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Rural-Urban Migration and Social Mobility in Third World Metropolises: a Cross-National Study*

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Two implicit models have provided the major frameworks for rural-urban migration research in developing societies: one model, the underprivilege model, predicts that rural migrants enter the bottom rungs of the urban occupational structure and suffer inequality in status attainment in the city; the other model, the push up model, suggests that the influx of rural migrants provides a structural impetus to upward social mobility for the urban natives. This study synthesizes relevant findings from several major Asian and Latin American metropolises and thereby provides a cross-national test of the two models. The paper rejects both models and explicates structural reasons why the models do not hold true in Third World cities.

In sociological literature, rural migrants and foreign immigrants are often viewed as having similar positions and roles in the new society. Being newcomers from different social systems and with different attitudes, norms, and life styles, they are believed to share the problems of adaptation to a new social system. Successful adaptation is regarded as problematic for both types of migrants. In addition to cultural differences, migrants are supposed to possess few marketable skills, little knowledge of the new opportunity structure and few useful contacts for finding desirable jobs. Consequently, migrants from rural hinterlands as well as from foreign countries are assumed to be pushed into the less desirable sectors of the host society. When the flow of foreign immigration diminishes, reasoning goes, rural migrants may substitute for them in the bottom rungs of the urban occupational structure. This view was most explicitly expressed by Lipset and Bendix (1959):

... migration from rural areas and smaller communities to metropolitan centers influences the placement of people in the occupational structure in the same way that large-scale immigration once did (p. 204). . . . The cycle in which lower-class immigrants or migrants into large cities take over the lower-status positions while native urbanites from similar class backgrounds move up in the occupational structure has been one of the more important processes underlying social mobility ever since cities began to expand rapidly (p. 216).

Implicit in these statements are two interrelated but analytically separable models of the relationship between migration and social mobility. The first

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model views rural migrants as being predominantly of lower-class origins, unskilled and unsophisticated and, thus, likely to constitute large portions of the underprivileged classes in urban societies. Furthermore, this model suggests systematic inequality relations between rural migrants and urban natives, migrants suffering various handicaps or possible discrimination due to their rural origins. For convenience sake, this model will hereafter be designated as the underprivilege model.

The second model is concerned with the effects of the in-migration of underprivileged rural migrants on the social mobility of native urbanites. This model predicts that the influx of rural migrants into the bottom of the urban occupational structure provides a structural impetus to upward social mobility for native urban residents. This model will be designated as the push up model.

This paper seeks to test the validity of these two models with the data gathered in several Asian and Latin American metropolises. By doing so, the paper attempts at the same time to synthesize many existing case studies into some broader theoretical frameworks.

This cross-national comparative analysis is deemed particularly necessary because the relevant materials are widely scattered and a great deal of unnecessary repetition develops in the empirical literature. This study demonstrates that a wealth of empirical data accumulated in the past two decades is enough for us to reject both models in Third World societies. This review also detects an unmistakable sign of stagnation in the development of new parameters of urban migration studies. The ultimate aim of this study is, therefore, to help the field move toward a new direction by offering a critical examination of the current state of knowledge and the underlying assumptions which have guided the accumulation of this knowledge.

The Underprivilege Model

The underprivilege model can be treated as a static one, predicting rural migrants' overrepresentation in underprivileged classes, or as a dynamic one, pertaining to the processes through which this situation is produced and maintained. Taking it as a dynamic model, there are several aspects of rural migrants' adaptation to be investigated.

First of all, we must know where in the urban status hierarchy the rural migrants, taken as a whole, are situated. But knowing their position alone does not give a comprehensive picture; their position must be related to that of the urban natives. The main question in this context is how well rural migrants fare in competition with native urbanites for desirable positions in the city. Most empirical researches have concentrated on this aspect and produced enough data to determine native/migrant differentials in terms of average occupational and income statuses.

