

The Unwelcome Guests: Indonesian Immigrants and Malaysian Public Responses

AZIZAH KASSIM*

I Introduction

Malaysia presently faces serious problems of illegal immigration into the country. The migrants are largely from the ASEAN region, i.e., Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, while a few are from Burma, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India. As the migrants arrived illegally, it is impossible to determine their number. The government in 1985 estimates their number to be 20,000; however this figure is strongly disputed by many, especially by the Secretary General of the opposition party, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), Mr. Lim Kit Siang, who believes the figure to be "between 800,000 and 1 million" or close to 7% of the country's 15.5 million population [*Asiaweek* November 1, 1985: 38]. That a very large proportion of them are from Indonesia is evidenced by their conspicuous presence in town centres and on estates or plantations, and by the number of Indonesian illegal immigrants who have been detained by the authorities and deported.¹⁾

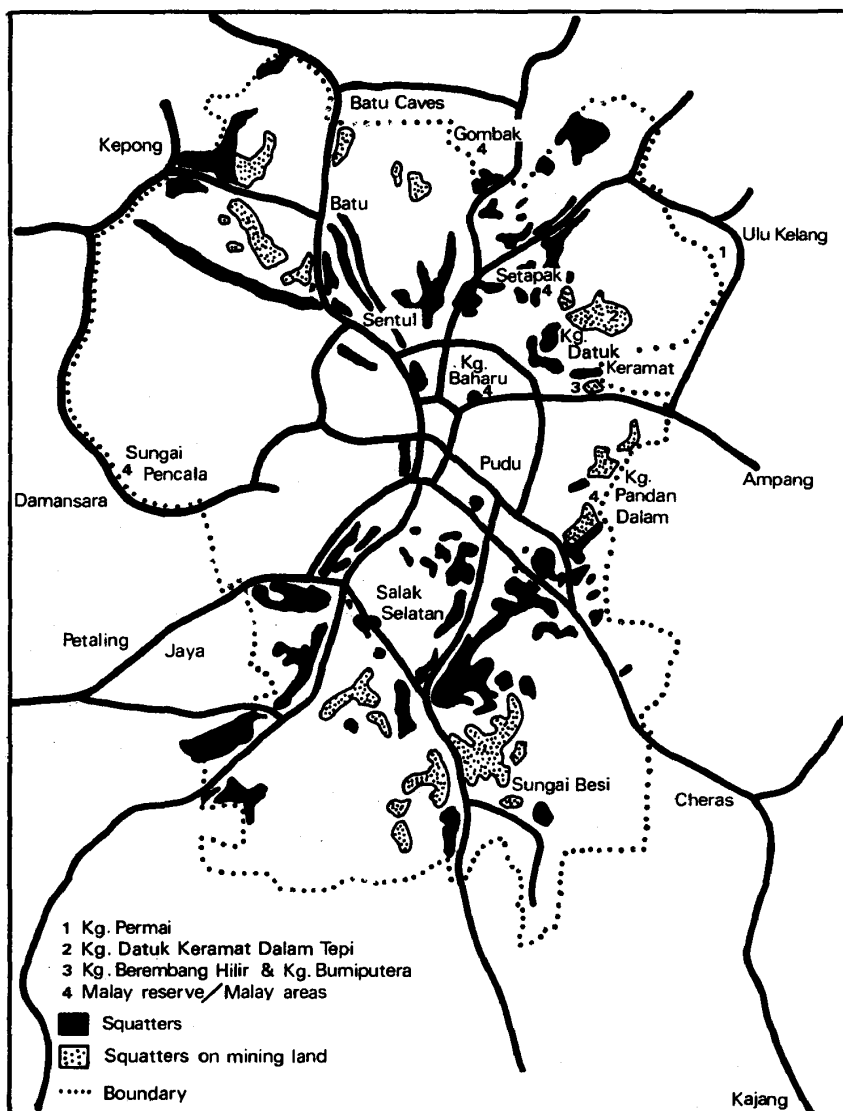
* Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Malaya, 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

1) Arrest and detention of illegal immigrants is well-documented in the national dailies and in such reports their nationalities are given.

The presence of the Indonesian immigrants has serious socio-economic and political implications and invokes varying responses and reactions from different sections of the Malaysian public. Here, I attempt to examine such responses both at the macro and micro levels. Public reactions at the macro level are gauged by studying numerous articles published on the Indonesians between 1975 and 1985, especially those which appeared in the country's leading national dailies, as well as readers' letters and editorial columns pertaining to the Indonesian immigrants.²⁾ To study micro level responses, field work was performed between August and December 1985 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city, where there are about 12,000 Indonesian immigrants [Azizah Kassim 1986: 29-38].³⁾ The field work focused

2) Among the newspapers used were the *New Straits Times*, *Berita Harian*, *The Star*, *The Malay Mail*, *Utusan Malaysia* and *Utusan Melayu*. Newspaper clippings pertaining to the Indonesians for the stated period were compiled by the Ministry of Home Affairs and were made available to me by a senior official of the Ministry.

