (for example, the wages or salary of an office or factory worker).

13. Several government projects, from construction of the reservoir mentioned above to basic road maintenance, were undertaken while I was in Sungai Siputeh. Numerous men from the *kampung* derive occasional part-time income by working on construction and maintenance crews.

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