Native/migrant occupational differences in average terms have little meaning, however, if there are large variations among rural migrants and if the economic inferiority of rural migrants is largely due to their initial handicaps in family status and educational backgrounds. Powerful proof of rural migrants' inequality experiences would be that rural migrants from heterogeneous social

backgrounds are transformed into a fairly homogeneous group clustered in the least rewarding sectors of the urban economy.

Previous research has not directly addressed this issue. Instead, recent studies have approached this problem within a status attainment framework (cf. Blau and Duncan, 1967; Duncan, et al., 1972). The question which is significant within this framework is whether rural origins have unfavorable effects on migrants' socioeconomic achievements in the city, independent of their familial and educational backgrounds. The purpose is to determine whether there is a market force in the urban economic system which systematically discourages rural migrants' socioeconomic success. This approach has led researchers to pay close attention to the mobility assets which rural migrants bring with them to the urban labor market and the relations between these mobility assets and the achieved status positions.

Keeping these points in mind, the paper will first summarize the relevant empirical findings from three Asian and three Latin American metropolitan centers. After this review, we will draw several empirical generalizations which will allow us to determine the validity of the underprivilege model.

Seoul, Korea. Koo and Barringer's study (1977) of rural migrants' status attainments in Seoul (based on survey data from 866 male adults) reveals that rural migrants have lower average occupational status scores than native urbanities (35.9 versus 43.9). Rural migrants also have lower average incomes than the natives (45,300 versus 48,200 won). These differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$), although not large. Yet, the data do not indicate that rural migrants are more homogeneous than urban natives. Occupational and income variations among migrants and natives are found to be quite similar.

Further analysis indicates that rural migrants' occupational and income inferiority is largely attributable to their educational inferiority (the average years of education for migrants are 11.3 years as compared with 13.2 years for the natives). The rural migrant and the native of similar educational backgrounds are very likely to achieve similar economic positions. The study concludes that being a rural migrant means that he is more likely to have poorer education than an average Seoul-born man, but that rural background does not create any additional economic inequality experiences for the migrant.

These findings are corroborated by a recent analysis of the Seoul data drawn from a one percent sample of 1970 Korean census (Li, 1976). This analysis introduces age and length of urban residence as additional control variables, but yields essentially the same conclusions. The study further discloses that the employment rate of rural migrants is not lower but in fact slightly higher than that of Seoul natives.

Another Korean migration study (Koo, 1976) in a provincial capital of Chonju shows that the older or less educated rural migrants are most likely to find their ways into the petty entrepreneurial sector of the urban economy (e.g., petty trading, peddling, shining shoes, etc.), while the younger and better-educated migrants compete successfully with the urban natives for positions in bureaucratic organizations.

Ankara, Turkey. Moots' study (1976) of migration and status attainment in Ankara was based on survey data drawn from a stratified cluster sample of 803 wives. The findings closely parallel those of the Seoul studies. Rural migrants are inferior to Ankara natives both in terms of average occupational status scores (44.8 versus 49.1) and average income (586.7 versus 922.6 lira). The occupational difference is extremely small, and when age is controlled the average income difference is also not very large.

Moots also examines the net (or direct) effect of rural background on socioeconomic achievements. The result is consistent with the Seoul findings: "the effects of community of origin on status achievements are largely attributable to its effects on education." As to education, Moots' data show that the average rural migrant has had 2.4 years of education, compared to 5.6 years for Ankara natives. Moots points out, however, that rural immigrants in Ankara are much better educated than the nonmigrant population in the rural provinces.

Mexico City, Mexico. In the same article, Moots analyzes the 1971 survey data (N=798) from Mexico City and corroborates the findings in Seoul and Ankara. Here again, rural migrants are found to be slightly inferior to the natives in terms of occupation (47.8 versus 51.0) and income (2,325 versus 2,853 pesos). This inferiority is shown to be largely the result of migrants' educational inferiority to the natives (4.7 years versus 7.5 years of schooling). Thus, the study concludes that "the impression that large masses of illiterate peasants flow to the city where they encounter and create major difficulties in adjusting to the unfamiliar opportunity structure of the city may be inaccurate."

