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Rural and Intra-Urban  
Migration in Colombia:  
Two Case Studies in Bogotá

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## RURAL AND INTRA-URBAN MIGRATION IN COLOMBIA: TWO CASE STUDIES IN BOGOTÁ

WILLIAM L. FLINN

*Cardinal*  
The study reported in this essay traces two random samples of residents of barrios El Carmen and El Gavilán in Bogotá from their birthplace to their present locations. More specifically, it seeks answers to the following questions: How much of this rural-to-urban migration involves a multi-stage or step process, i.e., farm to village, village to town, town to city? What interval of time is involved in the migration process to the city? How much of the intra-city migration? What factors are related to the intra-city movement? What are the experiences of rural migrants in terms of their satisfaction with their urban conditions?

### MIGRATION TO BOGOTÁ

A prevalent theory is that migration to Bogotá occurs by a series of stages or steps. The step-migration theory, which characterizes the process as one in which people move from small population centers to successively larger ones can be traced to Ravenstein's (1885) nineteenth-century study of England. He observed a universal shifting or displacement of the population which produced migration streams in the direction of the large cities. The gaps were filled by migrants from more remote districts.

In both cases reported here, the majority of migrants moved directly

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**Table 1. Number of Intermediate Steps in Migration by Rural-to-Urban Migrant Residents of Barrios El Carmen and El Gavilán (in percent)**

Steps	BARRIOS	
	<i>El Carmen</i>	<i>El Gavilán</i>
Direct to Bogotá	66	70
One step	12	15
Two steps	8	8
Three steps	6	5
Four steps	6	1
Five steps	1	1
Six steps	1	0
<i>Total</i>	100	100
N =	106	87

to Bogotá without intermediate stops (see Table I). On the other hand, at least 30 percent of both samples made intermediate stops of widely varying lengths. (See Table 2.) Even for these migrants, however, the pattern is not fully consistent with step theory, since several of them apparently did not move to larger population centers before migrating to Bogotá. Table 3 indicates that some *campesinos* who were born in the *vereda* (more or less equivalent to a rural U.S. school district) did move to the *cabecera* (a small village, town, or city). This does not, however, present a clear picture of the step-migration process since the population of a *cabecera* is not always greater than that of a *vereda*. In the present studies slightly

**Table 2. Time Interval Between Departure from Area of Origin and Arrival in Bogotá of Residents of Barrios El Carmen and El Gavilán (in percent)**

Years	BARRIOS	
	<i>El Carmen</i>	<i>El Gavilán</i>
Less than one year	66	70
1 to 5 years	13	15
6 to 10 years	6	5
11 to 15 years	6	5
16 to 20 years	4	1
21 to 25 years	3	2
More than 25 years	2	2
<i>Total</i>	100	100
N =	106	87

more than half the in-migrants who made intermediate stops moved to successively larger population centers before migrating to Bogotá. The others moved to population centers of the same size or smaller.

Table 3. Place of Birth and Last Place of Residence Before Bogotá of In-Migrant Household Heads of Barrios El Carmen and El Gavilán (in percent)

Place	BARRIOS			
	El Carmen		El Gavilán	
	Birth Place	Last Residence	Birth Place	Last Residence
Cabecera	60	74	56	67
Vereda	40	26	44	33
Total	100	100	100	100
N =	106	106	87	87

These data seem to show that step-migration does not always occur. Several other Colombian studies, however, indicate that the migration steps take place, but that the steps are not necessarily made by the same generation and probably are not (Facultad de Sociología, 1963; Urrutia, 1963; Reyes, Durán, and Hanneson, 1965). Small towns around Bogotá have experienced large in-migration. For example, in 1963, 60 percent of the population of Chía was composed of in-migrants, while the population of Facativá, Zipaquirá, and Chiquinquirá contained 48, 42, and 30 percent in-migrants respectively (Urrutia, 1963). The data from these towns indicated that the majority of the in-migrants came from surrounding areas. The growth rates for these municipalities were approximately the same as the national average, indicating that out-migration is also taking place. Reyes, Durán, and Hanneson (1965) stated that 68 percent of the emigrants from the Suárez River Valley, a *municipio* 36 miles from Bogotá, moved directly to Bogotá. The researchers also noted that the largest amount of in-migrants to the area were from the surrounding areas. A study of the Subachoque River Valley, near Bogotá, indicated that 10 percent of the heads of households were not natives of Subachoque, but were from areas near Subachoque (Facultad de Sociología, 1963: 14). The major focal point for the emigrants was Bogotá.