3) The field work was financed by the University of Malaya Vote F Research Fund and was carried out with the help of two research assistants and second-year students (1985/86 academic session) in the Urban Anthropology Course at the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Malaya.



Source: adapted from City Hall's map on squatter areas in Kuala Lumpur, 1976.

Fig. 1 Location of Indonesian Immigrants in Kuala Lumpur (1985-86)

on two squatter villages (*kampung*), i.e., Kampung Berembang Hilir and Kampung Datuk Keramat Dalam Tepi, where recent immigrants from Indonesia live alongside Malay squatters (see Fig. 1). The respondents are comprised of both Malays and Indonesians. One hundred sixty-eight Indonesian households (accounting for one third of the total number of households in both villages) were studied to determine, among other things, ethnic compositions,

demographic patterns, socio-economic status and the nature of their interactions with their Malay neighbours. Of the Indonesians studied, 64.3% are Boyans (Baweans), 17.9% Maduras and 11.3% Minangkabaus, while the remaining 6.5% are from other islands in Indonesia, especially those in the province of Riau.

Interviews were also held with the Malays, especially with their political-cum-community leaders at the local (squatter) level. Additionally, some Malay household heads were chosen at random in an attempt to evaluate general Malay reactions and attitudes towards their Indonesian neighbours.⁴⁾

II Migration of Indonesians into Malaysia: A Historical Overview

The flow of Indonesians into Malaysia, particularly Peninsular Malaysia or Malaya, has continued for centuries. The phenome-

4) No corresponding attempt was made to study the socio-economic background of the Malay squatters in the two villages in view of the fact that the Malay squatters in Kuala Lumpur have been extensively studied in the last five years or so.

non is widely known; migration between both countries in the prehistoric period is enshrined in Malay myths and legends; and the process of migration during the colonial period is well-documented. Finally, the presence of descendants of earlier immigrants from Indonesia, found all over the western states, especially in Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, Johor and Perak, bears testimony of earlier immigration [Ismail Buyong 1985: 8–11; Mohamad Khalid Shariff 1985: 43–52; Mohd Ali Hj. Ismail 1985: 19–33; Norisa Nasar 1985: 34–42; Paridah Talib 1985: 64–74; R. Hydat R. Iskandar 1985: 53–63]. In the period before independence in 1957, the migratory flow from Indonesia into Malaysia was left unchecked. In fact, at some point in the late 19th century and early 20th century, the British colonial authorities in Malaya encouraged such immigration as it contributed positively towards their capitalistic enterprises. Many of these early immigrants stayed and were, at the time of independence, given the option to become Malaysian citizens. A large number of them did so and were soon assimilated with the local Malays. Such assimilation was made possible by socio-cultural similarities and intermarriage between the two ethnic categories. Now these ethnic Indonesians form part of the *Bumiputera* community, the main component of the Malaysian population besides the Chinese and Indian.⁵⁾

In the post-independence era, however, in an attempt to control population growth, immigration from Indonesia and elsewhere into Malaya has been restricted. Neverthe-

less, the inflow continued, at first in trickles, but eventually gaining momentum in the seventies. Large numbers of Indonesians were induced to come to Malaya because of the job opportunities created by the launching of the New Economic Policy set forth in the Second Malaysia Plan 1971–75. The policy's simultaneous emphasis both on urbanization/industrialization and rural development created an acute labour shortage in the agricultural sector when the rural Malay population moved into urban areas in response to the government's urbanization policy. The short-fall in labour in the rural sector was overcome by the solicitation of Indonesians by contractors and sub-contractors engaged by private estates and by government agricultural agencies such as FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority), RISDA (Rubber Industry Small Holders Development Authority), and FELCRA (Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority). Such labour, it appears, was brought in surreptitiously, either through illegal syndicates or informal social networks. Hence, the arrival of the first Indonesian workers was hardly noticeable. Their obscurity was further enhanced when they were confined to agricultural sectors in land development schemes and estates which

5) The Malaysian society is officially categorised into two parts: *Bumiputera* (lit.: Sons of the Soil) and *Bukan-Bumiputera* (lit.: not Sons of the Soil). The former, in West Malaysia, refers to indigenous people such as the Malays and various *Orang Asli* groups (the Temuans, Semai, Jakun, etc.); while the latter refers to descendants of immigrants from China, India, etc.

were isolated from the mainstream of the local population. The immigrant presence was barely felt, and in fact, some segments of the local population were not even aware of them.