Santiago, Chile. Three separate studies have investigated migrants' adaptation to the economic structure of Santiago. Elizaga (1966) analyzed 1962 survey data from 2,319 households and Herrick (1965) has done extensive analysis of census data and other secondary source materials. The third is Raczyński's analysis (1972) of a sample survey from 628 household heads.

The three studies agree that there are few significant differences between the migrants and the natives. In occupational dimension, Elizaga's analysis shows that the migrant and native groups include almost the same proportions of manual workers (63 versus 64 percent). Raczyński's data display that the average occupational scores for the migrants and the natives are 24.7 and 28.3 respectively, a slight disadvantage for the former but not much. Also, no appreciable difference is detected in income by Elizaga. Herrick's analysis of education shows that migrants lag behind the Santiago natives in terms of the proportion of those who received secondary education or technical training but the proportion of college-educated migrants surpasses that of the natives. The evidence clearly indicates that migrants are not a homogeneous group. In terms of migrants' backgrounds, Elizaga and Herrick report that the immigrants in Santiago are very likely to be of upper or middle class origins.

Another interesting finding is that the labor force participation ratio is greater among migrants than among natives. Herrick points out that "possibly the most surprising finding . . . is that migrants had a lower, not a higher, rate

of unemployment than the Santiago natives (1965:14).'' Elizaga supports this finding. Further analysis suggests that these differential employment rates are related to the differential occupational distributions. The census data indicate that the migrant labor force tends to be overrepresented in self-employment and "personal services," i.e., economic sectors with lower unemployment rates but at the same time with possibly higher rates of underemployment.

Bombay, India. Zachariah's Bombay migration analysis (1966) was based on 1961 Indian census data. The analysis suggests that rural migrants are likely to have greater representation in industries and occupations which require less skill, less education and less capital. A large proportion (estimated as about one fourth) of rural migrants became casual laborers or marginal service workers (peons, cooks, waiters, or hawkers). There is some indication that migrants without education have greater probabilities of becoming marginal workers than nonmigrants with comparable education.

At the same time, as much as about one third of migrants obtained nonmanual and professional positions. Migrants' economic success seems to depend primarily on education, and secondarily on religious and regional origins. Evidence indicates that although migrants are educationally inferior to the natives, they are far superior to the general population at origin.

Consistent with the Seoul and Santiago findings, the Indian data reveal that the work participation ratios of migrants in Greater Bombay are higher than those of nonmigrants in each age group. Zachariah thus argues: "Therefore, if migration contributed to the increase in the rate of unemployment in the city, it was probably because of the displacement of nonmigrants."

Monterrey, Mexico. The Monterrey survey data gathered in 1965 from a stratified sample of 1,640 men have been extensively analyzed by several researchers (Balán, 1968; Browning and Feindt 1969; Balán, et al., 1973). In terms of socioeconomic status, these data display relatively large differences between rural migrants and the Monterrey natives. About sixteen percent of rural migrants are engaged in nonmanual occupations as compared to about 31 percent among the Monterrey natives. In terms of education, rural migrants had an average education of 3.8 years, while the natives had 7.5 years of schooling; or, 15.5 percent of migrants compared to 39.7 percent of the natives had secondary education or more. In spite of the migrants' educational inferiority to the Monterrey nonmigrants, they are shown to be superior to nonmigrant rural population at origin in terms of both educational attainment and early work experiences.

The Monterrey studies disclose several additional interesting findings. The first one is the significant internal differentiations among rural migrants according to the age at the time of migration and farm/nonfarm background. In general, social mobility chances are fairly good for early-age migrants from nonfarm backgrounds, while old-age migrants with farm work experiences seem to have considerable occupational handicaps.

The second observation is that farm background per se is not a handicap in the urban occupational world. The fact that men with farm backgrounds achieve lower occupational positions than men with nonfarm backgrounds is

largely attributable to the relatively low status of origin and lower level of education among the former.

