

# ETHNICITY AND CLASS IN URBAN RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY: SOME EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS

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## SINOPSIS

*Mobiliti kediaman mempengaruhi struktur di dalam bandaraya dengan menguatkan atau mengurangkan ciri-ciri tertentu yang terdapat dalam kawasan-kawasan kediaman. Dari segi ini, bilangan mobiliti dan, yang lebih penting, arah mobiliti adalah faktor-faktor yang mustahak yang mendatangkan struktur kediaman dalam bandaraya. Satu kajian kes yang telah dijalankan di enam jenis tempat kediaman di Kuala Lumpur telah menentukan bahawa arah mobiliti adalah mengikut bangsa dan/atau taraf sosio-ekonomi. Implikasinya ialah struktur kediaman masakini yang mengikut bangsa dan taraf sosio-ekonomi akan menjadi lebih ternyata. Oleh demikian, usaha-usaha untuk mengawasi arahubahan ini memerlukan perhatian dan penyelidikan yang terperinci khasnya berkenaan sikap dan tingkahlaku.*

## SYNOPSIS

*Residential mobility affects the internal structures of cities by intensifying or adulterating specific characteristics of existing residential areas. In this respect, the volume of movements and more important, the directional biasnesses are important determinants of city structures. A case study of six different residential areas in Kuala Lumpur confirms the model of mobility destination biasnesses according to ethnic and/or socio-economic status. This implies a perpetuation of existing socio-economic and ethnic residential structures and any attempts to contain this trend would require more attention and research into realms such as attitudes and behaviourism.*

## INTRODUCTION

Rapid urban residential turnover, as seen in the high degree of residential mobility can suggest, on the one hand, that substantial changes are taking place in the overall pattern of residences within the city. This can mean that any existing residential differentiation either along ethnic or class lines becomes less apparent because of ethnic residential mixing or the adulteration of high-income areas by lower-income homes, *vice versa*. On the other hand, despite a high level of urban residential mobility, there may still be a stable

socio-economic and ethnic residential pattern. In other words, existing residential differentiation remains essentially the same or may even be intensified. This happens when movements in and out of residential localities involve basically people of the same ethnic or socio-economic status groups. Tryon's study in San Francisco, for example, noted that rapid population turnover in the city between 1940 and 1950 occurred within a framework of neighbourhood stability (Tryon 1967).

Clearly, investigations into the effects of urban residential mobility on the internal structure of urban areas involve not merely the volume but more important, the directional biases of residential moves. Basically, these pertain to whether the household or family moves to areas of similar ethnic and/or similar socio-economic status or do the families cut across these boundaries in their movements. Inevitably, the motivations and decisions to move from one area to another are created by a host of factors such as the stage of the family cycle attained, the household size, or improvements in income levels (Lee, 1977). However, while these factors account for why families or households move, they need not necessarily indicate the direction of movements. Instead, the destination of migrant households may be said to be the reflections of the ways in which the household members now want to live. Thus, the directional biases of residential readjustments are important factors consolidating or otherwise, urban residential patterns.

In this respect, two variables – ethnicity and economic class – appear to be important in affecting the pattern of residential moves. In fact, the persistent trend of ethnic residential segregation and divisions along class lines in Malaysian cities (McGee 1963; Lee 1976b) have led the present writer to suggest a simple model of urban residential development as shown in Figure 1, whereby poor in-migrants into the city shows apparent proclivity for enclaves of their own ethnic kind or to areas in proximity to these enclaves (Lee 1976a). Higher income in-migrants, on the other hand, tend to favour the ethnically-mixed areas of better residences (Lee 1974). The objective of this paper is to provide further confirmation of this model by investigating the pattern of urban residential mobility in an empirical study in Kuala Lumpur.

### **The Case Study in Kuala Lumpur**

Date relevant to residential mobility were extracted from a larger household interview survey in six selected residential areas, namely Kenny Hill, Bangsar, Kampung Bahru, Chow Kit, Loke Yew flats, and a squatter area in Sungei Besi (See Lee 1976c). Using an operational definition of classifying movers as those households who have stayed in a particular dwelling unit for a continuous period of less than five years (so as to focus attention on the more recent movers only), the gross mobility figures indicate that

