

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A CRITIQUE AND AN ALTERNATIVE

Introduction

This chapter is divided into four parts. Each of the first two parts reviews one of the important theoretical and topical concerns of this research. The first part presents a brief overview of the macro-level theories of labor migration and a discussion of the drawbacks of these theories. The second part provides an overview of neoclassical economic theories of labor migration and a discussion of the inadequacy of these theories in relation to the Bangladeshi labor migration to Singapore. This study is critical of the neoclassical economic theories of labor migration. The thesis claims that the existing neoclassical economic theories have not adequately appreciated the noneconomic factors in migration motivation. The third part of this chapter develops the theoretical framework. Finally, the fourth part provides an elaboration of the theoretical framework.

Historical / Structural Approaches to Labor Migration

The greater part of the research on international labor migration has dealt with the question of why people migrate. Historical / structural approaches of labor migration describe broad patterns of movement for geographic areas and population aggregates. Historical-structural theorists link migration to the macro-organization of socioeconomic relations, the geographic division of labor, and the political mechanisms of power and domination (see for details, Portes and Walton, 1981; Piore, 1979; Swanson, 1979). The structural school fitted migration to most major historical theorization of underdevelopment, unequal development, dependency theory, center- periphery theory and world-system theory. Analysis focused on either the developmental impact of migration in the national economy, or on global theorization - the historical position of migrants in the international economy. Historical-structural theorists argue that since political power is unequally distributed across nations, the expansion of global capitalism acts to perpetuate inequalities and reinforce a stratified economic order which provokes migration (see for details, Massey et al. 1998; Skeldon 1997; Portes and Walton, 1981; Amankwaa, 1995).

For example, Samir Amin's (1974) work explores the underdevelopment of the West African interior as a consequence of 'structural' economic orientation to metropolitan capital's requirements. Amin (1974:85) begins by asking why capital does not go to labor to establish equilibrium, material inputs permitting, and why the factors of production are poorly distributed at the outset of neoclassical analysis. In Amin's view the coastward migration of Africans to work was an upsetting, nonequilibrating imposition on the indigenous West African economy. Argument is that rather than

experiencing an inexorable progression towards modernization, poor countries in reality are trapped by their disadvantaged position within an unequal geopolitical structure, which perpetuate their poverty and create 'a reserve army of cheap labor'. Labor migration is viewed detrimental for the sending countries. This line of historical-structural thinking became known as dependency theory.

The chief exponent of another line of historical-structural theory was Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1980), who undertook a comprehensive analysis of the global expansion of the capitalist system from the sixteenth century onwards. He sought to reconstruct the historical processes by which unequal political/ economic structures were created and extended throughout the world, and the mechanisms by which non-capitalist or precapitalist regions were incorporated into the global market economy. He classified countries according to the degree of their dependency on the dominant capitalist powers, which he termed 'core' nations. Peripheral nations were the most dependent, whereas 'semi-peripheral' countries were somewhat wealthier. This line of thought eventually became known as 'world systems theory'. In essence, world systems theory argues that the penetration of capitalist economic relations into non-capitalist or pre-capitalist societies creates a mobile population that is prone to migrate (Simmons 1989; Portes and Walton, 1981).

Another conceptual framework that applies the general social system theory to the phenomenon of international migration starts with the fundamental relation between power and prestige in a society. In essence, international migration constitutes an 'interaction between societal systems geared to transfer tensions and thus balancing power and prestige' (Hoffmann-Nowotny, 1983). In this conceptual universe 'prestige'

legitimizes 'power'. In any society there exists some sort of consensus about the value attributed to material and immaterial goods such as money, education, and merit. Power and prestige in a social system are determined by the position and by the status attributed to the positions. Structural tensions arise from inequalities and status inconsistencies in the emigration country. These structural tensions may generate anomic tendencies, an imbalance between power and status. Action directed to resolve these tensions may take forms such as social mobility, giving up the social position held, or emigration to a country where status aspirations can be attained (see for details, Hoffmann-Nowotny, 1983).

Thus, macro-level theory of international migration focus on the macro-economic processes that produce socio-spatial inequalities and constrain the life chances of individuals as members of specific social classes in particular places. There are two primary problems with structuralist theories of migration. First, these theories lose sight of the migrants as decision-makers who choose how to respond to these structuralist changes (Pedraza, 1991: 307). Second, traditional structuralist theories do not explain the association between economies and peasant relations that may sustain the migrant flow (Radcliffe, 1991: 134). This thesis recognizes that the structural forces have an overriding influence in determining the distribution of economic opportunities in a developing country like Bangladesh and hence in shaping the macro patterns of migration. Village-level researches conducted in the Third World contexts (Hugo, 1981, 1975; Titus, 1978; Cardona and Simmons, 1975; Pertierra, 1992; Kurien, 1994) confirm that structural factors have of considerable importance in causing migration. However, these studies also suggest that if one is to approach an understanding of the migration process, especially the motivational factors, it is important to have an appreciation of the

social and cultural context within which these forces operate and are perceived by the people involved.

