


Urban annexation of the rural: *kebun* culture in Malaysia

Eric C. Thompson 

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, National University of Singapore, Singapore

Correspondence: Eric C. Thompson (email: socect@nus.edu.sg)

'*Kebun* culture' is a distinctive, emergent form of rural sensibility and social-economic relations in Malaysia. As a contribution to theories of 'planetary' or thoroughgoing urbanization, the ethnographic evidence presented in the article illustrates a case of urban annexation of rurality, in which *kebun* (orchards) are detached from the social organization of rural villages and incorporated into urban-centered Malay society. *Kebun*, as productive land with non-rice crops, have traditionally been associated with rural *kampung* (village). In the late twentieth century, thoroughgoing urbanization, driven by both rural-to-urban migration and in situ urbanization of rural *kampung*, simultaneously produced a social disintegration of Malay *kampung* and increasingly urban-oriented Malay society. The *kebun*, which previously was an ancillary part of *kampung* social ecology has become dissociated from *kampung* and instead operates as an annex of urban-centered social lives. *Kebun* are also distinctively individuated rather than communal socio-economic projects. In both reserve lands and *kampung* areas, urban-based Malays and rural-to-urban return migrants are involved in *kebun* projects, through which they engage with nostalgic notions of rurality, but without the social entanglements of *kampung* social relations. At the same time, through *kebun* projects, urban Malay subjects enter into new social relations, albeit ones marked by commodification.

Keywords: Malaysia, rurality, planetary urbanization, assemblage theory, political economy, class differences

Accepted: 4 August 2019

Introduction

Over the course of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Malay society on the Malay Peninsula has gone through a rural to urban transition. In earlier times, Malays were seen as—and most, though not all were—rooted in rural, *kampung* (village) life (cf. Kahn, 2006). Now Malay lives, even for those born or living in rural *kampung*, are deeply entwined with urban centers (Thompson, 2007). In the wake of thoroughgoing urbanism on the peninsula, a new form of rurality centered not on *kampung* but rather on *kebun* (orchards) is emerging among urban-centered Malays. This article examines two important aspects of the *kebun*-as-rural in Malaysia. First, *kebun*-as-rural is not categorically distinct from the urban, but rather operates as a form of rurality *within* urban-oriented Malay culture and society. As such, the social relations and individuation of *kebun* culture are markedly different from *kampung*-as-rural. Second, access to the rural is class-differentiated, such that affluent and working-class Malays access *kebun* rurality respectively as spaces of consumption and production. Middle-class Malays have a more tenuous access to *kebun* rurality, being able neither to engage with *kebun* wholly as spaces of consumption nor as spaces of production. In explaining these contemporary trends in Malay society, I engage with recent theory in geography regarding planetary urbanization and assemblage.

In a critical review of current debates in urban theory, Storper and Scott (2016) identify planetary urbanization (e.g. Brenner, 2014; Kanai, 2014) and assemblage theory (e.g. McFarlane, 2011) as two influential perspectives that pose ‘strong challenges to much if not most of hitherto existing urban theory’ (Storper and Scott, 2016: 1115).¹ Under the rubric of planetary urbanization, Brenner and other geographers, have argued for a theory of the urban and urbanization ‘without an outside’ (Brenner, 2014). Questioning the rural-urban divide is nothing new. Brenner and colleagues go further in seeking to substantively re-theorize the ‘urban’; in particular focusing on urbanization as a process and moving away from a typological contrast between urban and rural or for that matter urban, rural, periurban, suburban, exurban, and so on (e.g. Wachsmuth, 2014).

Planetary urbanization critically engages the ontological categories of urban processes. Assemblage theory models such processes. Assemblage is a post-structuralist framework seeking to identify modes of change for non-equilibrium systems.² It derives from a combination of Deleuzian scholarship, Latour’s actor-network theory, and complexity theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; DeLanda, 2006; Latour 1997; McFarlane, 2011). As McFarlane (2011: 651) points out, the term ‘assemblage’ is frequently used but generally undertheorized in geography and other social sciences.³ One of the key theoretical aspects of assemblage theory is that ‘assemblages are characterized by ... component parts (which) may be detached and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different’ (McFarlane 2011: 653–4).

This article draws on ethnographic research in Malaysia to model sociocultural processes of planetary urbanization, based on an assemblage framework for understanding processes of change. It demonstrates how *kebun* (orchards) ‘detach’ (so to speak) from a traditional assemblage of rurality centered on *kampung* (villages) and are incorporated into urban-centered systems of social relations and cultural ideals.⁴ I use the term ‘annexation’ to describe this process—in which contemporary Malay social and cultural geographies are being reconfigured through the appropriation of a social-cultural element of geography (the *kebun*). This urban annexation of *kebun* illustrates at least one way that material, social and cultural transformation occurs within the widely observed phenomenon of ‘planetary urbanization’ (Brenner, 2014; Kanai, 2014).⁵ It is a specific case of how ‘urban’ systems can appropriate and draw ‘rural’ elements within them.

In line with Kanai’s call for attention to the far-reaching, transformative effects of urban processes, particularly in the contemporary Global South, the current article argues that new sensibilities and practices around *kebun* in Malaysia demonstrate the incorporation of particular forms of rurality *within* processes of thoroughgoing or planetary urbanization. Reframing our thinking of urban and rural away from a typological contrast of two sorts of spatiality, urbanization is better seen as a process of interconnecting spaces of human settlement and activities. Brenner (2014) argues that these processes do not have an ‘outside’ (cf. Jones, 2018). Or as others have similarly but less unconditionally argued, it is not particularly productive to squabble over what is properly ‘inside’ or properly ‘outside’ these processes— i.e. what is typologically ‘urban’ as opposed to ‘rural’ (cf. Scott, 2008).

That said, processes of urbanization *do* rely in important ways—conceptually and in practice—on differentiation and conglomeration, diffusion and densification to produce cultural *sensibilities* of rural and urban. These sensibilities are manifest in cultural categories such as *kebun*, *kampung*, countryside, gated communities, industrial zones, and so on. Moreover, these cultural sensibilities provide understandings through which subjects (in this article, for instance, Malay subjects in Malaysia) think about and act in their world.⁶

We see in Malaysia a disassociation of *kebun* from the cultural notions and socio-spatial assemblages of traditional *kampung* and annexation (both incorporated and subordinated) within social and cultural geographies of city-centered lives. The central argument of this article is that the reconfiguration of the *kebun* in Malay cultural geographies demonstrates at a fine-grained, ethnographic scale the processes of assemblage that work to produce ‘planetary’ or thoroughgoing urbanization. But whereas assemblage theory has been both modeled and criticized as radically non-hierarchical (Storper & Scott, 2016), the annexation of *kebun* involves both ideological hierarchies, in the ways that thoroughgoing urbanization incorporates and subordinates the rural, and socio-economic hierarchies in the ways that differently positioned, affluent, working- and middle-class, urban-based Malays access and incorporate *kebun* into their lives.