more than 54 per cent of the total households surveyed were movers.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1 shows the proportion of movers in each of the residential areas. A few brief comments regarding the table highlight certain patterns. The area surveyed in Bangsar is of recent establishment and consequently dominated by recent movers (93%). In Chow Kit, a predominantly Chinese area in the hub of the city, about 70 per cent of the households interviewed were movers. This testifies to the functional role of Chow Kit as an important commercial sub-centre of the city attracting many in-migrants who came in search of opportunities in retailing, storekeeping, hawking and other related activities. In the Loke Yew flats and the squatter area in Sungai Besi, the proportion of movers was much less – 41 per cent and 25 per cent respectively. The low percentage in the latter area may be due to the fact this area has had a long established squatter community dating back to the 1920s and 1930s (Coe 1962). It is therefore already a congested area. Very likely too the closely-knit community as typical of these squatter areas (Sen 1973) does not encourage new-comers, especially strangers into the area. This probably channels potential in-migrant to newer areas elsewhere. The relatively large proportion of movers in Kenny Hill, a high-class residential area may be attributed to its tenurial characteristics where many of the dwellings were rented out or quarters provided by big corporations or banks. Consequently, depending on work contract terminations, job transfers, etc. new households move in to replace the former occupiers. In fact about 65 per cent of the movers into Kenny Hill came as a result of occupational transfers and another 35 per cent listed 'quarters provided' as one of the main reasons for their residential shifts.<sup>2</sup>

TABLE 1 – PERCENTAGE OF MOVERS/NON-MOVERS IN THE SELECTED RESIDENTIAL AREAS

	KENNY HILL	BUNGSAR	KAMPUNG BAHRU	SUNGAI BESI	LOKE YEW FLATS	CHOW KIT
Movers	47.6	93.3	46.7	25.0	41.7	70.0
Non-Movers	52.4	6.7	53.3	75.0	58.3	30.0
$\eta =$	42	60	60	60	60	60

$$\chi^2 = 69.59; \text{ df} = 5; \text{ p} = 0.001$$

### Sources of Migrants

Movers into the six residential areas selected may be classified as either intra-urban movers (that is, from other parts of the city) or extra-urban in which case they could have come from other parts of the State of Selangor but outside Kuala Lumpur, or from other states of the country or from overseas. Figures 2, 3, and 4 show the origins of each migrant households accord-

ing to their most recent previous place of residence. More than three-quarters of the movers in three of the areas (Bungsar, Sungai Besi, and Loke Yew) consisted mainly of intra-urban moves. In Kampung Bahru and Chow Kit, slightly more than half of the movers were intra-urban while Kenny Hill had 62 per cent extra-urban migrants. These three areas are thus the destination areas of migrants from outside Kuala Lumpur. An examination of both extra-urban and intra-urban patterns reveals several important points most relevant to the present objective.

#### (a) Extra-Urban Migrants

In Kenny Hill, the extra-urban migrants reflected one major source from outside the country (about 77 per cent of the extra-urban migrants) many of whom were on short vocational sojourn. A less important source was the other states of the country. A significant point is that none of the extra-urban migrants were Chinese. Movers from other states were entirely Malays while those from overseas were mainly 'Others' (Figure 2). In Kampung Bahru, where 43 per cent of the migrants came from outside Kuala Lumpur, the most important source was from the northern states of Penang and Perak (Figure 2). About 14 per cent of the extra-urban migrants came from other parts of Selangor. It must be stressed that all these migrants were Malays, mostly from rural areas. There is little doubt that Kampung Bahru remains a major recipient of the stream of Malay rural migrants as has been observed earlier by McGee (1969). In Chow Kit (Figure 3) almost half of the movers were extra-urban migrants, most of whom came from the other states of Perak, Perlis, Penang, Kelantan, Negeri Sembilan, and Johore. Thus, when compared to Kampung Bahru, Chow Kit drew its migrants from a far larger field. Furthermore in terms of the ethnic composition of the movers into Chow Kit, 80 per cent were Chinese demonstrating the importance of the city centre in attracting Chinese in-migrants.

In the remaining three areas of Bungsar, Sungai Besi, and Loke Yew, extra-urban migrants were less significant comprising only about 25 per cent, 14 per cent, and 16 per cent of the movers in each of the respective areas. Movers into Bungsar came from Penang and Perak and comprised largely Indians and Chinese (Figure 3). In the squatter area of Sungai Besi, however, none of the extra-urban movements came from other states but instead came from the outskirts of the city (Figure 4). This confirms the tendency of squatters to have moved from nearby vicinities as observed by Jackson (1974).