Neoclassical Economic Approaches to Labor Migration

The neoclassical economic tradition dominates the migration studies for many years. Massey et al. (1994, 1993) points out that “the intrinsic appeal of neoclassical economic models lies in their articulation of a formal theory of individual behavior and their generation of testable hypotheses”. The neoclassical approach has its roots in models developed originally to explain internal labor migration in the process of economic development (see, Todaro, 1976; Da Vanzo, 1981; Lewis 1954; Ranis and Fei 1961). Neoclassical macroeconomic model assumes that international migration of workers is caused by differences in wage rates between countries and in response to the migration flow the wages in the high wage country will fall, while the wage in low wage country will rise leading to equilibrium in international wage differentials. International migration is caused by geographic differences in the supply of and demand for labor (see for details, Todaro and Maruszko 1987; Massey 1998; Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969; Taylor, 1995).

Associated with this neoclassical macroeconomic model is a neoclassical microeconomic model of individual choice (see for details, Todaro, 1976; Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro and Maruszko, 1987). It views international labor migration as a sum of individual cost-benefit decisions undertaken to maximize expected income through international movement. Contrary to the pure neoclassical theory, migration is determined by expected rather than actual earnings differentials. Neoclassical macro and

micro theories which are mainly concerned with permanent labor migration do not adequately come to address temporary labor migration. Target income theory comes with fresh propositions to explain some of the aspects of temporary labor migration. Target income theory adapts neoclassical theory to explain temporary labor migration. It retains the neoclassical emphasis on push-pull factors and individual cost-benefit analysis, but relaxes the assumption of lifetime income maximization (Berg, 1961; Hill, 1987; Aly Hassan and Shields, 1996).

The theory starts with the assumption that migrants strongly prefer to remain in their communities of origin, but must resort to temporary labor migration because of limited income opportunities at home. Optimally, migrants would prefer to spend as little time as possible away from home and yet accumulate enough savings from migrant earnings to reach a particular savings target. Hence, migrants enter destination markets as target earners. When they have saved or remitted money to fulfill a target, they return to their home community (Berg, 1961; Byerlee, 1974; Lindstrom and Lauster, 2001). However, the recent trends in international labor migration reveal that migrants are hardly inclined to return home after few years of their stay.

The neoclassical economic perspective has led analysts to focus almost exclusively on economic disparities between areas of origin and destination, which are evaluated by rational actors seeking to maximize utility. The inadequacies of the theoretical propositions of the major individual economic theories raised massive concern among migration scholars worldwide.

“Standard economic models have a difficult time explaining a variety of commonplace observations in the post-industrial world, for instances, whereas one less developed country may have a high rate of emigration its similarly underdeveloped neighbor may not; migrants do not always go to places where wages are highest; migration often ceases before wage disparities disappear; migration at times occurs in the absence of wage disparities”. Massey *et al.* (1998)

Other problems that they have pointed out are the inability of models to account for moves that are not economic in nature and the assumption that migrants are homogeneous with respect to taste and risk.

Thomas Straubhaar (1988) criticizes the traditional neoclassical model for not covering some additional motives that influence the migrant’s decision-making processes. He notes that “the traditional neoclassical model concentrates on the real income differences between home and abroad and neglects costs, which are related to migration abroad”. These costs can equalize or exceed the benefits of migration abroad, which is more or less the case of Bangladeshi labor migration to Singapore. Additionally, the initial costs of migrating may exceed the financial limits of an individual who is willing to migrate but is not able to find the money to do so, either on his own or by borrowing. Neoclassical theory necessarily predicts that international migration should decrease when the earnings differential between two countries shrinks or host country is in economic crisis. However, movement of Bangladeshi migrants did not shrink during the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and despite often little and sometimes no financial benefits the flow of migration did not stop over time.

Recently, the ‘new economics of labor migration’ generated fresh hypotheses and assumptions to complement the neoclassical economic approach (See for details, Stark 1991; Stark and Levhari, 1982). In contrast to neoclassical economic theory, the new economics of migration focuses on the family, rather than the individual, as the relevant decision-making unit and it posits that migration is a response to income risk and to failures in a variety of markets (insurance, future, credit, and capital markets), which together constrain local income opportunities and inhibit risk-spreading. The new economic model recognizes that in many settings, particularly in the developing world, markets for capital, futures and insurance may be absent, imperfect, or inaccessible. In order to self-insure against risks to income, production, and property, or to gain access to scarce investment capital, families send one or more workers to foreign labor markets. International migration is seen as a strategy for risk-minimization and capital accumulation.