I am not arguing that in all instances the assemblage framework provides a superior theoretical standpoint (cf. Brenner *et al.*, 2011; Storper & Scott, 2016). In this instance, the annexation of *kebun* within an urban assemblage of social relations and cultural ideas demonstrates principles of ‘rhizomatic’ detachment and attachment proposed by assemblage theorists (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). But, whereas many admirers of Deleuze emphasize non-hierarchical symbiosis (e.g. McFarlane, 2011: 653), the incorporation—or annexation—of *kebun* within thoroughgoing urbanization in this case, involves a relationship of domination in which the urban both incorporates (the *kebun*) and marginalizes the traditional rural (the *kampung*).⁷ This case illustrates how a particular socio-economic and cultural element (the *kebun*, both as productive land and a way to think about rurality) is reconfigured and repurposed—‘reassembled’ if you will—under conditions of thoroughgoing urbanization in Malaysia.

Contemporary (re)assemblage of *kebun* within urbanism points to the ways in which ‘planetary urbanization’ is not merely about the political and economic processes through which cities or city-regions sprawl, extend and gobble-up ever larger swaths of territory. Although such processes are undeniably an important part of the story (cf. Harrison, 2010), the focus of this article is in how cultural and social geographies transform in ways that draw ‘rural’ places within the conceptual and practical sphere of the urban. An assemblage framework is useful because it allows us to conceptualize how particular elements of cultural geographies—in this case the Malay *kebun*—are not necessarily overwritten or erased in the process of planetary urbanization, but instead can be refashioned and repurposed to operate within such an urban system (while still, perhaps ironically, conceptualized as an ‘outside’ or ‘other’ to that system).⁸

Kampung and kebun

The Malay *kampung* (usually translated into English as ‘village’) has traditionally been the archetype of rurality in Malaysia. Research over the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has demonstrated that rural *kampung* have significantly transformed, that rural lives have been substantially ‘urbanized’ in the past decades and that rural society is not what it once was (see Thompson, 2015 for a review). By most scholarly accounts, Malay *kampung* society has fragmented in the face of rapid urbanization or at the very least has changed considerably due to enhanced transportation infrastructure, telecommunication, modern education, livelihood diversification and other social phenomena (e.g. De Koninck & Ahmat, 2012; Mohamad, 2013; Preston & Ngah, 2012; Stivens, 2013; Thompson, 2004, 2007; Emby, 2003).

This article does not examine the already well-documented disintegration of *kampung* culture, but the emergence of a new sort of rurality, termed here ‘*kebun*

culture'. Following Geertz, it describes a particular socio-spatial model for and of the rural. *Kebun* ('orchards') have always been an important aspect of rural and *kampung* lives and livelihoods. That history notwithstanding, the current article argues that *kebun* are becoming a new, central signifier of rurality within Malay culture more broadly. As rural *kampung* sociality fragments in the face of Malay urbanization, urbanized Malays are reconnecting with rurality (the '*luar bandar*') not (only) through maintaining ties to and nostalgia for *kampung* (cf. Kahn 1992; Kessler 1992) but through investment in and attachment to *kebun*.

The implications of this phenomenon are manifold. First, the notion of *kebun* is becoming ancillary not (only) to rural *kampung* but to urban social life. Urban acquired wealth allows urban-based Malays to 'return' to the rural by investing in *kebun*. In this way, the *kebun* is emerging as a signifier of rurality within Malay culture that is distinct from and displaces (at least in some instances) the traditional position of *kampung* in Malay conceptual geographies. Second, a broader implication for Malay society is that *kebun* are conceptually individuated projects; in contrast to *kampung*, which are fundamentally social projects—we can easily talk about '*masyarakat kampung*' (village society); but does it make sense to talk about '*masyarakat kebun*' (orchard society)? This raises questions about the association of rearticulated '*kebun*' senses of rurality with urban individuation and socio-economic stratification within Malay society. Third, the meaning and instantiation of *kebun* is broadening. Whereas traditionally (i.e. in the twentieth century and before), *kebun* signified 'orchards' of fruit, rubber or other agricultural commodities, the term now covers a much wider variety of rural projects—e.g. as weekend retreats, *wakaf* (legacy) projects, and the construction of *sekolah tafsir* (Quranic recital schools). The scale of *kebun* also varies greatly, from modest and economically-oriented investments of working-class Malays to large-scale projects initiated by elite Malay entrepreneurs.

***Kebun* projects exemplified**

Based on fieldwork in central and northern peninsular Malaysia, I provide three examples of this emergent *kebun* culture and its implications for transformations in Malay cultural conceptions of and connections to rurality. The examples below are drawn from two field sites. The first site is the area of Ulu Selama in the State of Perak, where the author has conducted fieldwork since 1992 (Thompson, 2002, 2004, 2007), located in the foothills of the Titiwangsa mountain range approximately 100 kilometers inland from Penang. The *kebun* here are on land opened up by local villagers, only some of whom have subsequently received official titles of ownership from the state. The second site is in Ulu Selangor in Selangor State, also (though higher up) in the foothills of the Titiwangsa, about an hour and a half by car from the Kuala Lumpur City Centre. The *kebun* in the second site are located on Malay Reserve Land originally opened by the state and sold on favorable terms to local residents (including *Orang Asli*),⁹ then commonly resold to others.

Between 2012 and 2014, over the course of a dozen repeated trips to both sites, the author conducted interviews and field observations focusing on rural gentrification occurring due to the influence and investments of return migrants and others (re) entering these places from urban Malaysia.¹⁰ Recognition of the emergent centrality of *kebun* culture arose from a grounded-theoretical perspective through this field research process. At first, interviews focused on the investment that return migrants and urbanites were making in *kampung* (village) houses. During the course of fieldwork,

including iterative interviews and observations, I came to see how investment in *kebun*, financially as well as in time and labour, indexed particular senses and practices of rurality among my interlocutors.