#### (b) Intra-Urban Movers

The pattern of intra-urban movements presents several interesting features. Kenny Hill recorded the lowest proportion of movers from within the city (Figure 2): it only had one 'intra-locality' move, that is movement from one part of Kenny Hill to another part of the same area. The movers to Kenny

Hill came mainly from the eastern half of the city in Jalan Weld, Jalan Peke-liling, Jalan Ampang and Kampong Datuk Keramat involving all ethnic groups except the Indians. Apart from Kenny Hill, however, intra-urban moves were significant in all other areas, particularly Chow Kit and Kampung Bahru. In both these areas too, the largest proportion of the movements involved shifts from within their respective localities (57 per cent and 63 per cent of the intra-urban moves respectively). Movers into Chow Kit from other parts of the city came from the Chinese agglomerations in the south-east of the city as well as from Chinatown (Figure 3). In the case of Kampung Bahru, they came from Jalan Ipoh, Kampung Datok Keramat, and Pudu but what is more interesting is that they were all Malays (Figure 2). In Bungsar, about a quarter were intra-locality moves with the rest coming from an assortment of localities (Figure 3). Ethnically, the movers into Bungsar were Chinese and Indians. About a third of the intra-urban movers in Sungai Besi were intra-locality movers (Figure 4). Another third came from Pudu. In the case of the flat dwellers in Loke Yew, a large proportion came from a then-demolished squatter area in Bukit Bintang. Again, intra-locality moves, represented by the former squatters in Jalan Kenanga were important comprising a quarter of the intra-urban moves (Figure 4).

Hence, it could be seen that except for Kenny Hill, a peculiar distinction was the significance of intra-locality moves in all areas. This probably suggests that many of the intra-urban moves were made not because of dissatisfaction with their environment which otherwise they would have moved out of the locality. Rather, movements had occurred possibly because of some relatively small differences in dwelling conditions such as requiring a nicer or bigger house. As in each of these localities a wide range of dwelling unit sizes were available and perhaps, more important, were within the same price range or rental levels, most of their requirements were thus met within the respective localities.

The importance of intra-locality moves indicate also that most intra-urban moves occurred over relatively short distances. Although the better-income households tended to have shifted over a longer distance (3.8 kilometres) than the lower-income households (1.93 km), the overall average distance travelled in the shift of residence was only 2.52 km. (about 1½ miles). In fact, only 16.6 per cent of the intra-urban movers travelled more than 5 kilometres in their shift of residence. In other words the frequency of movement tended to be higher over short distances than long distances. That frequency of movement appears to be an inverse function of the distance between origin and destination of movers has also been observed in western cities and has been attributed to 'distance friction' (Horton & Reynolds 1969). Brown and Moore (1970) viewed this constricting role of distance as a function of urban 'awareness space', that is movements are constrained to those portions of the urban space of which the movers are aware of. While 'mental maps' upon which desirable areas are charted may

influence the potential mover, the role of the element of urban awareness space in the relatively smaller cities of the developing Southeast Asian world may be questioned. Furthermore, given the rigid spatial compartmentalisation into ethnic and socio-economic enclaves (Lee 1976b; McGee 1963), it is unlikely that the potential movers are unaware of portions of the city in terms of their desirability. Nevertheless, while potential movers may be aware of most areas in the city in terms of their desirability, the movers would obviously be more aware of their immediate surroundings even in a small city in terms of available housing. This is particularly important in the case of squatter shacks or cubicles in the downtown area which are not advertised through newspapers but through verbal communication. This latter form of communication thus confines knowledge of known dwelling vacancies to the respective immediate localities and hence results in a distance-decay function of mobility frequencies.

### **Testing The Model of Mobility Destination Biasness**

The phenomenon of intra-urban mobility occurring within short distances possibly suggests in this case that movements have occurred within similar socio-economic status or similar ethnic neighbourhoods. For instance, the pattern of mobility in terms of distance travelled appears to be longer among the rich than the poor. Similarly while the Malays travelled an average distance of 1.93 km. in relocation, the average distances moved by the Chinese and Indians were 2.75 km. and 2.81 km. respectively. Thus it appears that certain groups tend to relocate nearer to their points of origin than others. These biasnesses indicate selection preferences.

Table 2 shows the general socio-economic status of the origin areas of the intra-urban movers. Extra-urban migrants were excluded owing to the difficulties of identifying the status of origin areas from outside the city. The socio-economic standing of the origin areas had to be subjectively classified by utilising measurements made of the destination areas.<sup>3</sup> The table shows that more than 95 per cent of the lower-status areas (Ranks III and IV) came from areas of similar rankings in other parts of the city. In Kenny Hill (Rank I) about 37 per cent came from Rank II areas. In Bungsar (Rank II) a substantial proportion of the movers came from Rank III areas. Both these situations may be taken to imply some degree of inter-status moves, that is a process of upward social mobility in a spatial sense. Despite these trends in the better residential areas, the table reveals a dichotomy of movement whereby the respective higher-status areas (Rank I and II) and lower-status areas (Rank III and IV) tend to receive movers of similar status. This pattern may further be corroborated by the occupational types of the movers. About 80 per cent of the movers into Sungai Besi, Loke Yew, Kampung Bahru, and Chow Kit were sales workers, service workers and production workers. On the other hand, 95 per cent of the movers in Kenny Hill were

in the professional and administrative category. In Bungsar, 55 per cent were in the professional, administrative and clerical occupations. Thus it is obvious that the existing socio-economic residential framework of the city has a strong influence on the destination biasnesses of intra-urban residential movers.