Towards the second half of the seventies, however, the inflow of Indonesian immigrants increased; they were no longer confined to the rural areas, and were recruited to work in domestic services, as well as in the construction industries, most of which were located in urban areas. By 1976 their number became so large as to attract the attention of the general public, especially in the state of Johore, which was regarded as the entry point for the illegal immigrants. In response to public outcry, a series of raids were carried out by the police and the immigration authority on plantation and construction sites in an attempt to stem the flood of illegal immigrants. Such attempts appear to have brought little success and in 1979 the Deputy Minister of Labour announced that there were 12,000 Indonesians in Malaysia [*The Star* August 13, 1979]. Two years later the number of Indonesians increased astronomically; 100,000 were estimated to be in the state of Johore alone. With the continued inflow from Indonesia, the government found itself in a dilemma. On the one hand, it realized the need for foreign labour in the agricultural sector and construction industries [*The Star* February 17, 1981; March 18, 1981], and on the other, it was seriously concerned about the socio-economic and political implications of the Indonesian influx into the country.

In an attempt to curb the mounting flow of immigrants from Indonesia into Malaysia, the two countries signed a labour pact on May 12, 1984 in Medan, Sumatra, with the Malaysian side represented by then Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Musa Hitam and the Indonesian by Mr. Sudomo, Indonesian Minister for Manpower. The pact, known as the Medan Agreement, stipulates that the acquisition of Indonesian labour by prospective employers in Malaysia must be made through official channels, i.e., via the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Labour and the Immigration Department of Malaysia and the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower. Based on the amount and type of labour needed by Malaysia, the Indonesian Manpower Ministry would recruit workers and facilitate their entry into Malaysia by such means as providing them with travel documents and exempting them from exit tax. By channelling the inflow of labour through government bureaucracy, both countries hoped not only to curb illegal immigration of Indonesians into Malaysia, but also to keep track of immigrant workers and safeguard them against exploitation by Malaysian employers.

However, this attempt to bureaucratise immigration of labour did little to solve the problem of illegal entries. Prospective employers, and especially prospective migrants, deplore bureaucratic procedures which are time-consuming and incomprehensible to the Indonesian layman.⁶⁾ To date only 200 Indonesians have been

6) Interview with officials of the Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs in November 1985.

recruited to work on estates through inter-governmental labour cooperation as stipulated by the Medan Agreement; the rest found their way into Malaysia and sought their jobs otherwise. Thus illegal immigration continues.

In 1985 illegal immigration became so rampant that the government was forced to take drastic steps to curb it. In September of that year Home Affairs Minister Datuk Musa Hitam announced a nationwide campaign against illegal entries. The Malaysian Task Force on refugees, known generally as Task Force VII, was given extra powers to deal with illegal immigration. It identified landing points and increased patrols in these places. The police, navy, air force and the Malaysian RELA contingency force were directed to cooperate with Task Force VII, and the general public was implored to cooperate with these measures by reporting all known cases of illegal immigration to the authorities. Subsequent raids and surveillance led to several arrests, detentions and deportations. In spite of such measures the inflow of Indonesians has not subsided. The deported returned, all the wiser from their experience in how to avoid the authorities, sometimes bringing others with them as well [*The Star* December 3, 1981].

If the problem of illegal immigration is insurmountable, it is not due to a lack of effort on the part of the Malaysian authorities. Many factors contribute to complicate the problem. The close geographical proximity between the two countries enables easy access into Malaysia. To the Indonesians it seems, to quote the

Indonesian Information Officer at the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, "the Straits of Melaka link rather than divide people of the two countries" (*Selat Melaka itu menghubungkan bukan memisah kedua negara*). It takes only half an hour by boat from the nearest islands off the coast of Sumatra to Selangor on the west coast of Malaya. Prospective immigrants dressed as fishermen or acting as barter traders can easily sneak into the various landing points on the western coastline. Those with family ties along the coast will find such entry even easier with family members providing shelter and protection in the initial part of their stay.

The Indonesians disembark from various islands: Bengkalis, Pulau Riau, Rupert, Rengsang, Bagansiapiapi and Pulau Karimun, usually having arrived from elsewhere in Indonesia, and gain access into Malaysia mainly through Sungai Tiram, Sungai Buluh, Sungai Selangor, Tanjung Lumba-Lumba, Kapar and Telok Gong in the state of Selangor; or through Masai, Penggarang, Pontian, Mersing and Johore Baru in Johor. A smaller number have come through Negeri Sembilan, Malacca and Perak. Some of the immigrants are reported to have acquired letters of introduction from local politicians, while others have forged such letters to facilitate entry [*New Straits Times* October 20, 1983], and sought shelter with local villagers. In many cases their arrival was pre-arranged by syndicates in contact with prospective employers.⁷⁾ The trip costs each immi-

7) The syndicate, according to some officials in the Ministry of Home Affairs, is Chinese.

grant between M\$50–M\$200, to be deducted later from their pay packet. From these landing points they are brought in buses to their work place under cover of darkness in the late evening or early morning.