Contemporary *kebun* in Malaysia take many forms. The following examples illustrate the variety of *kebun* undertakings found in Malaysia today. While urban-based Malays associate *kebun* with cultural senses of rurality, they are at the same time tied to commodification of land. One of the most apparent features of emergent *kebun* culture is the sharp differentiation between affluent owners, for whom *kebun* are primarily a site of consumption and less affluent, working-class owners for whom *kebun* are central to their livelihoods (cf. Hines, 2010). The examples here may be read as typifying working-class, elite and middle-class *kebun* projects, but they are not meant to illustrate a neat typology. Rather, they reflect a spectrum of *kebun* projects as experienced by and related to the economic means of those undertaking them.

Mat's kebun

Mat¹¹ has been actively cultivating *kebun* land for several decades. As a teenager in the 1970s, he accompanied his father to open up *kebun* land above the *kampung* of Sungai Siputeh in Ulu Selama where he is originally from. The land is along a road that cuts into the mountains above the village. As with many other men in Sungai Siputeh and the surrounding *kampung*, Mat and his father were '*peneroka*' or 'pioneers'; taking the initiative to open up the land—clearing it, planting fruit trees, putting up a couple simple huts or houses of thatch and wood, and fencing the land (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Mat's kebun along the road.*

Source: Photograph captured by author.

For the past three decades, the *kebun* has been a major undertaking for Mat, but not his only one. He previously worked for a short time, in his late teens and early 20s in Penang and also in the greater Kuala Lumpur (KL) metropolitan area. In the latter case, he worked as a shop assistant at a small-scale restaurant run by his elder sister. After some time in KL, in the late 1980s, the elder sister and her husband relocated to Sungai Siputeh, where she ran a small coffee shop in the village. Through the 1990s, Mat was her main shop assistant; and continued to assist in the coffee shop up to 2012 when it was torn down to make way for road construction.

Mat's *kebun* is typical of rural *kebun* which are integral to *kampung* (villages). But from the 1970s and 1980s, the *kampung* has transformed, becoming a less tightly knit and less agriculturally-oriented settlement and into a largely urbanized social space, despite the fact that it is very far from any city and even 17 km from the nearest small town (Thompson, 2004; 2007). Mat is in fact typical of *kampung* residents, who often spend large parts of their lives working outside the *kampung* and do agricultural work (*kerja kampung*) only on a part-time basis in conjunction with non-agricultural employment, such as Mat's work as a shop assistant.

With the development and maturing of the *kebun* (e.g. trees and other plants maturing to the point of bearing fruit), Mat is able to derive a reasonable though irregular income. Exactly how much income cannot be reported precisely; in very long extended discussions with Mat, he could explain in detail the prices he could get for particular quantities of fruits at particular times, but only vaguely estimate an average monthly or yearly income.¹² Despite the irregularity of income, the *kebun* is economically self-sustaining and on balance is at least enough for Mat to live on at a basic subsistence level. As a confirmed bachelor, Mat now lives in the *kebun* on a largely full-time basis, though sometimes stays with his older sister or at his now-deceased father's house in the *kampung*. He occasionally has other bachelors—usually younger men in their 20s—staying with him and helping out in the *kebun*.

Like many other working-class Malays with *kampung* roots, when asked Mat expresses a preference for rural rather than urban life—less stressed, less crowded, freer, more relaxed. The idiom that he and others use continues to be 'kampung' life (*hidup di kampung*). But this is in a context where the *kampung* is changing. The subtle shift in sensibilities is perhaps best indexed by expressions of being 'free' (*bebas*). In the 1990s, being 'free' was regularly associated with urban life—sometimes positively but frequently negatively, with city life considered 'too free' (*terlalu bebas*) and morally dangerous (Thompson 2002, 2007). The *kampung* was (and in some contexts continues to be) experienced as a space of social surveillance, where everyone is related to everyone else and everyone knows everyone's business. In the context of *kebun-as-rural*, the freedom (*bebas*) of the rural is positively valued—free from stress, free from surveillance.

Datuk's kebun

Datuk is a successful businessman and CEO of a medium-sized company based in Kuala Lumpur and operating internationally. In the mid-2000s, he began looking for *kebun* land outside of Kuala Lumpur. Although he is originally from Negeri Sembilan, only a couple of hours drive from KL, Datuk chose not to invest in land in or around his natal *kampung*. Among other reasons, he expressed concern about the various social entanglements of returning to his own *kampung*. He did return to Negeri Sembilan at least a few times a year to visit his father, but did not want to purchase land there. In particular, he said, because he was successful and financially well-off, when he visited

his own *kampung* relatives or friends would seek him out for financial help; e.g. to borrow money or to invest in some project.

Datuk along with his wife sought *kebun* land first and foremost for a weekend house and retreat. They spent well over a year visiting various sites in the vicinity of KL. Originally, they expected to buy land in Janda Baik near Genting Highlands, but found it overpriced and too crowded—as the result of other well-to-do KL-ites buying up plots in the area. Eventually, they settled on a plot of land in Ulu Selangor further out and about an hour drive from KL. The plot was in an area of Malay reserve land. They bought it from a man who lived in Perak State, further north of KL, and who himself had purchased it from the original owner who had gotten title to the land after it was opened up and designated as Malay reserve land. Prior to that time, the land was used by Orang Asli (Temuan), who are still in the area, and there remain some issues around Orang Asli use and access to the land—small groups of Orang Asli men move through the area from time to time and there is an Orang Asli village of about 360 inhabitants nearby.

The original plot of land was purchased for RM 110 000 in 2011.¹³ It is on a mountain ridge with a steep slope and a stream running through the valley on one side. The plot is two acres square; though the actual area of land is slightly more, because the two acre square is designated using a flat, two-dimensional map, but the land itself is on a steep slope (Figure 2). When Datuk originally purchased the land, it was overgrown and had not been well maintained. It did, however, contain numerous mature trees—among them valuable *petai* and *durian* trees. After purchasing the land, Datuk



Figure 2. Datuk's *kebun* on a mountain slope after landscaping.

Source: Photograph captured by author.

arranged for a crew to clear out the underbrush, landscape, and build a number of structures on the land (Figure 3). He engaged a friend, also Malay, who worked in the construction and landscaping business as his manager, who in turn hired a number of Indonesian labourers. In addition to clearing the underbrush, the workers built a small, but rather elegant house at the top of the ridge for Datuk, his family and guests to use as a weekend retreat and another small house down the slope as a workers' quarters. The former house was designed by craftsmen in Kedah, shipped to Ulu Selangor and reconstructed on Datuk's plot (Figure 4).