Perhaps rural-to-urban migration processes are best summed up by McGreevey (1965: 23-25) who notes that there are two predominant patterns. One he calls "fill-in" migration where people who move out of rural areas generally go to nearby small towns, and natives of small towns move up to larger cities. The other major pattern is direct migration from farms to the large cities.

### INTRA-CITY MIGRATION

Even though the majority of shantytown residents migrate from farms or small towns, research shows they come to the shantytowns largely by way of the tenement houses and back alley slums within the central city (Mangin, 1967: 68). This is contrary to the commonly espoused notion that "thousands of discontented farmers are moving to the cities and building shantytowns called *barrios* on the edge of town. . . ." (Leonard, 1969: 5). It is also counter to some descriptions of Latin American cities as made up of a plaza-centered commercial core, an adjacent upper-class residential zone, and a periphery of slums (Morse, 1962: 485). This conception of the spatial structure does not include an intra-city slum or transition zone as noted in the theory devised for the North American city by Burgess (1925).

Evidence suggests that the former notion is a myth while the latter ecological pattern is indicative of Latin American cities which are experiencing little growth (Hayner, 1944; Hayner, 1945; Leonard, 1948; Caplow, 1949; Dotson and Dotson, 1954). It has been suggested that cities in different technological epochs will display dissimilar spatial structures (Schnore, 1965: 372). With growth, the ecological processes of invasion and succession of land uses is set into motion (Burgess, 1925). As the city's business district expands along with accompanying improvements in transportation, the spatial structure begins to reverse itself. The upper classes shift from central to peripheral residence and the lower classes increasingly take up occupancy in the central areas abandoned by the élite. The old mansions are converted into tenement houses and cheap hotels. This transition area or zone is inhabited by rural-urban immigrants and otherwise dispossessed residents. Most live there, not by preference, but because the cost of transportation to work in the center of the city is low. This reversal in spatial structure produces a pattern of concentric circles: central business district, transition zone, zone of working men's homes, residential zone, and the commuter zone. (For other theories see Hoyt, 1939; Harris and Ullman, 1945.) Breese (1966: 106) notes that this concentric pattern of growth is subsequently replaced by a sector pattern of growth. This view holds that different income groups tend to locate themselves in distinct sectors of the city centered around the central business district and along particular axes of transportation.

In Bogotá, which was founded in 1538, the prominent families lived in the *barrios* surrounding the main plaza until the late nineteenth century (Amato, 1968: 97). Then the reversal started with the upper classes moving north of the plaza until the beginning of the 1940s when they abandoned the central city for residence in the northern suburbs. Neïssa (1965) demonstrates that Bogotá has passed through the reversal stage and

has developed a transition zone (*zona negra*) in the areas evacuated by the élites. The patio-centered houses in this area have been converted into *vecindades* (a family per room with the kitchen and other services shared) and *inquilinos* (rental apartments and housing). These rental slum dwellings and *hoteluchos* contain migrants from nearly every region of Colombia.

Both Amato (1968: 97-98) and Neissa (1965: 50) demonstrate that beyond the transition zone, the sector theory probably best describes Bogotá's spatial structure. The industrial zone extends westward from the central business district to the edge of the city. The élite residential areas are concentrated in the north, middle group in the west, the lower classes in the south. The lower-class residential area is divided into at least three types: (1) *barrios piratas* or *clandestinos*, illegal "pirate" or "clandestine" subdivisions in which small parcels of unimproved land are sold without official permits; (2) *invasiones* or *tugurios* (rustic shacks), squatter settlements on public and private lands (Instituto de Crédito Territorial, 1966: 7; Ludgerio Camues F., 1966); (3) public-housing projects and *urbanizaciones*, legal subdivisions designed according to city specifications and provided with some public services.

If intra-city migration is a two-step process, we would expect to find that in-migrants move first to the central city, especially in *inquilinos* or *vecindades*, in the transition and then later to *barrios clandestinos* or *tugurios* in Bogotá. This is what Cardona (1968: 69) found in a study of two *barrios de invasiones* or *tugurios* in Bogotá. Over 65 percent of the in-migrants in both invasion *barrios* had lived in *inquilinos* or *vecindades* in the central city while still others had lived with relatives in the central city before moving to the squatter settlements. Somewhat similar patterns were noted among residents of *barrios clandestinos* (Departamento Administrativo de Planificación, 1963a and 1963b). Both *barrios* in the present study are clandestine. Thirty-eight percent of the in-migrant residents of El Carmen and 45 percent of the residents of El Gavilán lived in the central city (transition zone or workingmen's houses) prior to moving to their respective *barrios*.

