



Social polarisation and migration to Gauteng

The manufacturing sector, once a major source of urban employment and consisting of a large percentage of skilled and semi-skilled, middle-income jobs, has declined, while the service sector, predominantly comprising either high-skill, high-pay or low-skill, low-pay jobs, has grown. *Jacqueline Borel-Saladin* argues that the decline of manufacturing and the growth of the service sector does not result in a more polarised occupational structure.

The increasing professionalisation of native and internal migrant African men and women and white women has significantly changed the distribution of high-skill occupations.

Growing numbers of low-wage, low-skill service sector jobs are said to attract poorly educated, unskilled immigrants from rural areas and developing countries. The contention is that these migrants become trapped in low-skill, low-wage service sector jobs, thereby exacerbating social polarisation.

An alternative argument is that there is a trend towards professional occupational structures, with a general upgrading of skills among the employed workforce and a growth in non-manual clerical, sales, technical, professional and managerial jobs. Consequently, unskilled migrants experience a skills mismatch and are likely to be unemployed rather than employed in low-skilled jobs.

This study used household survey and population census results for Gauteng, South Africa, from 1980 to 2007 to explore the relationship between migrants and social polarisation. The results showed that migrants had a very similar occupation and education profile to natives, and that their presence did not cause social polarisation but instead supported growing professionalisation instead. Here, a migrant to Gauteng is defined as anyone born outside of the province, while a native is someone born in Gauteng.

Migrants and polarisation

Most authors agree that global cities are points of concentration for the producer services vital to managing global financial systems and the high-skill, high-pay workers who perform these tasks. If this was the only phenomenon in question, there would likely be an indisputable trend towards professionalisation and no debate about increasing polarisation. The theory of social polarisation is indeed an appealing one, however some scholars question the evidence in support of it.

Many polarisation theorists also contend that while the native residents of the city fill the growing numbers of high-skill, high-wage service sector jobs, unskilled immigrants to the city fill the concomitantly increasing number of low-wage

service jobs. They argue that migrants are disproportionately concentrated in low-wage service sector jobs. Yet very few scholars provide any evidence at all for these types of claims and where evidence is presented, it often does not support the social polarisation hypothesis and the role of migrants therein.

Migrants to Gauteng had a very similar occupational and educational distribution to native residents.

The purpose of this research was to critically assess the social polarisation hypothesis using data for Gauteng. The evidence did not support the social polarisation hypothesis, namely that changes in sectoral structure have led to equal increases in high- and low-skill work, at the expense of skilled middle-income, manual employment. The dominant pattern was one of increasing numbers of high-skill, high-pay jobs. While the numbers of low-skill workers did increase in Gauteng between 1980 and 2010, the absolute growth in the numbers of higher-skilled, higher-paid managerial, professional, associate professional and technical workers was two-and-a-half times greater than that among low-skill workers. This led to a marked skewing of the occupational distribution towards high-skill work.

The dominant pattern was one of increasing numbers of high-skill, high-pay jobs.

I also found that migrants to Gauteng had a very similar occupational and educational distribution to native residents. They were well represented in high-skill, high-pay and semi-skilled, middle-income work and not overwhelmingly uneducated and marginalised in low-skill service sector work. Despite migrants having a similar occupational distribution to natives overall, individual immigrant communities had varied occupational outcomes.

Briefly, although historically the vast majority of high-skill jobs were held by white men, and despite the greatest trend towards professionalisation occurring among coloureds and Indians, it was in fact the increasing professionalisation of native and internal migrant African men and women and white women that significantly changed the distribution of high-skill occupations and contributed most in absolute terms towards increasing professionalisation in Gauteng between 1980 and 2007.

Conclusion

Contrary to what many polarisation theorists argue, it does not appear that uneducated, unskilled immigrants are being attracted in large numbers to work in a burgeoning low-

wage service sector in Gauteng. Instead, the distribution of occupations among migrants is as diverse as among natives and they are not confined to low-skill work. The data for Gauteng show that migrants have similar occupational distributions to natives, and that all migrants have contributed significantly in absolute terms to the growth of managerial, professional, associate professional and technical occupations and therefore, the trend towards increasing professionalisation. The presence of migrants in this case could be argued to be more relevant to the process of the skewing of the occupation distribution towards increasing professionalisation than glaring polarisation.

There are simply not enough low-skill, low-wage jobs for the large unskilled labour force.

As South Africa is a country with large numbers of unskilled adults, it would not be unreasonable to expect that the growth in high-skill occupations would be accompanied by a concomitant growth in low-skill work. Why are the unemployed not taking up low-skill, low-wage jobs? There are simply not enough low-skill, low-wage jobs for the large unskilled labour force. This perhaps underscores a fundamental difference between developed countries and developing countries: vastly different levels of wealth. Arguably, even though there are increasing numbers of high-skill, high-pay workers, the percentage of the total population they form, and the amount of money they earn, is not enough to generate the demand for the low-skill, low-pay service sector jobs necessary to create employment for the majority of unskilled workers. There has simply not been sufficient economic growth and job creation in comparison to labour force growth in South Africa. This has also resulted in growing professionalisation accompanied by increasing unemployment and a large outsider surplus population.

This highlights two points: first, that professionalisation is not a process that occurs only in Western, developed economies, and second, that professionalisation can be accompanied by unemployment under quite different circumstances to those proposed by other authors (i.e. adequate welfare benefits making it unnecessary for workers to hold low-wage jobs and choose unemployment instead). Thus, growing professionalisation is accompanied by growing unemployment and a large outsider surplus population in Gauteng. ■

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The research was supported by the African Centre for Cities and the National Research Foundation (NRF). Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.