III Image of the Indonesian Immigrants

As the number of Indonesians increased, their presence became conspicuous, especially in the states of Malacca, Pahang, Selangor, the Federal Territory and Negeri Sembilan. The attention of the authorities and the general public was drawn to them. Their presence soon became a national issue and the Indonesians became the focus of attention for the national dailies. Since 1980 news items relating to the Indonesians have become a common feature in the newspapers and most of the reports are far from favourable. There were reports of detention of Indonesians for illegal entry, of raids by police, deportation, armed robbery, murder, housebreaking, rape, gang-clash, possession of firearms, physical clashes with the authorities, etc. In 1981, for example, 65 news items on various crimes committed by Indonesians graced the various dailies: in English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil. Hence, for that year alone the Indonesians were found in news items relating to crime more than one per week on average. At the end of the year, the general public was shocked when 100 Indonesian petty traders in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, fought enforcement officers at the Chow Kit Market. The incident generated an outcry from the public,

endless debates in the newspapers on the wisdom of allowing the Indonesians into the country, and more importantly, increased surveillance by the police. The next two years brought frequent reports of raids by the police, detention of illegals, fines and jail sentences, etc. By the end of 1983, Deputy Home Minister Encik Kassim Ahmad announced that 12,000 Indonesians had been caught and deported [*Utusan Melayu* October 31, 1983].

In 1984 Indonesians were on the headlines again for their involvement in a series of armed robberies and murders in broad daylight in the city centre of Kuala Lumpur. Two gem shops were robbed within a month with M\$300,000–M\$400,000 worth of gems taken. Needless to say, the public was shocked again. The police were forced to increase their efforts to weed out the bad hats and the illegals among the immigrants. Reports of raids on Indonesian settlements and construction sites resulting in detention and deportation increased. In a statement in Parliament that year, the Deputy Home Affairs Minister, Encik Radzi Sheikh Ahmad, announced that 22,045 illegal immigrants were sent home [*The Star* November 27, 1984]. So many were detained that the country's prison system became overcrowded, with one-third of its living space occupied by Indonesians. And the cost of deportation increased as the government had to pay M\$25 per person repatriated.

In 1985 a new issue relating to the Indonesians came to the forefront, i.e., reports of Indonesian babies born in Malaysia. The question was whose babies

were they? Were they Indonesians or Malaysians? Again the general public was drawn into the debate, with the politicians of all denominations united in calling upon the Immigration Department to clarify the issue. Towards the end of 1985, the Indonesian issue surfaced again when a boat tragedy off the coast of Pontian killed 60 people on their way to Indonesia for the Hari Raya Puasa (religious festival to mark the end of Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month). The overcrowded boat, which took off from an illegal jetty, sank while half-way to Bagansiapiapi. This incident led to the discovery of illegal jetties in the states of Selangor and Johore which were used for illegal entry.

Newspaper reports over the years became the main source of information on the Indonesians for the Malaysian public. The local population has had limited or no interaction with the Indonesians, and thus press coverage of the Indonesian immigrant issue was seminal in setting the tone of public opinion and shaping individual responses and reactions to the Indonesians.

IV Response from the Malaysian Public

Malaysian response to the immigrants can be gauged in two ways: firstly, at the macro level, through the national dailies, based on quotes and letters to the newspapers of which there were many; secondly, at the micro level through interviews with those in contact with Indonesians, i.e., their neighbours in residential areas. The micro level response is derived from my anthropo-

logical field work in two squatter areas in Kuala Lumpur, as mentioned earlier.

At the macro level it appears that public response is influenced by class and ethnicity. The wealthy segment of the population, such as plantation owners, housing developers and contractors, coffee shop operators and middle class housewives, welcome the immigrants as they provide much needed cheap labour. The trade unions and Chinese-dominated political parties denounce their presence and call for their immediate deportation.

The resentment from the trade unions is understandable. The influx of Indonesians is seen as a threat to local labour, robbing jobs and stifling attempts to improve working conditions and wages. The Indonesians, who are used to a lower standard of living, are willing to accept lower wages without the fringe benefits normally accorded to local labour. Being immigrants, sometimes illegal and unfamiliar with local conditions, the Indonesians make subservient workers; they can easily be manipulated and exploited. Hence, the employers' preference for Indonesian workers vis-a-vis the locals.