Over the period that Datuk has owned the land, he has employed, through his manager, either Indonesian men or couples (husband and wife) to live in the worker's quarters and to maintain and improve the *kebun*. At any one time there have been at least one and usually two or more Indonesians living and working in the *kebun*. The manager has also, at times, engaged Orang Asli, particularly at the early stages of the project. But he found them to be unreliable—they would come and work until they made a bit of money, then quit without notice.

From 2011, the development of Datuk's *kebun* was an ongoing project with permanent staff and expanded into additional projects. In the intervening years, Datuk has purchased additional plots of land in the area, one for an animal (stray cat) sanctuary and another on which he has begun to sponsor a modest *Sekolah Tahfiz* or Quranic Reading School. The main *kebun* was a place for Datuk's rest and recreation, as well as family members, friends and business associates who he would invite from time to time. Datuk oversaw the planting of a wide variety of fruit trees and other plants. He



Figure 3. Landscaping of Datuk's *kebun*, featuring man-made ponds (front) and bird enclosures (upper right).

Source: Photograph captured by author.



Figure 4. Small house on Datuk's *kebun* along with a watch tower (upper right).
Source: Photograph captured by author.

also had his manager and workers build two large enclosures for birds, two large platforms along the slope for people to sit, rest or picnic, and a watch tower with a view out over the valley. In the valley, his workers and manager did extensive landscaping, using the small stream to create two ponds for fish as well as two small land bridges and one larger arched bridge over the stream.

Although the fruit could be of considerable value, Datuk did not sell the fruits produced in the *kebun*, but gave them away to friends, family and colleagues. For Datuk, his investments in the *kebun* were not for profit. He also sought to enhance the natural flora and fauna of the *kebun*, for example by planting specific varieties of fruit trees to attract and feed birds. Datuk explicitly related these and other endeavours to religious, Islamic ethics of generosity and care for animals and the environment.

Developing and spending time in the *kebun* was, for Datuk, a way to rearticulate and maintain connection to the rural; which he indexed using the words *kebun*, *kampung*, and *luar bandar*. Datuk talked about his *kebun* in particular with reference to his own childhood, growing up in a rural *kampung* and how it was important to have that connection to the natural environment outside of the city. Malay friends visiting Datuk's *kebun* and other affluent Malay *kebun* owners frequently expressed similar senses of nostalgia in reference to the *kebun*. For men like Datuk, unlike Mat, the *kebun* was more explicitly a substitute for rather than an extension of *kampung* rurality.¹⁴

Abang's kebun

A third example, Abang's *kebun*, shares aspects of both Mat's and Datuk's *kebun*. Abang is a secondary school teacher in his fifties. He purchased *kebun* land in the same Malay

reserve area as Datuk. Abang saw his investment in the *kebun* both as a retirement plan with economic payoffs and as a retreat from urban life. Abang had purchased his *kebun* at a good price, of RM 70 000 for a two acre plot which he said was worth RM 140 000 on the open market. It was a plot on somewhat more level ground and therefore probably more valuable than Datuk's original parcel. Abang had paid wage workers (*upah orang*), either from Indonesia or Bangladesh (he couldn't recall which) to build a simple house on the land and also to clear the plot. The house has no electricity and no running water, as is true of both Mat and Datuk's houses. Abang had planted fruit trees—mainly durian—and anticipated some return on his investment when the trees matured and he could sell the fruit.

However, Abang had some misgivings about his *kebun* investment, which he had held for about two years when I interviewed him in 2013. He said that he had found it hard to make enough time for the amount of care and maintenance that the *kebun* entailed, given that he was still working full time as a teacher. Unlike Datuk, he did not have nearly the financial means to employ a full time staff to take care of the *kebun*, but only occasionally employed casual labourers. The *kebun* also required more financial investments than he had anticipated (e.g. fertilizer). He also wondered out loud, while talking to me, whether or not he would be strong and healthy enough to work the *kebun* land himself once he was older and retired. 'I might not want to work so hard in my old age and might not be healthy enough,' he said. Abang's experience echoed that of other 'middle-class' Malays, who expressed desires to (re)connect to the rural, but did not have the means.

Malay rurality: from *kampung* to *kebun*

Traditionally, *kebun* have been an integral part of Malay *kampung* society. The *kampung* was a long-standing center of Malay society. As I have argued elsewhere, in the nineteenth century, two crucial spatial centers of Malay society were the royal court and the commoner village (Thompson, 2007). The court was the center of the *kerajaan*, the seat of government embodied in the sultan or raja, his officials and retinue. The *kampung* (translated broadly as village or more specifically as a house compound) was the site of the daily lives of the *rakya'at* (commoners). For hundreds if not thousands of years, Malay traders and others had lived urban lives in towns and cities (Kahn, 2006). These town Malays notwithstanding, well into the mid-twentieth century Malay society remained overwhelmingly rural, a classic 'peasantry', situated in *kampung* (see, for example: Nonini, 1992).

The main transformation that occurred from the late nineteenth to late twentieth centuries was the rise of the city (*bandar*) and particularly, on the peninsula, of Kuala Lumpur (KL) as a new geographic center of Malay society. Political power came to rest in the parliament and Prime Minister, established during the transition from the colonial to national period and modeled on British parliamentary democracy. As in Britain, the monarchy increasingly became a symbolic figurehead with a very limited role directly within the political system.¹⁵ By the last three decades of the twentieth century, the two poles of conceptual geography of Malay society had shifted from court and *kampung* to city and *kampung* or more specifically KL and *kampung* (Bunnell, 2002; Thompson, 2007).

Kuala Lumpur's stunning growth in the second half of the twentieth century can be attributed to many factors—not least of which was the rapid influx of Malay rural to urban migrants. Government policy, particularly under long-serving Prime Minister

Mahathir Mohamad set out to urbanize the Malay population (*membandarkan Melayu*). Mahathir himself wrote critically of Malay 'kampung mentality' and insisted that urbanizing Malay society was essential to the development of the Malays.¹⁶ In many ways, the desire for a thoroughly urbanized Malay society has been realized. The transformation of *kebun* from an integral part of Malay *kampung* society to an ancillary party of Malay urban society can be seen as one measure (and effect) of the urbanization of Malays, which had by-and-large been accomplished by the beginning of the twenty-first century.