The third finding concerns the role of the marginal tertiary occupational sector to absorb ill-educated migrant workers. Petty trading, personal services and construction work are essential to absorb segments of the overabundant labor supply in Monterrey. Although these economic sectors employ a large number of the native workers as well, they seem to be especially important for providing jobs for the less-skilled farm migrants.

This brief review of case studies leads us to make the following empirical generalizations:

1. Rural migrants to metropolitan areas have greater education and higher social class backgrounds than the rural population in their places of origin.
2. Rural migrants taken as a whole occupy slightly lower positions than native urbanites in the urban socioeconomic hierarchy.
3. Rural migrants are less likely to be unemployed than native urbanites.
4. Rural migrants are not a homogeneous group in terms of both status of destination and status of origin; rural migrants enter at all levels of the urban occupational hierarchy.
5. The less-educated and less-skilled rural migrants are very likely to be overrepresented in the marginal tertiary sector of the urban economy (i.e., petty trading and domestic services).
6. The most important predictor of the rural migrants' socio-economic success in the city is education; the less important predictors are age at the time of migration, farm or nonfarm background, and the duration of residence in the city.
7. Rural background does not have a direct effect on the migrant's socioeconomic status achievements, independent of education and father's status; at the same educational level, the migrant and the native are likely to achieve similar socioeconomic positions.

In light of all this empirical evidence, the underprivilege model cannot be maintained in the context of Asian and Latin American metropolises. Rural migrants in these cities are not predominantly uneducated or unskilled, nor do they form large underprivileged and impoverished strata in cities. This is not to deny that problems of poverty and joblessness confront rural migrants. But the important point is that these problems are not unique to migrants but equally relevant to urban natives. Urban poverty is not something transplanted from rural areas, but is generated and maintained by the urban economic conditions. Thus, even in "favelas," "barridas," or shanty towns, which are usually identified with the adjustment problems of rural migrants, researchers have discovered a sizable representation of native population (cf. Morse, 1965; Mangin, 1967; Nelson, 1970; Ross, 1973).

In short, socioeconomic status differentials between rural migrants and native urbanites are too small and their internal variations too large to confirm the validity of the underprivilege model.

The Push Up Model

The push up model deals with structural effects of large-scale migration on social mobility of native urbanites. It must be conceded that structural effects

associated with any particular social force are very difficult to observe and isolate. The adequate test of the push model would require a longitudinal research design with proper measurements of changes in the rates of immigration and upward social mobility of urban natives. Furthermore, this research must be able to control for other factors which are known to have structural effects on social mobility pattern such as differential birth rates and changes in occupational, educational and political structures. This paper does not intend to undertake a rigorous test of the model. It is my contention, however, that the inadequacy of the model in the context of Third World cities can be sufficiently demonstrated by the available data and by critically examining the basic assumptions underlying the push up model.

Let us first turn to the logic of the push up model. Blau and Duncan wrote:

The natives in large cities as well as the migrants from other urban places gain from the influx of rural migrants into the least desirable occupational positions there, for this influx means that fewer natives must occupy the lower positions than would otherwise be necessary. Thus more of them are enabled to take advantage of the superior educational and training facilities in their urban environment and acquire the qualifications needed to move into higher occupational positions (1967: 269).

This statement along with the original discussion by Lipset and Bendix acknowledges explicitly that the first premise of the push up model is the influx of rural migrants into the lower positions in the urban occupational hierarchy. In other words, the validity of the push up model depends heavily on that of the underprivilege model. Consequently, the findings reviewed above have immediate bearings on the push up model. If rural migrants are not especially underprivileged vis-à-vis native urbanites and, rather, show competitive strength in obtaining higher positions, there is little ground to believe that the natives enjoy advantages of climbing up the social ladder on the shoulders of recent migrants.