The concerns of the trade unions are valid. In the estates, for example, a member of National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW) earns a minimum daily wage between M\$9–M\$12 per day, and is entitled to medical benefits, Employees Provident Fund, accident compensation under the SOCSO (employees social security organization), overtime pay and off days. But immigrant workers may get only M\$5 per day without any extra benefits. The

difference in wages between Indonesian and local labour is also noted in the urban areas where most of the Indonesian immigrants are engaged in the construction industries. Seventy-five percent of the respondents in this study, for example, work in the construction industries as brick layers, carpenters or welders, and they are paid between M\$15 to M\$25 per day depending on their expertise and skills. They are paid monthly, but the wage is calculated on a daily basis. Although their wage is equivalent to that of local workers, they are denied medical benefits, leave with pay or sick leave and Employees Provident Fund contributions. And unlike local labour, the Indonesian workers can be dismissed easily when the employers no longer need their services.

Apart from the trade unions, it is the non-Malay political organizations which are the most vocal in wanting the Indonesians out. The opposition party, DAP, which is Chinese-dominated, is the most strident and persistent in this respect. The party's Secretary-General, Mr. Lim Kit Siang (also leader of the opposition in Parliament), and Member of Parliament from Kuala Lumpur Bandar, Mr. Lee Lam Thye, have relentlessly brought up the issue of illegal immigrants in Parliament and in the press since 1976. They have called on the government to introduce tougher laws against those involved in smuggling and harbouring the immigrants. In the 1980's the DAP's crusade against the immigrants has been supported by the MCA (Malayan Chinese Association) Party [*New Straits Times* October 12, 1982]. The Malay

political party, United Malay National Organization (UMNO) appears to have been silent on this issue until 1984. In fact, some of its politicians were accused of helping the Indonesians to immigrate by giving them letters of introduction to enable them to get jobs. The Prime Minister, President of UMNO, is reported to have defended the need for Indonesian labour [*The Star* February 17, 1981]. It was the Prime Minister's conviction of the essential need for such labour that led the government to sign the Medan Agreement in 1984. UMNO politicians denounced the Indonesian immigrants publicly in 1984 only when the deluge of Indonesians became problematical, especially after the recession set in and the negative socio-economic and political impact of the Indonesians' presence began to emerge [*Berita Harian* May 8, 1985; *Berita Minggu* May 12, 1985; *The Star* August 6, 1985].

The difference in response between the Malay and Chinese politicians can be explained in political terms. In 1985 Malaysia had a multi-racial population of approximately 15 million; 55.3% *Bumiputeras*, 33.8% Chinese and the rest comprised of Indians and other minority groups. At the same time, Malaysia has a democratic government whose political parties are formed largely on ethnic lines, and where political support is based on ethnic sentiment. The influx of Indonesians is suspected by the non-Malays as an attempt by the Malay-dominated government to increase the demographic strength of the Malays, and with it, their political strength. After all, the Indonesians and Malays are

culturally and socially similar, and Indonesians can easily assimilate into the Malay society as was the case with earlier Indonesians. The DAP alleges that some Indonesians are already being given blue identity cards, thus granting them citizenship which enables them to vote in the general election.⁸⁾ The allegation was denied by the government which attributes the acquisition of the identity cards by some Indonesians to the work of illegal syndicates dealing in forged official documents. Nevertheless, the issue of citizenship for Indonesians has remained a favourite political theme for the DAP, especially prominent in the campaign period before the General Election in August 1986 [*Asiaweek* July 27, 1986; 10]. By giving

the Indonesians blue identity cards, Mr. Lim is reported to have said, the government relegates the Malaysian Chinese to third class citizens.

Are the Malays, politicians or otherwise, actually in favour of Indonesian immigration as the DAP has implied? At the grassroots level, my research on the two squatter villages in Kuala Lumpur suggests otherwise. In the villages under study, Malay and Indonesian squatters have lived alongside each other since the seventies when Indonesians began infiltrating what was then a Malay squatter settlement. The proliferation of Indonesians in the last decade has caused intense resentment on the part of the Malay population. The local village power structure, which is the local UMNO branch, found the Indonesians problematical and has repeatedly called on the government to repatriate them. Problems relating to the Indonesians are as follows:

(a) They have rapidly increased in number through reproduction and immigration of relatives and friends from Indonesia. In Kampung Berembang Hilir, one of the villages studied, the Malays claim there were only 5 or 6 Indonesian families in the early seventies. Now the number has increased to approximately 4,000 people. Such an increase is well illustrated by the case of Ahmad's family which arrived in Kampung Berembang Hilir in 1975 from Sangkapura, Bawean Island, in the southeastern part of Indonesia. He came alone as a contract worker for a housing construction site, initially living in a rented house with his workmates.