The ‘new economics of migration’ integrates migration decision-making with migrants’ remittance behavior and families’ remittance use- “aspects of migration that hitherto have been treated separately in the migration literature” (see for detail, Massey et al 1993). Integration of migration motivation with remittance behavior is an important contribution of this model, although it has been done in the utilitarian fashion. As a result, the model can not explain the situation when we see that remittances do not lead to productive investment. This thesis argues that if the desire to overcome local constraints on production is the driving force behind migration, then the outcome of migration (remittances) should reflect this fact (that is remittances should be used mostly in productive areas). The empirical findings hardly comply with this theoretical proposition (see, Gregory and Perez, 1985; Gitmez, 1991; Habib, 1985; Islam, 1991;

Stahl and Habib, 1991; Straubhaar, 1988, Adepoju, 1991; Thahane, 1991; Papademetriou and Emke-Poulopoulos, 1991; Burki, 1991; Pessar, 1991; Papademetriou, 1991).

While the hypotheses derived from the new economics of migration adduce an insight into the complexities of labor migration, they are considerably behind in explaining many of the features of Bangladeshi temporary labor migration to Singapore. For instance, the theorists of new economics do not offer any convincing argument for the rising financial cost of labor migration that often exceeds the financial benefits from overseas employment. It has been found that potential migrants sell or mortgage cultivable land and borrow a large amount of money from traditional moneylenders putting the families left behind under severe risk. Although theorists of the new economics conceive labor migration as a risk-minimizing strategy, in reality, migrants commence their overseas journeys shouldering a high risk of losing their last economic strongholds at home.

Thus, the available micro level studies have underlined only economic motives. It is observed that regardless of the risky migration procedures, huge financial cost, hazardous working conditions, and low economic return, a section of the Bangladeshi rural society is desperate to migrate overseas. In this desperation, loans are taken which can only be repaid at great effort, land is sold, information on the destination end is ignored and goals are risked. I am not denying the existence of sheer poverty in rural Bangladesh but to point out that the sheer poverty alone cannot convincingly account for the two hundred thousand Taka migration venture (seven thousand Singapore dollars). To suggest the worsening economic deprivation leads automatically to increased migration and international migration is a response to the international wage differentials

is overtly simplistic. It overlooks (a) the role of the group (family or *Bari*) and (b) the role of socio-cultural factors. Econometric models assume that migration is rational behavior, that is, the potential migrant makes a conscious decision to migrate or not to migrate through a process by which perceived economic consequences are weighted and evaluated. However, rational action is not necessarily economic; it can be noneconomic as well.

Towards an Integrative Theoretical Framework

Rationality and Migration

While macro sociological perspectives - voluntarist ([meso-level] push-pull model) and structuralist - have contributed immensely to the understanding of broad patterns of labor migration, there is a paucity of micro sociological framework for migration studies. The sociological model of rational choice theory can contribute to this dearth in scholarship. Economic rational choice theory see rational behavior as *ipso facto* rational choice in utilitarian terms, as economic rationality or instrumentally rational action. This is done by subsuming all the ends, reasons and motives of action to egoistic ones – that is, the pursuit of self-interest. This approach to rational choice which is grounded on the neoclassical economic model of rationality and, so far, is largely used in migration studies is criticized. My argument is that we need to go ‘beyond the [utilitarian] theory of rational choice to a broader notion of rationality.

Classical sociologists such as Max Weber rejected a narrow meaning of rationality and considered non-economic factors in social analysis. Weber's differentiation between the two basic types of rational action is of great importance. The first is *means-ends rationality*, or action that is 'determined by expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings, these expectations are used as 'conditions' or 'means' for the attainment of the actor's own rationally pursued and calculated ends" (Weber, 1921/1968:24). The second is *value rationality* or action that is 'determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently of its prospects for success" (Weber, 1921/ 1968: 24-25). Examples of pure value-rational orientation would be the actions of persons who, regardless of possible cost to themselves, act to put into practice their convictions of what seems to them to be required by duty, honor, personal loyalty, or the importance of some 'cause' no matter in what it consists. Value-rational action always involves 'commands' or 'demands' which, in the actor's opinion, are binding on him (Weber, 1968: 25).

Action is instrumentally rational when the end, the means, and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighted. This involves rational consideration of alternative means to the end, of the relations of the end to the secondary consequences, and finally of the relative importance of different possible ends. Choice between alternative and conflicting ends and results may well be determined in a value-rational manner. In that case, action is instrumentally rational only in respect to the choice of means. Instrumentally rational social action aimed at attaining the actor's 'rationally pursued and calculated ends', above all material interests, is similar to utilitarian rational choice. However, this is not the case of value-rational action, for it

involves the pursuit of ideal interests, for example social prestige, for their own sake, regardless of its prospects of success as measured in utility or gain. As such, this action mode cannot be reduced to the instrumental-utilitarian or treated as non-rational/irrational (Weber, 1968: 23-26). This exposes the fault of the economic rational choice theory.