I am arguing here that in the context of the social transformation of Malay society, the meaning and function of the *kebun* has changed as well. Rather than disappearing or being overridden, *kebun* have 'broken off' from the *kampung*, and been incorporated within processes of thoroughgoing urbanization. Previously, the *kebun* was an integral part of the larger concept of the *kampung* (cf. Woods, 2016). '*Kampung*' has been debated as an inexact term, in that it can refer to both a house compound and to a larger cluster of such compounds—i.e. the use of *kampung* in the sense of village (Shamsul, 1989; Shamsul, 1991). In the twentieth century the latter use of *kampung* as village was most common.

Kampung has been iconic of Malay rurality; so much so that Malay seems to lack a significant word for 'rural' other than *kampung*. The closest other word would be *desa*, but it is rarely used in Malay (it is much more commonly used in Indonesian). Government planners and others, when seeking to use a term to signal the 'rural' beyond the *kampung* alone, generally use the term '*luar bandar*' (lit. outside the city). The use of *luar bandar* itself signals the extent to which the city (*bandar*) has established itself as a central signifier in Malay conceptual geography.

In earlier times, up to the past decade or so, *kebun* were primarily an integral part of the *kampung*. Translated generally as 'orchard', *kebun* refers to land planted with crops for either consumption or commercial sale; with the exception of rice land, referred to specifically as *tanah padi*, *sawah*, or *bendang*. *Kebun* is used to refer to land for all other sorts of crops—especially fruits (*kebun buah-buahan*) and rubber (*kebun getah*). Malay peasant farmers would typically cultivate both *padi* and *kebun*. In this sense, *kebun* were seen as essentially rural and integrally part of the *kampung*. This is no longer the case.

Kebun have become detached—conceptually and in other ways—from the Malay *kampung* and on a broad scale have become ancillary to urban Malay society. Moreover, *kebun* culture—as a rural practice and conceptual geography—although not entirely replacing the *kampung*, has come to be a significant, alternative mode of rurality in early twenty-first century Malay society. This is not to say that *kampung* have disappeared entirely nor that *kampung* life does not still encompass cultivation of *kebun* as an important part of *kampung* society. However, many Malays are now relating to the rural (*luar bandar*) significantly through their relationship to *kebun* and less or not at all through relation to *kampung*.¹⁷ Moreover, *kebun* rurality is accompanied by transformed social relations.

A key difference between the *kebun* and *kampung*, is that a *kampung* is at its core a social entity. Conceptually, a *kampung* refers to a settlement in which and through which people are related to one another, usually though not necessarily or exclusively by way of kinship (cf. Banks, 1983; Carsten, 1997; De Koninck, 1992; Peletz, 1988). Typically, in rural Malay *kampung*, one will be told that everyone in the *kampung* is related to everyone else; and even where this is not strictly the case, nevertheless ties within the *kampung* are overwhelmingly figured through kinship. Yet even when a *kampung* is not a settlement of people related by family ties—as is the case in some urban neighbourhoods

conceptually and linguistically referred to as *kampung*—the *kampung* is still conceptually about neighbourly relations. The bottom line is that *kampung* are social entities; the essence of the *kampung* is the people and the ties between them.

Kebun by contrast are not social entities, and more often than not they are conceptualized as individuated as opposed to social or communal projects. A *kebun* is a piece of cultivated land (though as with the examples of the animal sanctuary and *sekolah tahfiz* above, *kebun* plots are now frequently put to uses other than cultivation of crops). *Kebun* are generally individually owned and even where they are worked by many people, they are individually managed by the owner of the *kebun*. This is not to say that no social relations exist in and through *kebun*. For instance in the examples above, Datuk mediates social relations with family, friends and colleagues through the *kebun* and there are various social relations—particularly between owners and labourers—that underlie and are produced by the *kebun*. But the social relations of the *kebun* are very different from that of the *kampung*. They become less communal and more commodified, embedded more in market than gift exchange (Mauss, 1966).

In addition or along with individuation that the *kebun* engenders comes a different sense of privacy associated with rurality, extending the anonymity traditionally associated with urban spaces to rural ones (cf. Simmel, 1950; Wirth, 1969). Traditionally, *kampung* or village life has been associated with close bonds but also with some sense of surveillance—that everyone knows what everyone else is doing, about each other's business, about relationships among residents and so on in the *kampung* (Mohamad, 2013; Thompson, 2002). By contrast, towns and cities have been seen as places of greater anonymity; not only in Malaysia, but of course elsewhere too. Rural *kebun*, by contrast, flip the sense of urban-private, rural-public associations. Part of the 'escape' that *kebun* culture entails is an escape from the social pressures and surveillance of urban life. This can be true of *kebun* located in the owner's natal *kampung*, such as Mat's, but even more so of *kebun* owned by non-residents. Typically, owners of *kebun* such as Datuk and Abang know little about those who own *kebun* adjacent to their own, let alone those in the wider area. *Kebun* owners tend to keep their activities in their own *kebun* largely to themselves.

Political-economy of *kebun*

In their critique of McFarlane's (2011) formulation of assemblage theory, Brenner *et al.* (2011: 230–1) raise concerns that assemblage theorists may elide engagements with political-economic analysis. The main purpose of the present article has been to illustrate the shift from *kampung* to *kebun* rurality in Malaysia as an example of 'planetary urbanization' best understood through an assemblage model of change. Mindful of the concerns raised by Brenner *et al.* (2011), in this section, I briefly sketch out how the reassembled *kebun* articulates with class-differentiated Malay society. Much of the planetary urbanization literature has focused on ways in which capital dominates and working classes resist the processes that the theory describes (e.g. Kanai, 2014; Wyly, 2013). In Malaysia, however, we see a case in which affluent and working classes access *kebun*-as-rural in different ways as spaces of consumption and production. Middle-class subjects face exclusion from *kebun*-as-rural, having neither sufficient affluence to consume nor the time and flexibility to produce within the space of the *kebun*.

From an economic point of view, *kebun* may be profitable investments or they may be expensive hobbies. When cultivation of *kebun* is undertaken in rural *kampung*, the objective is always for them to be profitable or at least productive investments. While fruit from *kebun buah-buahan* (fruit orchards) may be consumed by the owner's own family

and shared among relatives and neighbours, a large portion is almost always meant for sale and profit. Other *kebun*, particularly *kebun getah* (rubber), are purely commercial enterprises aimed at earning money for the owner and in turn for his or her family.