8) All citizens and residents in Malaysia are required by law to have an identity card. Four types of identity cards are issued by the Registration Department, each a different colour: blue identity cards for citizens, red for permanent residents, green for temporary residents (residing in Malaysia for more than a year) and chocolate-coloured for those who have committed crimes and have their names registered under the Prevention of Crime Ordinance (PCO) 1969. A citizen is required to obtain an identity card at the age of twelve. Application for the card is made by the minor's parents/gardian to the local Registration Department. An alien who wishes to apply for a red or green identity card has to fulfil certain conditions and requirements as stipulated by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Officials at the Immigration Department in Lembah Pantai, Kuala Lumpur said only the alien wife of a citizen and his children below the age of six years are eligible to become permanent residents and thereby acquire a red identity card. For a temporary residency, which brings with it the green identity card, an alien with a work permit is eligible to apply, as are his wife and children. The application must be made as soon as he/she enters the country.

Frugal living enabled him to save enough money to buy a house and send for his wife, children and their spouses, step-children and finally his 70-year-old mother-in-law. Now, ten years later, all twenty-five members of his immediate family live with him in the squatter village. All have arrived through 'proper channel.' The pattern of migration of Ahmad and his family members is typical of Indonesians in both villages under study, and accounts for the rapid increase in population. Thus, the Malay population has been reduced to a minority. The problem was exacerbated when some of the Malays left because of what they consider the intolerable living conditions that now prevail in the squatment.

(b) The astronomical increase in the number of Indonesians puts a very heavy toll on housing, land and whatever limited basic amenities are available in the squatment. So desperate are the Indonesians in their attempts to find accommodation, they are willing to buy or rent any vacant space or vacant buildings and pay any price for it. In the course of field work for this report I found Indonesians buying chicken coops, shacks and gardening patches from Malays, all of which were to be converted into living space. Naturally, with this high demand the rental value and prices of houses/rooms in the squatment has soared to an unprecedented level. A room in a squatter hut in 1985 was rented for M\$50 a month, while a whole hut went for M\$200–M\$300, equivalent to the rental value of a single-story terrace house in a working class housing estate in the capital; and much

higher than the monthly rent of government-owned flats. Old squatter houses with wooden walls and zinc roofing were sold for M\$7,000–M\$8,000 per unit, although such huts may not cost half that amount elsewhere. This increase in rent and house cost worry the Malays, who are mostly poor.

(c) The population increase has also led to congestion and overcrowding. The Indonesians extended their houses to accommodate newly arrived family members and friends, which has had the effect of turning the squatment into a slum with houses huddled together, separated in many cases only by narrow alleyways 3–4 feet wide. Where there was no space for house extension, the existing house was partitioned into several cubicles, each cubicle allocated to a family. The case of a small Malay sundry shop sold to an Indonesian illustrates how small these cubicles are. The shop, approximately 20 feet by 15 feet, is now divided into three sections. The front section acts as a shop-cum-house for the shop owner and her teenage son; the other two sections are occupied by two other families, the shop owner's cousins. So small is the room for each family, there is only enough space for all family members to lie down close together at night. Obviously, this shelter can only be used for the purpose of sleep and rest, other activities, including cooking, must be done outside the house.

In the squatter village of Datuk Keramat Dalam Tepi, which was already rather congested before the arrival of the Indonesians, the immigrants reclaimed land

from a former mining pool by dumping all kinds of garbage into the shallow pool in an attempt to fill it and stabilize the soil. Houses on stilts were then built above the water level with flimsy wooden catwalks between them to provide passageways for traffic. These houses are usually two-room wooden structures consisting of a kitchen-cum-dining room, and another all-purpose room, functioning as guest room, living room and bedroom.

The congested wooden structure is clearly a fire hazard. During my field work, a fire which broke out in Kampung Berembang Hilir burnt down 20 houses in approximately 10 minutes leaving over 200 Indonesians homeless. The number left homeless from the fire demonstrates that the Indonesian households are large in size. This is corroborated by my field work which found households varying in size from 3 to 21 people. The majority of the households have between 4-9 members, and household size on the average is 6.6, much higher than the average household size of their Malay neighbours and other Malay squatters in Kuala Lumpur, which is 5.5 people [Azizah Kassim 1985: 159].

The congestion and overcrowding apall their Malay neighbours who complain of the drop in living standards since the immigrants arrived.

(d) With population expansion among the Indonesian immigrants, heavy pressure is applied on whatever few basic amenities there are in the squatment. The most acute is the problem of water supply, as well as garbage and waste disposal. Communal standpipes provided by the authorities are

overextended, leaving many to use water from other sources. In Kampung Berembang Hilir, water for household use is drawn from wells, while bathing and washing are done at these wells and in monsoon drains. Garbage and wastes are thrown into a nearby river which is also where children play or dip to cool themselves in the heat of the midday sun. In Kampung Datuk Keramat Dalam Tepi, water is drawn from wells to supplement water from the communal standpipes, and very often such wells stand side by side with pit laterines. Needless to say, the entire squatment is a health hazard.