Sociological theory postulates a 'broad model' of rational choice (Olberg 1995). The main premise of this model is that rational choice can be defined not only in utilitarian terms but also in non-utilitarian ones, in micro- (individual) as well as in macro – (structural) terms (for details see, Zafirovski, 1999: 47-107; Coleman, 1986; 1990; Coleman and Fararo, 1992; Hechter and Kanazawa, 1997). Thus, the model possesses pertinent multivariate and micro-macro properties. As such, the model represents a corrective to narrow utilitarian models of rational choice. In particular, this multivariate model rectifies or relaxes the single-factor assumption of utilitarian causation found in the current rational choice theory (Olberg, 1995). The problem with such bivariate models of rational choice is that, given the actual multiplicity of explanatory variables in social action, they are unidimensional. By including solely economic variables, they have, according to Mueller (1979:155), "implicitly ruled out non-economic variables as explanatory factors".

The basic assumption in economic rational choice model is that actors are rational utility maximizers in their economic as well as social behavior. Brooks and Manza (1997: 939) argue that "the fallacy of utilitarian mono-causality and reductionism plagues these models; that are ill-equipped for addressing 'multivariate research questions' and thus with dubious theoretical-methodological adequacy". A broader

model of rational choice constitutes an alternative to such methodologically and theoretically untenable models (Zafirovski, 1999). This model incorporates economic and non-economic variables. This multivariate model differs from a bivariate model of rational choice, which claims to tell the whole story of human behavior by relegating all non-utilitarian variables into the error term (for details see, Zafirovski, 1999). Within the multivariate model, utilitarian rational choice is just one side of the story.

Zafirovski provides some principal differences between conventional rational choice theory and broader rational choice theory. The former assumes that (rational) choice is or should be only a narrow utilitarian choice, namely utility, profit or wealth maximization. The latter argues that choice can also be a non-utilitarian choice, the pursuit of objective functions or goals, such as power, prestige, or justice. A broader rational choice theory posits that the second type of rational choice is not reducible to the first, rejecting thus the typical reductionism of narrow rational choice theory. Since rational choice can involve not just purely utilitarian ends, such as utility, profit or wealth, but also the social, social action is rational if “it aims not only at economic goals but also at sociability, approval, status, and power” (Granovetter, 1985: 509-10). This makes broader rational choice theory more powerful to explain the motivation for different types of social behavior including migration behavior.

Can social status be an end in itself? Some studies even in economics indicate that individuals can pursue wealth ‘not just for its utility in consumption’ (or production), but for the ‘resulting social status’ (Bakshi and Chen, 1996: 134-5). This is evidenced by the tendency for rational economic actors not to achieve status in order to optimize utility or profit, as assumed by the utilitarian rational choice model, but also to resort to, because

of status considerations, 'signaling wealth through conspicuous consumption' (Bagwell and Bernheim, 1996: 350). This supports the crux of the argument that motivation for migration to a high-wage country may not be necessarily an [utilitarian] economic rationality; it can be a means to an ultimate end, which might be some noneconomic things like status and power.

To explain the diverse motivating forces, and the complex transformations that emerge in labor migration, several researchers have already emphasized, though not sufficiently, the role of noneconomic factors in migration occurrences. For example, Josef Gugler (1969) in his study in Sub-Saharan Africa showed how noneconomic factors along with economic factor are shaping currents of migration in that region. Kingsley Davis (1963) in his theory of change and response in modern demographic history illustrated how noneconomic factors, particularly, social prestige influences migratory behavior. Although Davis's general thesis has been confirmed only with regard to the impact of migration on demographic transition (see for details, Friedlander 1969), its wider application to migration, including decisions to move appears warranted.

Peter Uhlenberg (1973) examines the experiences of three groupings in the USA: Negro movement from the South during 1860 to 1920; Japanese-American migration from internment camps during World War II; and exodus from Southern Appalachia between 1930 and 1960. Each of these three cases illustrates both the importance of noneconomic variables in determining migration. He suggests using a framework which examines motivation for and constraints upon migration for individuals as a starting point in developing migration theory. Based upon the three cases studied in this paper, as well as many other studies, Uhlenberg encourages future migration research to avoid an

overemphasis upon economic factors and to reject the argument that no generalization is possible.

Michael J. Piore (1979) in his celebrated work “Birds of Passage” stresses noneconomic factors, particularly, social status as a possible cause of labor migration. He draws a correlation between migration and mobility, and thereby suggests that migration is not just a ‘step out’, but also a ‘step up’. In his sense, a migrant is, by definition, also an agent involved in the broader process of cultural transformation, and not just in pursuit of economic rewards. Graeme J. Hugo’s (1981, 1975, 1978, and 1979) works show how the social and cultural elements predominantly influence migration decision making in the Third World societies. His data come mainly from community-level research in Indonesia. Jobes, Stinner and Wardwell (1991) compiled case studies of migrations which are largely noneconomic in origin. For example, the partition between India and Pakistan led to mass migration on extremely short notice. They report that religious beliefs determined the nation of choice of emigrants (Jobes, 2000: 74). Goldring (1999) shows how immigrants seek power and status in transnational social space.