Apart from this inference, several studies investigated social mobility patterns. The results suggest that urban natives do not enjoy significantly better opportunities of upward mobility than rural migrants in Third World cities. For example, Barringer and Lee (1973) examined social mobility patterns among rural migrants and urban natives in three Korean cities including Seoul, and concluded that there are no significant differences in mobility patterns between the two groups. McGee (1971) compared intergenerational and intragenerational social mobility rates between migrants and the natives in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, and reached the same conclusion. The similar pattern was observed in Poona, India, by Sovani (1966). Findings from several Latin American cities are also consistent with these mobility patterns (see Bock and Iutaka, 1969; Raczynski, 1972; Balán et al., 1973; Simmons, 1975).

Undoubtedly all these findings cast serious doubts on the push up model. However, it is still arguable that a large portion of rural migrants do, after all, provide labor for the lowest positions in the city. It is also undeniable that the influx of migrant labor makes it unnecessary for many native workers to fill these undesirable positions. The question is, then, why does not this condition,

as Blau and Duncan suggest, lead to greater upward social mobility of native urbanites?

The crucial point to realize at this juncture is that there is no necessary connection between labor release from menial positions and upward social mobility; that is, a force that displaces urban natives from the lower positions does not necessarily promote their upward social mobility. For if there are no vacancies into which they can move, the same force may simply push the natives out of the labor market. The relationship between "the influx of rural migrants into the least desirable occupational positions" and upward mobility of the natives is not a necessary but a contingent relationship. The most important contingency is the rapid expansion of the middle to upper sectors of the urban economy and a concomitant demand for fresh labor. Discussions of the push up model in the context of rapidly industrializing societies have taken this contingency for granted, but it cannot be so assumed in most of today's Third World societies.

One of the best established facts about developing economy nowadays is probably the failure of its modern urban industries to generate a significant number of employment opportunities to absorb a mounting supply of labor. It has been repeatedly observed throughout the Third World that the growth of industrial employment lags behind the rate of population agglomeration in urban areas; it even lags behind the increase of industrial growth (see Moore, 1963; Myrdal, 1968; Germani, 1973; Friedmann and Sullivan, 1974; Goldthorpe, 1975). Yet, it is in the modern industrial sector where more desirable jobs are to be found. With only little exaggeration, Meier summarizes the conventional view on this phenomenon as "development without employment (1970)." Another economist remarks: "The failure of modern urban industries to generate a significant number of employment opportunities is perhaps the one descriptive generalization that has almost no geographic, demographic, institutional, political or cultural bound in the less developed countries of the world (Todaro, 1973:42)."

Although explaining the structural sources of this pattern of development is not of our immediate concern, a brief discussion of this will nonetheless illuminate the relationship between migration and social mobility. An important point to realize first is that most Third World nations tend to develop the capital-intensive, modern technological industry. As a consequence, even if industrial production increases considerably, the proportion of new jobs created by industry is much lower. It is certainly an irony that the nations with the unlimited supply of cheap labor opt for labor-saving technologies. This irony can be understood in terms of the dependent nature of their economic development (cf. Dos Santos, 1970; Cockcroft et al., 1972; Furtado, 1973; O'Brien, 1975; Portes, 1976).

It is now widely accepted among students of development that economic development in most Third World nations is geared to and dominated by the interests of foreign capital. It is also well understood that the foreign capital (particularly, multinational corporations) prefers to use capital-intensive and labor-saving techniques rather than relying on the unreliable and politically

unpredictable indigenous labor force. Dependent economies which evolve under these external structural conditions increase the gap between the small modern technological sector and the large indigenous private sector of the economy. The workers in the first sector are highly paid and protected by unions and labor legislations, while those in the latter suffer job instability, severe competition and meager rewards for hard work.

The main reason why the push up effect of rural migrants does not operate in Third World metropolises lies in the structural limitations imposed by dependent economic development. In these societies, opportunities of upward social mobility are directly related to the expansion of the better-rewarding, modern technological sector. Yet, largely due to the nature of dependent development, this sector has very limited capability to employ an increasing number of people. Most importantly, this modern industrial sector is hardly responsive to an accelerated inflow of migrant labor from the countryside.