The Malays find the situation deplorable as they are used to a better living condition, but under the present circumstances there is little the local power structure can do to improve the living conditions in the village. The local authorities in Kuala Lumpur have provisions for up-grading by means of providing squatter areas with minimal basic amenities and social services, but such improvements are denied to areas with large concentrations of immigrants because the authorities do not consider themselves responsible for the aliens. Hence the presence of the Indonesians is seen by the squatter Malays as detrimental to their material well-being.

(e) The continuous flow of immigrants into the squatment affects the peace the squatters once enjoyed. During the field work some one hundred thirty Indonesians happened to come in illegally. These Indonesians of all ages, who came in at about 3 a.m. in the middle of a night in October 1985, soon disappeared in the

maze of squatter huts. A police raid which ensued the next day could only detain a couple of them. The harbouring of illegals is known to the authorities, hence the squatter areas are always under police surveillance. To the Malays, such a state is disquieting, providing them with further reasons to regard the Indonesians as undesirable.

(f) The concentration of Indonesians of different ethnic groups within a confined geographical area has led to stiff competition between them and the Malays for limited resources: primarily jobs and housing. This has led to jealousy, enmity, quarrels and fights between them. Indonesians are reported to fight each other frequently with the men flicking their knives; while women holler at each other over such trivia as a missing pair of slippers. To the Malays, the Indonesians, especially the Boyans and Maduras, are rough (*kasar*) and uncivilized (*belum bertamadun*) and the Indonesians smart over such labels. The Indonesians complain both of Malay arrogance, and of their jealousy when they see Indonesians doing rather well. "When an Indonesian buys a radio, TV and video," according to a Boyan elder, "Malays accuse them of stealing these goods and inform the authorities. They can't stand seeing us do well." Perhaps there is truth in what this Boyan elder said; a few Indonesians are definitely doing much better than the Malays as evidenced by the display of material wealth: car, TV, radio and video. Some of the Indonesians are now making inroads into petty trading in the city which puts them into direct competition with

Malay petty traders. And the Indonesians' capacity to work hard for long hours has put some Malay petty traders out of business. The Malays therefore see the Indonesians as a threat to their economic survival and well-being.

(g) Finally, it is the Indonesians' private practices, with which the Malays have found fault. Malays complain that the Indonesians lack a 'sense of propriety' when it comes to dressing and male-female interactions. In the crowded squatter environment Indonesians of the opposite sex are not spatially and socially segregated. Various categories of kin who are not '*muhrim*' (close-blood ties), such as in-laws, are found mixing freely, in what Malays describe as "inappropriate setting and disappropriately dressed." Within the confine of their tiny huts, the Indonesian male dress scantily, wearing only shorts and leaving their chest bare; the women wear sarong either tied over their breasts leaving their lower legs and upper torso open (*berkembangan*) or with a sarong and brassier which is an affront to the Malays' sense of decency (*kurang adat*). This is especially true of the Maduras and Boyans. The Minangkabaus, on the other hand, are the exception. In fact, the Minangkabaus take issue with the Maduras and Boyans on this score and use this as an excuse to separate themselves from the two ethnic categories and ally themselves with the Malays.

Thus, there is a negative response from Malays who are in the position of having to live together with the immigrants. The reactions of local UMNO politicians and the ordinary Malays disprove DAP's claim

that the Malays are in favour of encouraging Indonesian immigration. The feeling of resentment against the immigrant group is shared by many UMNO party officials at the upper level of the party hierarchy, in both the state and national levels. They are worried equally about the proliferation of the Indonesians, their children's status in the country, their impact on employment, housing and business opportunities for Malays; and most importantly, they are greatly concerned about the rising rate of crime by the Indonesians in Kuala Lumpur and the country at large.

While the Malay squatters at the village level harbour passionate resentment towards the Indonesians, I found others who sought the Indonesians for their services. Housing developers and contractors frequently send agents into the squatter villages looking for workers to man construction projects. The agricultural sector uses them on a short-term contract basis. Many of the Indonesians work in building sites in Kuala Lumpur and elsewhere in the country as far north as the state of Kelantan, only coming home when the contract is over or on public holidays. Informal employment agents come to look for domestic help, while others seek a midwife, a masseuse, or traditional medicine, especially an herbal concoction known as '*jamu*.' Indeed, in middle and upper class households Indonesian maids are often found. They are highly sought as the locals are not very keen on such jobs, and the Indonesians' servility coupled with their willingness to accept low wages make them attractive to the prospective employers.

The only factor against them is their 'notoriety' for stealing and unfamiliarity with modern gadgets (most have come direct from remote villages in Indonesia), but this is easily overcome by the censoring performed by the informal recruiting agents. I also found Indonesians working in restaurants and foodstalls, with caterers and as helpers in sundry shops. Quite often their employment in such sectors is not easily observable as they work indoors, such as in the kitchen if they work in the food trade; or in the case of sundry shops, at the rear section of the shop where they help clean, weigh and pack items for sale.