Raul Pertierra’s (1992, 1995) work evidences the noneconomic orientation of migration. Pertierra (1992) from the community studies in Ilocos Philippines reports that the purely economic element cannot be clearly separated from other equally important but non-economic elements. He explores the horizons of meaning present in the communities concerned, which result in the viability and desirability of migration. This includes practical structures governing choices as well as normative expectations. He notes that cultural contexts help to define the notion of a good life and migration is seen

as one attempt to attain it. Pertierra (1995) also informs us the noneconomic orientation of migration. Ai-Hsuan –Sandra Ma (1998) discusses the cultural dimension of the decision-making process in migration. He analyzes how individuals perceive and incorporate different cultural factors in their decision-making processes based on the cultural implications of such factors. Findings show that several cultural factors – e.g. the contingency of social status on and the cultural meanings of education, interpersonal connections in the home country, definition of family, cultural implications of family responsibility, and forms of aid provided to the family – have substantial effects on decisions to migrate or return home.

It is clear from the preceding discussion that econometric theories must move beyond the analysis of simple economic disparities between countries. These economic models have largely been “deterministic and place heavy stress on the fundamental economic causes of movement with social and cultural influences being regarded as producing some peripheral ‘noises’ in the model” (Hugo, 1981:189). The existing individual theories are largely inconsiderate to the socio-cultural factors of labor migration or assumed that motivation for migration is solely economic. Migration researchers working at the community and / or individual levels as distinct from those dealing with aggregate (usually secondary) data are acutely aware of how poor a predictor of economic variables are when considered in isolation from social and cultural influences.

Migrant Networks

Patterns of Bangladeshi migration to Singapore indicate that a few selected districts in Bangladesh send the bulk of migrants to Singapore. Macro-level theories of labor migration explain why we find migration from developing countries to developed countries. They do not address the question of differential emigration rates from the same country. Micro-level theories view individuals as well as households as homogeneous decision-making body. The problem with these micro-level theories is that they do not consider the 'social embeddedness' of potential migrants' behavior (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993) and they cannot explain the differential emigration rates between two villages or regions within the same country. Thus, dominant theories of labor migration, which focus on macro-structural imbalance of labor demand and supply or motivations of potential migrants or households, are insufficient in the way that they cannot explain why so many people migrate out of so few places, economic conditions being equal (Faist, 2000).

In order to explain variability in the composition of migrant flows, migration theory now conceptualizes the migration decision at a contextualized moment (Massey et al. 1987). It is from this line of research inquiry that the concept of migrant networks has emerged as a critical idea for understanding the decision to move (Arango, 2000). Migrant networks are commonly understood as recurrent sets of interpersonal ties that bind migrants, return migrants, and non-migrants together within a web of reciprocal obligations that can be drawn to facilitate entry, adjustment and employment at points of destination (Massey, 1998; Choldin, 1973; Boyd, 1989; Portes, 1995). A social connection to someone with migrant experience at a particular destination represents an

important resource that can be used to facilitate movement and movement of one person within a network transforms the relationship into a valuable connection that can be used by anybody within the network to facilitate migration (Faist, 2000).

Boyd (1989) argues that the recognition of social relationships and its role in international migration adds an important theoretical emphasis, refocused the act of migration away from either the ‘oversocialized’ deterministic view of social structure or the ‘undersocialized’ perspective of atomized rational actors. Both micro- and macro-level analyses disregard the relational or meso nature of migration decision-making and dynamics (Faist, 1997). Networks constitute an intermediate, relational level that stands between the micro level of individual decision-making and the macro level of structural determinants (Faist, 2000), thus contributing to bridge a gap that is one of the major limitations in migration thinking. Although there are several models that can be employed to explain how social networks operate, researchers often refers to social capital model which assumes that actors migrate to maximize returns on their investments in human capital and, in doing so, draw upon the social capital embedded in their interpersonal networks (Faist, 2000; Portes, 1995).

Similar to some economic models of migration, the social capital theorists assume that individuals will instrumentally use their networks as a means of gaining the highest returns on their investment in human capital. This view was probably first suggested by Douglas Massey (Massey et al. 1987) and later convincingly explained by Thomas Faist (1997; 2000), drawing on social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988, Bourdieu and Coleman, 1991; Putnam, 1993; 1995; Portes, 1998). Migrant networks increase the propensity of an individual to migrate to a specific destination

through three mechanisms: demonstrating feasibility, reducing the expected costs and risk; and increasing the expected benefits (Faist, 2000). This strategy works on the assumption that migrants and non-migrants are linked through networks of obligation and shared understandings of kinship and friendship. Thus, migrant networks, located in reciprocal relations and holding symbolic value, can convincingly explain why migration surges out of a few geographical locations.