TABLE 2 – RELATIVE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF ORIGIN AREAS OF INTRA-URBAN MOVERS (%)

		SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF ORIGIN AREAS				
		HIGH STATUS		LOWER STATUS		TOTAL
		I	II	III	IV	
Socio-economic status of destination areas						
Kenny Hill	(I)	37.5	37.5	0.0	25.0	21
Bungsar	(II)	4.8	26.2	54.8	14.2	56
Kg. Bahru	(III)	0.0	0.0	81.2	18.8	28
Sungai Besi	(IV)	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	14
Loke Yew	(IV)	0.0	4.5	59.1	36.4	25
Chow Kit	(III)	0.0	4.3	91.4	4.3	42

It is also apparent from Figures 2, 3 and 4 that the ethnic characteristics of the migration streams are quite predictable. This is summarised in Table 3. Migrants into Sungai Besi and Chow Kit were largely Chinese. In the flats of Loke Yew, where a certain degree of control is exercised by the authorities in the allocation of units to families, the movers were more ethnically mixed. Sixty per cent of the movers were hitherto Chinese squatters being resettled as a result of their squatter huts being demolished. Interesting enough, the Malay movers into the flats were made up largely of police and field force personnel. In all probability Malay movements would be negligible if not for the lack of accommodation elsewhere for these 'service' workers. Perhaps the lack of Malay movers who were not involved in the 'service' sector may be attributed to the preference of the Malays to be accommodated in non-flat housing.<sup>4</sup> In Bungsar, movers were largely Chinese and Indians, the latter partly because of its propinquity to the previously Indian dominated area of Brickfields (Lee 1974). In the high-class area of Kenny Hill, the movers were ethnically mixed with 'Others' forming the largest group. Whereas in the case of Sungai Besi and Chow Kit where movers were largely Chinese, migrants into Kampung Bahru were entirely Malays. Thus a pattern of ethnic predilection in the choice of residential areas is obvious.

TABLE 3 – ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF RECENT MIGRANTS BY RESIDENTIAL AREAS (%)

	KENNY HILL	BUNGSAR	KAMPUNG BAHRU	SUNGAI BESI	LOKE YEW	CHOW KIT
Chinese	10.0	37.5	0.0	100.0	60.0	85.7
Malays	20.0	8.9	100.0	0.0	28.0	11.9
Indian	0.0	44.7	0.0	0.0	12.0	0.0
Others	70.0	8.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.4
100% =	21	56	28	14	25	42

These evidences support the simple model as set out in Figure 1 whereby the nature of the migration stream is quite predictable depending on the ethnic characteristics or the economic status of the destination areas. Among the lower-status areas, movers into the areas tended to be ethnically distinct but they become more ethnically mixed with increasing socio-economic scale in the destination areas.

## CONCLUSION

It appears that the pattern of residential mobility in Kuala Lumpur may be discussed within the framework of a stable socio-economic and ethnic fabric. The confirmation of the operation of the model suggested means that the daily residential changes would tend to perpetuate existing ethnic and socio-economic structures rather than to disintegrate them. This implies that any attempt to eradicate this trend requires a greater awareness and understanding of the persistence of this operation. Perhaps a planned quota basis in residential areas or deliberate policies in the resettlement of the lower-income groups may overcome this problem. However, even conscious urban renewal efforts may lead to increased segregation as shown, for instance, in Freeman and Sunshine's (1976) study in Syracuse (New York) where urban renewal efforts to resettle those in sub-standard housing tended to lead to the increased segregation of blacks and whites in the long run. It appears, therefore, that in attempting to restructure urban society in Malaysia, the authorities need to be aware of this problem and to encourage more attention and research into realms such as attitudes and behaviourism in endeavouring to explain this phenomenon (Lee 1978; Rabushka 1970).

## Footnotes

- 1 This confirms the high degree of residential mobility in Malaysian cities as was noted by Pryor (1975).
- 2 See Lee (1977) for some of the reasons of intra-urban residential mobility.
- 3 The socio-economic classification of the destination areas were based on a composite measurement of socio-economic variables viz. median income, median occupational prestige score, ownership/renter status of dwelling units, median house rental,



- illiteracy, educational level, and possession of owned durable goods. For details, see Lee (1976c).
- 4 An earlier survey in the multi-storeyed flats off Jalan Pekeliling revealed that 50% of the Malays then residing in the flats preferred alternative housing elsewhere (Lee 1973).

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