Both within the confines of the two squatter villages and outside, we see a very interesting phenomenon, i.e., that economic status and ethnic groupings can influence response to the presence of aliens in a country. While the poor Malays, such as squatters, oppose the Indonesian presence, the middle class and others welcome some of them. And while the DAP politicians call for the repatriation of the Indonesians, fearing among other things, increased Malay political strength, MCA's former leader and ex-Finance Minister, Mr. Tan Siew Sin, who was involved with the agricultural sector, steadfastly defended the need for immigrant labour [*Utusan Malaysia* March 19, 1985]. The debate on the immigrant labour continues, but in the last few years it appears that the mood of the general public has turned against the Indonesians. The economic recession which made thousands of Malaysians redundant, coupled with the rising rate of crime committed by Indonesian nationals

throughout the country can be seen as the two main factors creating a negative response from a large section of the Malaysian public.

In light of the unfavourable response and the enormous socio-economic and political problems posed by the presence of the Indonesian immigrants, it will be interesting to watch what measures the Malaysian government takes to resolve the problem of Indonesian immigration into the country. Whatever action it takes is bound to have some ramifications on Malaysia-Indonesia relations, especially within the context of ASEAN.

Acknowledgement

Indonesia Circle kindly permitted the writer to reproduce the Figure on page 266 in this article which had originally appeared in her article in their journal [Azizah Kassim 1986].

The writer also wishes to record her profound appreciation to officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs in Malaysia for their cooperation and assistance during the field work, and especially for the loan of all newspaper clippings on the Indonesian immigrants from 1978 to 1985. A note of thanks is due to Prof. Khoo Kay Kim of the History Department, University of Malaya who has kindly read the draft of this paper. I am indebted to him for his various criticisms, comments and suggestions.

Bibliography

- Azizah Kassim. 1985. Politics of Accommodation: A Case Study of Malay Squatters in Kuala Lumpur. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. School of Oriental & African Studies, London University.
- . 1986. Indonesian Immigrants and Urban Squatting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. *Indonesia Circle* 41: 29-38.
- Hopper, Melvyn A. 1984. An Interview with the Minister of Manpower, Sudomo. *Kaleidoscope International* 9(1): 214-217.
- Ismail Buyong. 1985. Masyarakat Bangkahulu di Sungai Choh, Selangor. *Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah* 14: 8-18.
- Mohamad Khalid bin Shariff. 1985. Kampung Orang Kampar di Talang Bunut, Batu Pahat, pada Awal Abad ke-20. *Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah* 14: 43-52.
- Mohd Ali Haji Ismail. 1985. Penghijrahan Orang Banjar ke Daerah Mersing. *Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah* 14: 19-33.
- Norisa Nasar. 1985. Penghijrahan Suku Minangkabau ke Mukim Hulu Langat. *Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah* 14: 34-42.
- Paridah bt. Talib. 1985. Masyarakat Minangkabau di Kuang, Selangor. *Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah* 14: 64-74.
- R. Hydat bin R. Iskandar. 1985. Penghijrahan Orang Bawean ke Kuala Lumpur. *Malaysia dari Segi Sejarah* 14: 53-63.
- Second Malaysia Plan 1971-1975*. 1970. Kuala Lumpur: Government Printers, Malaysia.
- Magazines and Newspapers*
- The Dilemma Over Migrants. *Asiaweek* November 1, 1985.
- Stop Illegal Indonesian Immigrants. *The Star* August 13, 1979.
- Mahathir: Sabah Needs Those Indon Workers. *The Star* February 17, 1981.
- We Want Indons Too, Say Estate Bosses. *The Star* March 18, 1981.
- One Year, \$50 and a Red IC Later. *The Star* December 3, 1981.
- Illegal Immigrants Use False Papers to Get Jobs: Boss. *New Straits Times* October 20, 1983.
- 12,000 Rakyat Indo Di Tangkap. *Utusan Melayu* October 31, 1983.
- 22,045 Illegal Immigrants Sent Home. *The Star* November 27, 1984.
- Memo on Threat from Illegal Immigrants. *New Straits Times* October 12, 1982.
- Rakyat Asing: Pemuda Akan Temui Musa. *Berita Harian* May 8, 1985.
- Pendatang Haram: Pemuda Bagan Serai Sokong Anuar. *Berita Minggu* May 12, 1985.
- Stricter Laws Needed Against Illegals: MP. *The Star* August 6, 1985.
- The Chinese Challenge. *Asiaweek* July 27, 1986.
- Kesal Dengan Pendatang Haram Jadi Buruh di Sektor Perladangan. *Utusan Malaysia* March 19, 1985.