Migration networks have a multiplier effect, which is implicit in the formerly fashionable expression 'chain migration' (MacDonald and MacDonald, 1974). Many migrants move because others with whom they are connected migrated before. In other words, as migration experiences multiply, it is perceived that marginal risks decrease and the marginal benefits increase thereby facilitating moves by individuals who would have been unlikely to take migration risks at earlier points in time (Massey et. al. 1987). However, existing network analysis mainly focuses on the form and pattern of ties and it is most plausible when explaining the direction of migration and aspects of the dynamics of migration flows (Faist, 2000). Recently, Thomas Faist (2000) has suggested that the content of ties, for example, obligations, reciprocity, and solidarity are also tremendously important, when one goes to examine the evolution of migrant networks and the mechanism that makes migration as a self-feeding process.

Obligations include mutual obligations and expectations of actors. Three elements are crucial for expectations and obligations to work in the migrant networks: 'the degree of trust in the other actors, the actual number of obligations, and the kind of services rendered in the past' (Coleman, 1990:360). Reciprocity as a social norm implies 'actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others and that cease when these

expected reactions are not forthcoming' (Blau, 1974:6). Reciprocity works in migration when an individual receives assistance from the other in the migration process requires some return. Finally, solidarity is based on interpersonal and imagined ties. Solidarity can be either focused, directed towards a narrow kin group, or it can extend to more diffuse forms. Diffuse solidarity often facilitates mass migration (Faist, 2000). These contents of ties inherent in migrant networks are vital to explain the dynamics of Bangladeshi labor migration.

The “Four R’s” to the Impact Analysis

A brief review of migration literature unfolds two fundamental views on migration-development relationship: the first is commonly identified with the neoclassical theory and the second is recognized as belonging to the structural theory. The neoclassical tradition focuses on equilibrium models that treat migration as a voluntary and economic rational choice model by individuals who seek to enhance their economic position by responding to higher wages offered away from home. Their mobility ensures their optimal distribution and hence their efficient allocation. Such mobility serves to restore the balance between unequally distributed resources across space in a manner that presumably benefits both destination and sending places (through remittances), and the migrants themselves. The Structural tradition of migration shifts the focus from individual actions to national and international political and economic forces, from the study of micro-level to macro-social processes. The structural school views migration as a component of the process of capital accumulation, generated thereof and instrumental to the strengthening of developed economics to the detriment of developing

economics. The long-term result of migration is not a restored equilibrium between uneven economics, but the reaffirmation of dependence of ‘periphery’ societies on ‘core’ societies (Portes and Walton, 1981).

The empirical analysis of the effects of emigration has produced abundant literature. A cursory overview of relevant migration literature reveals various models of impact analysis. Effects of emigration can be pursued at different levels. Aderanti Adepoju (1991:59) argues that the economic effects of emigration should be analyzed at three levels: the migrant’s, the migrant’s family/families / community and the migrant’s country. These distinctions have more than academic value since what may prove to be advantageous to a national aggregate may prove to be detrimental to an individual or family or vice-versa. Tapinos (1982) suggests that the effects of emigration on labor-exporting countries can be analyzed at three levels: the impact of the departure of workers on employment, production and wages; the transfer of funds and its effects on the living standard of family members, the resultant income distribution, and productive accumulation and growth; and finally the effects of return migration on the stock of human capital (cited from Adepoju 1991: 53).

Demetrios G. Papademetriou, and Philip L. Martin (1991) proposes a model for the study of effects of labor emigration in the name of “three R’s” of labor migration and the migration-development link is often understood to revolve around this “three R’s” of recruitment, remittances and return. They opine that these ‘three R’s occur at different levels. Firstly, *recruitment* affects those who emigrate, thus makes an impact on employment and production. Secondly, *remittance* affects the living standards of migrant families and thus the growth of communities and regions. Finally, *returning* migrants

affect the quantity and quality of the work force. However, one important variable is missing in these models: the resources wherefrom prospective migrants arrange their financial cost of migration. This is important when, in the Bangladeshi context, migrant workers bank on families and other traditional sources for raising the sunk cost of migration, which entails a heavy impact on the subsistence economy of workers' families and thus, influences the nature and extent of developmental effects at micro level. Along with “three R's” of recruitment, remittances, and return, I propose another ‘R’, that is, the ‘resources’ that migrants use to raise funds needed for migration.

An Elaboration of the Theoretical Framework

Figure 2.1 presents the theoretical framework of this thesis. The figure links family-based micro-level motivation for migration and macro-level causes and constraints, and by means of a causal figure, outlines how these elements are related to each other (for the sake of simplicity, however, many potential feedback linkages are omitted from the figure). Although I have divided the figure into two parts - factors affecting migration motivation and factors affecting migration occurrence – to capture the whole gamut of Bangladeshi migration to Singapore, the thesis sees migration motivation and migration occurrence as an integral part of the whole migration process. In the following discussions, I provide a brief description of each of the major components of the model.