For some urbanites, *kebun* have become a pure expense rather than profitable enterprises. This is true for Datuk's *kebun*. Datuk has developed and manages his *kebun* purely for pleasure and does not gain any commercial profit from it. Although the *kebun* has abundant fruit trees, all of the fruit is consumed by Datuk's family or given away to relatives, friends and others. Although Datuk could receive a reasonable income from selling the fruits, he chooses to give them away instead. Thus, while the *kebun* is 'purely for pleasure' it also communicates Datuk's wealth and success as well as provides surplus produce through which he can establish and maintain gift-giving relationships.

While, affluent owners like Datuk can manage their *kebun* as an expensive hobby, less affluent *kebun* owners, like Mat, are deeply committed to cultivating the land and managing the *kebun* full time. Although they do not have a lot of money for capital investment, they make up for this in their own human investment of time, labour and attention. For an owner like Mat, the profitability of the *kebun* is essential and he devotes his full attention to the *kebun's* success. From this perspective, among less affluent owners, *kebun* operate in ways more similar to their traditional role in a rural *kampung* economy, though as already noted above, owners like Mat are throughout their lives tied into urban-centered careers and social networks.¹⁸

Datuk's situation is unusual though not unique. His business success allows him to afford the *kebun* easily (as well as the other *kebun*-based ventures—animal sanctuary and school). A more common situation is that of Abang, the school teacher, who is of more modest 'middle class' means.¹⁹ Urban dwellers like Abang purchase *kebun* with an expectation that they will be able to derive some profit from cash cropping. But here, a crucial point is that they may get trapped between urban and rural concepts and approaches to the *kebun*. Aspiring, urban middle-class individuals like Abang find themselves caught between these two practices or modalities of investing in and managing a *kebun*. On the one hand, they want and economically need the *kebun* to provide some income—at least enough to cover the costs of the *kebun*. On the other hand, they imagine the *kebun* as a sort of hobby—as a place of retreat from urban life.

Numerous conversations, with Abang and others, suggest that many urban Malays find it easy to purchase *kebun*; the cost of land in rural areas is low, particularly when compared to the cost of land and real estate in cities. It is a greater challenge to invest in developing and cultivating the *kebun*. The result is that a great deal of rural *kebun* land, particularly Malay Reserve Land, is purchased by urbanites. They make initial investments, such as building simple huts and doing some clearing and planting; but after a while the owner realizes that the costs are significantly exceeding income and the investments stop or taper off. Throughout the area of Ulu Selangor, for example, one sees many abandoned buildings and largely fallow *kebun* land. After a time, sometimes due to life changes such as illness, owners give up on their *kebun* plans and look to sell the land; if it is bought, the new owner will begin the cycle again. While affluent and 'working-class' urban Malays are able to sustain consumptive or productive relationships to *kebun*, those in the middle class (such as school teachers and civil servants) experience a more tenuous, difficult relationship to *kebun* rurality.

Conclusion

Urban annexation of *kebun* in Malaysia provides a fine-scale example of Brenner's (2014) theory of 'planetary urbanization'. *Kebun* culture is emerging as an alternative

to *kampung* culture with regard to sensibilities and ideas of the rural (or *luar bandar*) in contemporary Malay society. *Kebun*-as-rural in contemporary Malaysia operates not as a space distinct from the urban but as a form of rurality *within* an urban society. Moreover, the urban annexation of *kebun* provides support to an assemblage-theoretical framework, by demonstrating how a cultural-categorical and socio-spatial element (in this case the *kebun*) becomes dissociated from a prior social assemblage (the *kampung*) and is reincorporated over time within a new, in this case urban-centered, social assemblage.

The claim is not that these cultural-ideational and social-relational processes work outside of or are causally antecedent to others, e.g. political-economic processes, such as capitalist expansion. Rather they work in simultaneous and inter-articulated ways with emergent economics and politics. For Malaysia, given the extent to which the *kampung* has been a central idea and ideal within Malay society, questions can be raised about the ways in which a shift to *kebun* rurality may influence wider ideas in Malay society—such as ideas about Malay identity itself (cf. Barnard, 2004; Mohamad & Aljunied 2011). *Kebun* simultaneously represent a nostalgia for traditional *kampung* rural life and the emergence of a new rural sensibility that is no longer embedded in the social, economic and cultural relations of *kampung* society. While some aspects of rural *kampung* culture are foreclosed by the thoroughgoing urbanization of Malays, others are opened up by the emergence of *kebun* as an ancillary element of urban-oriented lives.

The emergence of *kebun* as a signifier of rurality within the processes of planetary urbanization in Malaysia suggest a number of avenues for further investigation with special attention to the role of *kebun* in contemporary Malay society and culture. One is further research and elaboration on the new or at least amplified sorts of social and economic relationships that I have sketched out in the above. Although *kebun* projects are individuated, they are not without their own sets of social relations, such as those involved in buying and selling land and among those involved in developing and cultivating it.

As De Koninck and Ahmat (2012) have noted, the rural poor in Malaysia are for the most part no longer rural Malays nor ethnically Indian Malaysian citizens who work on colonial-legacy commercial ‘estates’ (plantations), but more recent, often undocumented immigrants from Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, the Philippines and elsewhere. This is certainly the case for many of the casual labourers working in *kebun* such as those of Datuk or Abang.²⁰ Among other things, the privacy and anonymity of *kebun* culture may make the lives of immigrants living and working in rural Malaysia more secure and stable than living and working in cities where raids and deportation are common.²¹

Kebun also engender and facilitate geographically dispersed social networks, as compared to the tight, localized social networks traditionally associated with *kampung*. Owners of *kebun* such as Datuk use the *kebun*, both as a place to invite and entertain guests, including employees and international business partners. He also enhances and maintains a wide social network of family, friends and associates through gifts of products, particularly fruit, produced in the *kebun*. For Datuk, but also for less affluent owners such as Abang or Mat, the *kebun* operates in part as a source of potlatch-like wealth, that can be distributed to others in ways that enhances the owner’s own status and prestige. While this reiterates the sorts of social rather than economic exchanges that are a hallmark (or at least stereotype) of rural Malay *kampung*, it is done so in ways that are rather different and entail different, arguably less intimate, sorts of social

or social-economic relations; there is a moral economy operating, but it is no longer the moral economy of the peasant (cf. Scott, 1976; Walker 2012, 2015).