One study established that some in-migrants to *barrios clandestinos* had experienced social mobility prior to moving to the "shantytown suburbs" (Flinn, 1968). Another study suggests that *barrios de invasiones* or *tugurios* provide a means for securing land for those in-migrants who do not possess the capital to purchase a lot in a *barrio clandestino* (Flinn and Converse, forthcoming). This desire for home ownership seems to be one of the major motivating forces in the migrants moving to the "shantytown suburbs." In the studies conducted by the City Planning Office (Departamento Administrativo de Planificación Distrital, 1963a and 1963b) on clandestine *barrios*, research indicates that approximately 40 percent of the respondents were motivated to reside in the various *barrios* by the desire to own a homesite. Approximately another fifth of the respondents

moved to the areas because of cheaper rent, even though for most of the respondents this meant higher transition costs and an hour or an hour and a half commuting time to their jobs in *el centro*.

In the present study, a majority of the respondents in both *barrios* listed home ownership or desire for property as the major reason for moving to the area. A follow-up study on Barrio El Gavilán indicated that those who own property in the *barrio* are the least likely to move, while nearly 90 percent of the renters had moved away during a three-year period.

Table 4 shows that the majority of the in-migrants did not move directly to El Carmen or El Gavilán. In fact, the majority lived in the

**Table 4.** Number of Intra-City Moves by the In-Migrant Residents of Barrios El Carmen and El Gavilán (in percent)

<i>Number of Moves</i>	BARRIOS	
	<i>El Carmen</i>	<i>El Gavilán</i>
Present <i>barrio</i> only	31	13
One move	28	41
Two moves	23	25
Three moves	12	10
Four moves	4	5
Five moves	1	2
Six moves	1	2
Seven moves	0	0
Eight moves	0	1
<i>Total</i>	100	100
N =	106	87

**Table 5.** Time Interval Between Arrival in Bogotá and Moving to Barrio El Carmen or El Gavilán (in percent)

<i>Years</i>	BARRIOS	
	<i>El Carmen</i>	<i>El Gavilán</i>
Less than one year	44	24
1 to 5 years	28	33
6 to 10 years	16	28
11 to 15 years	6	8
16 to 20 years	3	5
21 to 25 years	1	0
More than 25 years	1	2
<i>Total</i>	100	100
N =	106	87

transition zone, zone of workingmen's homes, or in other shantytowns between one and ten years before they moved to either El Carmen or El Gavilán (see Table 5).

How do in-migrants like city life? Eighty-nine percent of the residents of El Carmen and 75 percent of the residents of El Gavilán stated that

Table 6. Satisfaction of In-Migrant Residents of Barrio El Carmen with Barrio and Social Conditions in Comparison With Their Previous Residence (in percent)

Social Conditions	PRIOR RESIDENCE			Total
	Outside Bogotá	Central City	Other Shanty-town	
<b>1. Household head's satisfaction with <i>barrio</i></b>				
—more satisfied	46	72	67	62
—equally satisfied	24	18	12	18
—less satisfied	30	10	18	19
—no data	0	0	3	1
<i>Total</i>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
<b>2. Wife's satisfaction with <i>barrio</i></b>				
—more satisfied	39	63	55	53
—equally satisfied	28	15	15	19
—less satisfied	24	18	18	20
—no data	3	2	3	3
—no wife	6	2	9	5
<i>Total</i>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
<b>3. Household head's satisfaction with house</b>				
—better housing	52	73	63	63
—equal housing	12	5	28	14
—worse housing	33	20	6	20
—no data	3	2	3	3
<i>Total</i>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
<b>4. Household head's satisfaction with income</b>				
—better income	42	55	46	48
—equal income	21	33	33	29
—worse income	37	12	18	22
—no data	0	0	3	1
<i>Total</i>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
<b>N =</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>106</b>

they prefer city life to the country. Only 26 percent of the in-migrant residents of El Gavilán reported being less satisfied with their present residence than they were with their last residence prior to moving to Bogotá.