Broadly, figure first illustrates the factors that affect migration motivation. It illustrates how, on the one hand, various socio-cultural elements contribute to the

perception of international migration as a highly valued tool for ‘status claims’¹ and, on the other hand, inadequate economic resources threaten social status of the family. The figure shows that inadequate economic resources squeeze family’s income and thus it threatens viability of the social position of family. However, this is not an unusual case in many developing countries where family’s social position is under pressure from the income squeeze. The thesis does not predict that ‘status threat’ automatically leads to the decision to migrate. The thesis shows that motivation for migration is augmented by the socio-cultural forces that offer a platform to reinforce social status through international migration. If family’s other characteristics are in favor of migration motivation, family will finally be motivated for migration.

Secondly, the figure explains how meso-level factors facilitate migration motivation of family to turn into migration occurrence. Here, the migration industry² in both countries—Singapore and Bangladesh comes to play a vital role to materialize the migration dream. Considering the importance of migrant networks³ and manpower

¹ Having one’s status claim accepted by others confers status honor, which is critically important not only for dignity but also for one’s life chances. Status claims are generally made with statements, behaviors, or symbols that indicate to others one’s position in a status hierarchy (Pellerin and Stearns, 2001). Status claims are contextual in nature.

² Although the term ‘migration industry’ involves a wide range of actors, the thesis looks into two facilitators – migrant network and manpower ‘recruiting agent’. A detailed discussion is given in Chapter Five.

³ Migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin (see Massey et al., 1993).

recruiting agencies⁴, the thesis largely examines the role of these two facilitators in the migration process. Migration process for Singapore first starts with the payment (full or partial) of sunk cost of migration to a broker / local agent to obtain a job contract from Singapore (IPA⁵). Prospective migrants believe in ‘luck’⁶ and it is an inseparable part once he they initiate the migration process. To some extent, migrants see their success and failure in relation to the ‘luck’. Finally, the figure shows the integration of migration motivation, migrant’s remittance behavior and family’s remittance uses.

Family is placed at the center of the decisionmaking unit in the figure although the role of other equally important social units (for example, *Bari*- collection of families) is discussed. In a traditional society, the principle of ‘for the sake of the family’ or ‘all in the family’ mobilizes family members to work towards common interests. A recent development in the literature is the emphasis on family and family strategies as crucial elements in migration decisions (Wood, 1981; Roberts 1997; Hugo, 1998; Harbison, 1981; Gardner, 1995). Using family as the unit of analysis fits in with much anthropological literature (Krokkfors, 1995; Epstein, 1973). Hugo (Hugo, 1998: 143) argues that the expansion of temporary movement in developing countries cannot be

⁴ I have discussed this in Chapter Five

⁵ IPA means ‘In-Principle Approval’. Singapore government first issues this IPA for Bangladeshi migrants to enter to Singapore. Upon arrival in Singapore, they can apply for final work permit.

⁶ By luck, the thesis means a matter of having something good or bad happens that lies outside the horizon of effective foreseeability (Rescher, 1995). The belief in ‘luck’ is not new to them. It is inseparable from everyday life in rural Bangladesh. For example, families depend on luck for their good cultivation, job, marriage, and so on.

explained in terms of conventional classical and neoclassical economic theory, but it is readily understood from the family perspective.

In this emphasis on migrants and their families, macro-level factors have not been abandoned. On the contrary, the thrust has been plainly to study the interplay of socio-cultural structure, family strategies, and migration decision-making. The family perspective on migration provides a theoretical framework to explain human migration as one strategy for family sustenance. Literature has identified this strategy is linked to migration along four dimensions: accessibility to land and off-farm (Wood 1981), risk diversification (Stark, 1984, 1991, Stark and Bloom, 1985), relative deprivation and social stratification (Stark, 1991), and social networks (see, MacDonald and Macdonald, 1974; Massey et al. 1987; Mines, 1984; Taylor, 1986). This thesis particularly focuses on two major dimensions: relative status (social stratification) and social networks.

Individual and family's demographic and socio-cultural characteristics are differentiating factors in migration behavior. As shown in the figure, this broad category includes age, sex, education, occupation, family's socio-political status, migration experience or knowledge about migration, kinship ties, and social and economic capital of family. These variables: some with higher and some with lower propensities to move, which help to explain why certain areas have higher migration rates than other areas. The socio-cultural elements come to influence families at different levels. For example, 'perception of international migration' and 'village norms and values' related to migration induce motivation for migration largely at the community level, while 'relative status' and 'notion of work' influence motivation for migration predominantly at the *Bari* level.