Further work can also be done on the significance of the relationship between *kebun* rurality and individuated, private sensibilities, including comparative research on how rurality rather than urbanism becomes associated with privacy and anonymity elsewhere under conditions of planetary urbanization. This article has presented a singular case of shifting position of *kebun* vis-à-vis Malay understandings and practices around rurality and urbanism. Next steps would involve research both into the details of ‘*kebun* culture’ in Malaysia as well as examining whether or not and in what ways similar processes might be found elsewhere in other contexts. Does the model of annexation and assemblage—reconfiguring ‘traditional’ elements of the rural (e.g. the *kebun* as part of the *kampung*) within a new relationship to urban-centered lives and societies apply elsewhere? I would expect that annexation and assemblage may help us to understand such processes in some but not necessarily all analogous cases elsewhere.

Endnotes

- 1 A third perspective they critique is postcolonial theory. This article does not make specific interventions in postcolonial theory apart from contributing a specific, postcolonial case from the ‘Global South’. As Kanai (2014: 3) points out, most literature on planetary urbanization has been informed empirically mainly by studies focused on the ‘Global North’ and on exclusionary practices of neoliberal capitalism within inner-city cores.
- 2 For an overview of non-equilibrium system dynamics (i.e. systems that change over time) see: Holland (1998); Waldrop (1992). There are critical issues regarding the compatibility of traditional complexity systems theory and assemblage theory, which cannot be addressed in detail here.
- 3 For more extensive discussions and debates about the idea of assemblage in geography, see: Dittmer (2014); Müller (2015); Müller and Schurr (2016).
- 4 For a discussion of the traditional rural as itself an assemblage, see: Woods (2016).
- 5 Jones (1997) had earlier used the term ‘thoroughgoing urbanism’. I find Jones’ term more descriptively useful and accurate, but ‘planetary urbanization’ is the term that has become standard currency among geographers. A detailed comparison of the two terms and their implications is beyond the scope of the current article. See Jones (2018).
- 6 To model culture and how it operates and its relationship to subjective thought and action, I draw on Raymond Williams’ ‘structures of feeling’ (Williams, 1977: 131) and Geertz’s theory of culture as ‘models for and of the world’ (Geertz, 1973: 93). For recent attention to subjectivity in geography, see: Hoffman (2014); Rutland (2013).
- 7 Ironically, whereas geographers and others drawing on Deleuze have sought to cast assemblage somewhat idealistically as containing possibilities for revolutionary, non-hierarchical symbiosis (e.g. McFarlane, 2011); emergence within traditional complexity theory involves hierarchy as a core concept (e.g. Holland, 1998).
- 8 For parallel examples of such an application of assemblage theory, see Ong and Collier (2005); Ong (2006); Baird (2015: 56).
- 9 Orang Asli or ‘Aboriginals’ are groups classified as indigenous to Malaysia (bumiputera or ‘sons of the soil’) but distinct from politically and numerically dominant Malays. Only bumiputera can legally own Malay Reserve Land.
- 10 Research for this article was supported by National University of Singapore Academic Research Fund Tier 1 Grant R-111-000-120-112.
- 11 All names are pseudonyms.
- 12 This is generally true for Malay rural agriculturalists, who simply do not think of *kebun* or similar income in terms of hourly wages or monthly salaries.
- 13 USD 1.00 was approximately RM 3.50 at the time.

- 14 This article is unavoidably based overwhelmingly on masculine perspectives. There are gendered dimensions to these sensibilities and practices of the rural, which are beyond the present scope.
- 15 In the Malaysian federal system, the monarchy consists of nine traditional Sultans, who are heads of state at the state level and the King, who is the federal head of state. The King is selected from among the Sultans on a rotating basis. The King and the Sultans must confirm political appointments and do from time to time take an active role in politics through the confirmation process.
- 16 This view was articulated most famously in Mahathir's *The Malay Dilemma* (Mohamad, 1970) and re-articulated many times over in Malay discourse, e.g. Muhd Taib (1993).
- 17 I am not claiming that this is entirely new; I expect that in the past (perhaps for centuries) town-dwelling Malays may have owned, cultivated and enjoyed kebun land. The point is that this is now becoming a pervasive mode and sensibility of rurality in the present era.
- 18 In the past two decades of research in rural Malaysia, I have encountered very few—perhaps half a dozen—Malays born since the 1960s who have lived consistently rural-based lives. From the 1970s through 2000s, it was exceedingly uncommon for rural-born Malays to not spend some and usually a considerable part of their working lives in urban-based employment.
- 19 I use middle, working and affluent classes as simple heuristics here; it is beyond the scope of the present article to unpack the complex literature and arguments around how 'middle' and other 'classes' are understood in Malaysia; see for example, Embong (2002); Gomez and Saravanamuttu (2012); Kahn (1992; 2006).
- 20 Indonesian workers on Datuk's kebun all have legal residency, but many in the area do not.
- 21 The difference here is based on perceptions—i.e. what I was told, both by Indonesian migrants and Malaysian interlocutors; reliable statistics that differentiate between rural and urban locations on this matter are not available. That said, in this case, the perceptions of safe and dangerous places are as important if not more so than statistically based facts.

References

- Baird IG (2015) Translocal assemblages and the circulation of the concept of 'indigenous peoples' in Laos. *Political Geography* **46**, 54–64.
- Banks DJ (1983) *Malay Kinship*. Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia.
- Barnard TP (ed) (2004) *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity across Boundaries*. Singapore University Press, Singapore.
- Brenner N (ed) (2014) *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*. jovis Verlag GmbH, Berlin.
- Brenner N, Madden DJ, Wachsmuth D (2011) Assemblage urbanism and the challenges of critical urban theory. *City* **15** (2), 225–40.
- Bunnell T (2002) Kampung rules: landscape and the contested government of urban(e) malayness. *Urban Studies* **39** (9), 1686–701.
- Carsten J (1997) *The Heat of the Hearth: The Process of Kinship in a Malay Fishing Community*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- De Koninck R (1992) *Malay Peasants Coping with the World: Breaking the Community Circle?* Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.
- De Koninck R, Ahmat R (2012) A State-orchestrated agrarian transition on the Kedah plain of Peninsular Malaysia, 1972–2009. In Rigg J, Vandergeest P (eds) *Revisiting Rural Places: Pathways to Poverty and Prosperity in Southeast Asia*, 52–67. NUS Press, Singapore.
- DeLanda M (2006) *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*. Continuum, London and New York.
- Deleuze G, Guattari F (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Dittmer J (2014) Geopolitical assemblages and complexity. *Progress in Human Geography* **38** (3), 385–401.
- Embong A (2002) *State-led Modernization and the New Middle Class in Malaysia*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