Tables 6 and 7 show the residents' satisfaction with the *barrio* and services in relation to their previous residence. It is interesting to note that in both *barrios*, migrants whose prior residence was the central city are

*Table 7. Satisfaction of In-Migrant Residents of Barrio El Gavilán with Social Conditions of Barrio in Comparison With Their Previous Residence (in percent)*

<i>Social Conditions</i>	<i>Outside Bogotá</i>	<i>Central City</i>	<i>Other Shantytown</i>	<i>Total</i>
1. Household head's satisfaction with house				
—better housing	45	64	52	56
—equal housing	36	5	5	9
—worse housing	18	31	43	35
<i>Total</i>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
2. Household head's satisfaction with income				
—better income	36	31	19	26
—equal income	36	33	38	26
—worse income	28	36	38	36
—no data	0	0	5	2
<i>Total</i>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
3. Household head's satisfaction with public services				
—better	36	26	11	21
—same	36	20	11	18
—worse	28	54	76	60
—no data	0	0	2	1
<i>Total</i>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
4. Household head's satisfaction with educational opportunities for children				
—better	64	38	22	34
—same	27	26	30	28
—worse	0	31	40	31
—no data	9	5	8	7
<i>Total</i>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
<i>N =</i>	11	39	37	87

more satisfied than migrants whose previous residence was another shantytown. Most of the migrants from the central city lived in *inquilinos* or *vecindades* and view this move to the "shantytown suburb" as a big move upward.

### CONCLUSION: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In Bogotá, the various governmental agencies offer at least four solutions to the problems of *tugurios* and *barrios clandestinos*: (1) eradication of squatter settlements; (2) urban renewal for intra-city slums; (3) low-cost public housing; (4) improvement and renovation of peripheral shantytowns (Instituto de Crédito Territorial, 1966; 23-27).

As Mangin (1967) notes, the most commonly espoused solution to the problem is eradication. The Department of Planning of the Special District of Bogotá, however, has embarked upon a number of urban renewal projects (Departamento Administrativo de Planificación Distrital Bogotá 1964: 216). Unfortunately, these projects primarily benefit the élites and the upper-middle classes by producing luxury housing, cleaning up central city blight, and improving land values in the central business district (Amato, 1968: 239). For example, the National Civic Center project envisions a revitalization and improvement of the old colonial area of the city by destroying or renovating many deteriorated residences around the headquarters of the Colombian Government near the central plaza. This plan would displace many low-income groups from the *zona negra* or transition zone.

On the other hand, the building and location of public low-cost housing projects such as Ciudad Kennedy has not solved the squatter problem. It has only led to further segregation of the population by social class. Amato (1968: 257) indicates that the Colombian Government, acting through its various housing agencies, has developed several huge low-income self-contained projects which are completely isolated from the other social classes within the city. Many residents complain they are too far from their place of work and transportation costs are high.

Another solution sometimes offered is the renovation of *tugurios* through loans and self-help house building projects. The Instituto de Crédito Territorial has lowered construction costs and loans to about U.S. \$3,000 per dwelling, and has a policy of lending money only to families whose personal holdings are valued at less than U.S. \$8,000 (Fletcher, 1968: 30). They admit, however, that even with these measures, credit is not within the reach of the average *tugurio* resident whose income is only 40 or 50 percent of the legal minimum daily wage of 14 *pesos* (less than U.S. \$1 at mid-1969 rates) (Instituto de Crédito Territorial: 20).

In the course of the present study it was observed that many people who moved within the city, moved to a shantytown because of a desire to own a *homesite*. This implies that financial resources play a major role

in determining place of residence. As in-migrants accumulate capital, they move from the crowded tenements of the central city to what they see as a relatively better situation in a *barrio clandestino* on the edge of the city. The purchasing of property becomes a stabilizing agent in the migrant's life. It provides him with security and a hedge against inflation. Once they have some form of title security, residents of *tugurios* and *piratas* make considerable improvements on their property such as adding additional rooms or stories. A study in Barranquilla shows similar results. One-quarter of the residents of three *barrios de invasiones* had spent from 1,000 to 6,000 pesos (approximately U.S. \$75 to \$450 at 1965 rates) in improvements on their properties (Usandizaga and Havens, 1966). Perhaps the municipal and federal governments would receive greater return from investments designed to speed up the distribution of secure titles in existing settlements than from unrealistic efforts to eradicate shantytowns.

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