From the receiving country perspective, government of Singapore promotes a favorable temporary migration environment through a well-formulated recruitment policy. This recruitment policy lays down various rules and regulations for employing foreign workers in Singapore. The government of Bangladesh encourages the export of manpower. Bangladesh has favorable emigration policy that encourages male citizens to emigrate abroad for employment. While both governments create favorable environments for manpower movement, the actually work is carried out by some meso-level factors like migrant networks and recruiting agencies in both countries. The role of recruiting agents, brokers, and migrant networks is vital: without them, few migrants would have the information or contacts needed for successful migration to Singapore.

This thesis links migration decision-making with migrants' remittance behavior and families' remittance use. Since migration is a response to the stratus threat, migrants will keep contact with the family left behind by sending remittances and investing mostly to the areas viable to claim and retain family position in the own community. This goes against the established hypothesis of the 'new economics of labor migration', which put great emphasis on economically productive use of remittances. The arguments in this thesis are sustained by using data from two villages in Bangladesh and migrant workers' surveys in Singapore.

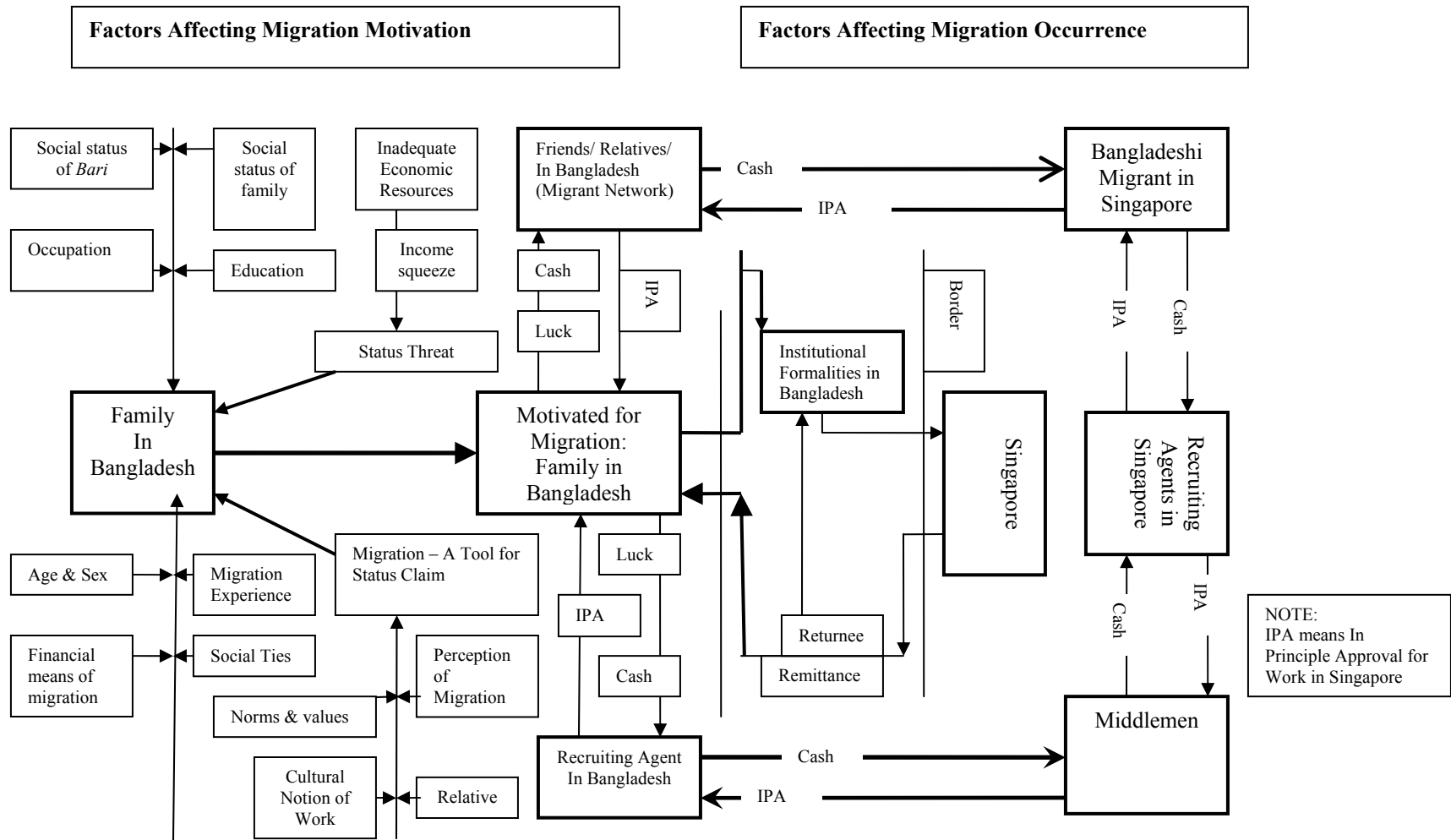


Figure 2.1 Conceptualizing Bangladeshi Labor Migration to Singapore