Given this structural limitation on social mobility opportunities, a huge influx of rural migrants is far from a benefit for native urban workers. Rather than pushing many native workers into the more rewarding modern industrial sector, rural migrants cause the urban labor market, particularly in the small-scale indigenous sector, to become increasingly more competitive and may eventually push many native workers out of the job market. Thus, the real effect of rural migrants on social mobility pattern in Third World cities is more likely a push out than push up one.

Discussion

The foregoing analysis has led us to reject the underprivilege and the push up models in several major Third World metropolises. The data examined are quite consistent in confirming that rural migrants are not predominantly unskilled and underprivileged in the urban status system and that native urban population do not benefit from the influx of rural migrants. Migrants and the natives are two heterogeneous groups and no study has shown any systematic inequality relations between them. Also, no analysis has demonstrated that rural or urban place of origin has independent effect on socioeconomic status achievements in the city. Therefore, one significant conclusion we can derive from this comparative analysis is that it is sociologically not very meaningful to juxtapose rural migrants with the natives as if they are two distinct social groupings, at least from the standpoint of social stratification.

This conclusion may appear surprising to many who recognize huge gaps between urban and rural societies in most developing countries. It is true that rural and urban areas represent two distinct economic systems: one is agricultural and less differentiated, while the other is predominantly industrial and commercial and more differentiated. One may also point out that in most developing societies there are enormous income gaps between rural and urban areas and that educational, cultural and occupational opportunities are concentrated in a few metropolitan centers. Observing these obvious inequality gaps, one must ask why there are no systematic inequality relations between rural migrants and urban natives. This question definitely deserves more serious consideration than it has received so far.

The first answer to this question is the selective migration process. As previous studies have shown, rural-to-urban migrants are more likely to come from upper segments of the rural population in terms of educational and family class backgrounds. Thus, comparing rural migrants with urban natives is not exactly the same as comparing the rural and urban populations in general. Selective migration results in the movement to the cities of a disproportionately large share of upper strata rural families with educational and family resources to compete successfully with native residents for higher positions.

This finding has an important implication, since it suggests a strength of rural upper strata vis-a-vis urban middle classes. Contrary to the beliefs of some dependency theorists who treat rural population singularly as an impoverished and exploited mass, rural populations in many developing nations do not seem to be homogeneous and include upper strata whose family resources are no less than those of urban middle classes. This recognition, however, does not deny the possibility that the accelerated cityward migration, which is in the long run related to the urban-centered economic development, may eventually deplete the human and material resources of rural societies and consequently accentuate the gap between rural and urban populations in general and between rural migrants and urban natives in particular. Under such a condition, the underprivilege model may find new empirical affirmation.

The second answer to the question lies in the nature of the economic structure of Third World cities. As mentioned previously, the urban economy of these societies is composed of only a small sector of modern industrial activities and a much larger sector of what are variously called indigenous, traditional, informally organized or marginal economic activities. Given a gross disparity between the two sectors of the urban economy, a serious question is raised as to the significance of the urban-rural dualism in developing societies. For the existence of a large marginal and informally organized economy signifies the tenuous relationships which a large proportion of urban residents have with the modern core institutions of the urban society. A large number of these marginal populations live literally in the periphery of the city, in shanty towns, slums and other low-income residential areas. Their meager income does not allow them to provide their children with any educational advantages over the youngsters reared in rural areas. Under these situations, there is little ground to believe that the rural-urban distinction is socially or economically significant. Nor is there any particular reason to expect the native-migrant distinction to play a significant role in the urban stratification process.

The implication of all these points is that we must shift our focus from individual modes of migrant adaptation to the structural conditions of developing economy which are the very sources of massive rural-to-urban migration as well as the primary determinants of migrants' adaptation to the urban structure. Future migration research must pay special attention to the dynamics of economic development in Third World societies that create enormous disparities not only between rural and urban areas but also within the urban society. Perhaps, previous migration studies have proceeded too long without consciously confronting the more fundamental structural conditions of developing economy in the Third World.

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