- Emby Z (2003) Changing occupations as a strategy for survival: case study of a Malay village in Peninsular Malaysia. In Storey D, Overton J, Nowak B (eds) *Contesting Development: Pathways to Better Practice*. Massey University, Palmerston North.
- Geertz C (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, New York.
- Gomez ET, Saravanamuttu J (eds) (2012) *The New Economic Policy in Malaysia: Affirmative Action, Ethnic Inequalities and Social Justice*. NUS Press, Singapore.
- Harrison J (2010) Networks of connectivity, territorial fragmentation, uneven development: the new politics of city-regionalism. *Political Geography* **29**, 17–27.
- Hines JD (2010) Rural gentrification as permanent tourism: the creation of the ‘new’ west archipelago as postindustrial cultural space. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **28**, 509–25.
- Hoffman LM (2014) The urban, politics and subject formation. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* **38** (5), 1576–88.
- Holland JH (1998) *Emergence: From Chaos to Order*. Perseus Books, Reading.
- Jones GW (1997) The thoroughgoing urbanism of East and Southeast Asia. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* **38** (3), 237–49.
- Jones GW (2018) The thoroughgoing urbanization of East and Southeast Asia revisited. In Bunnell T, Goh DPS (eds) *Urban Asias: Essays on Futurity Past and Present*, 297–304. jovis Verlag GmbH, Berlin.
- Kahn JS (1992) Class, ethnicity and diversity: some remarks on Malay culture in Malaysia. In Kahn JS, Loh FKW (eds) *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia*, 158–78. Allen and Unwin, North Sydney.
- Kahn JS (2006) *The Other Malays*. NUS Press, Singapore.
- Kanai JM (2014) On the peripheries of planetary urbanization: globalizing Manaus and its expanding impact. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **32** (6), 1071–87.
- Kessler CS (1992) Archaism and modernity: contemporary Malay political culture. In Kahn JS, Loh FKW (eds) *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia*, 133–57. Allen and Unwin, North Sydney.
- Latour B (1997) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York.
- Mauss M (1966) [1950] *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Cohen & West Ltd, London.
- McFarlane C (2011) Assemblage and critical urbanism. *City* **15** (2), 204–24.
- Mohamad M (1970) *The Malay Dilemma*. Times International Books, Kuala Lumpur.
- Mohamad M (2013) The new economic policy and poverty at the margins: family dislocation, dis-possession and dystopia in Kelantan. In Gomez ET, Saravanamuttu J (eds) *The New Economic Policy: Affirmative Action, Ethnic Inequalities and Social Justice*, 61–83. NUS Press, Singapore.
- Mohamad M, Aljunied SMK (eds) (2011) *Melayu: The Politics, Poetics and Paradoxes of Malayness*. NUS Press, Singapore.
- Muhd Taib MH (1993) *Melayu Baru*. ITC Book Publishers, Kuala Lumpur.
- Müller M (2015) Assemblage and actor-networks: rethinking socio-material power, politics and space. *Geography Compass* **9** (1), 27–41.
- Müller M, Schurr C (2016) Assemblage thinking and actor-network theory: conjunctions, disjunctions, cross-fertilizations. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **41**, 217–29.
- Nonini DM (1992) *British Colonial Rule and the Resistance of the Malay Peasantry, 1900-1957*. Yale Southeast Asian Studies, New Haven.
- Ong A (2006) *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Ong A, Collier SJ (eds) (2005) *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden (MA), Oxford and Victoria.
- Peletz MG (1988) *A Share of the Harvest: Kinship, Property and Social History among the Malays in Rembau*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Preston D, Ngah I (2012) Interpreting rural change in Malaysia. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* **33**, 351–64.

- Rutland T (2013) Activists in the making: urban movements, political process and the creation of political subjects. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, **37** (3), 989–1011.
- Scott AJ (2008) Inside the city: on urbanisation, public policy and planning. *Urban Studies* **45** (4), 755–72.
- Scott JC (1976) *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Shamsul AB (1989) *Village: The imposed social construct in Malaysia's development initiative*. Working Paper No. 115. Southeast Asia Program, Faculty of Sociology, University of Bielefeld, West Germany.
- Shamsul AB (1991) *Formal organization in a Malay 'administrative village': an ethnographic portrait*. Occasional Papers No. 15. Centre for South-East Asian Studies, University of Kent at Canterbury, Kent.
- Simmel G (1950) [1903] The metropolis and mental life. In Wolff KH (ed) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, 324–39. Free Press, Glencoe (IL).
- Stivens M (2013) Gender and the interplay of rural and urban: a Malaysian case. In Bunnell T, Parthasarathy D, Thompson EC (eds) *Cleavage, Connection and Conflict in Rural, Urban and Contemporary Asia*, 143–60. Springer, Dordrecht.
- Storper M, Scott AJ (2016) Current debates in urban theory: a critical assessment. *Urban Studies* **53** (6), 1114–36.
- Thompson EC (2002) Migrant subjectivities and narratives of the *Kampung* in Malaysia. *Sojourn* **17** (1), 52–75.
- Thompson EC (2004) Rural villages as socially urban spaces in Malaysia. *Urban Studies* **41** (12), 2357–76.
- Thompson EC (2007) *Unsettling Absences: Urbanism in Rural Malaysia*. NUS Press, Singapore.
- Thompson EC (2015) Rural transformations. In Weiss ML (ed) *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Malaysia*, 236–48. Routledge, Milton Park and New York.
- Wachsmuth D (2014) City as ideology: reconciling the explosion of the city form with the tenacity of the city concept. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **31**, 75–90.
- Waldrop MM (1992) *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos*. Simon and Schuster, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney.
- Walker A (2012) *Thailand's Political Peasants: Power in the Modern Rural Economy*. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.
- Walker A (2015) From legibility to eligibility: Politics, subsidy and productivity in rural Asia. *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and –National Studies of Southeast Asia* **3** (1), 45–71.
- Williams R (1977) *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Wirth L (1969) [1938] Urbanism as a way of life. In Sennett R (ed) *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, 143–64. Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs (NJ).
- Woods M (2016) Territorialisation and the assemblage of rural place: examples from Canada and New Zealand. In Dessein J, Battaglini E, Horlings L (eds) *Cultural Sustainability and Regional Development: Theories and Practices of Territorialisation*. Routledge, Milton Park and New York. (ebook online; last accessed 29 September 2019).
- Wyly E (2013) The city of cultural-cognitive capitalism. *City* **17** (3), 387–94.