

Is There a Rural Bliss? A Sociological Perspective in Farming Community

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Abstract. In the western rural sector today physical differences between this sector and urban sector are no more exist due to the huge modernization the rural sector went through. Comparison between these two sectors in the literature today is concentrating mostly on socio-economic differences. Thus; this paper is designed to figure out wither such comparison could be applied to a developing country which enjoyed a reasonable degree of modernization. This study conduct in Unizah City of the Qassim region of Saudi Arabia. A random sample of 200 respondents was chosen for the study. Only 147 questionnaires were used in the analysis. The findings supported the western literature that urban people have positive image towards rurality. Unizah's people suffered also from the loss of the community sense that used to characterize the bast. The study shows that old people and those who grew up in farming families tend to pine for the old life than the other. While education and occupation differences between respondents have no effect.

Introduction

The gap between rural and urban sector still exist and will stay since the rural areas in the developing countries come in last in interest of these countries' governments. Therefore, the rural-urban continuum and the differences between the people of these two sectors that rural sociologist discussed at the early decades of this century still there. In the other hand, such differences in the developed countries disappear many years ago. In some cases, rural areas in these countries not only equal but surpass the more urbanized areas with respect to level of living and styles of life [1]. Moreover, the absence of such differences in these developed countries not only through materialistic division or physical areas but also through social values as Rogers *et al.* [2, p.11] indicated that very clearly particularly in the United States which moves toward becoming a more homogeneous society. Accordingly, the choice of educated people in the developing countries to work in rural areas don not cross their minds. The reason behind that as

indicated by Abasiokong [3, pp.1-11] due to the differences that exist between these two sectors not only in income but also people in rural areas are isolated and dispersed. As a result, conventional public services such as education, health care, recreation facilities and sewerage systems are difficult and expensive to provide. Thus; most governments of these countries used force to make people work in these areas and some of them used some kind of national slogans to attract the young educated people like new graduate medical physicians, teachers and college of agriculture graduates to work in such places. Many studies took about the backwardness of rural areas compare to urban areas in many parts of the world [1,4, pp.13-40; 5, pp.103-139; 6, pp.13-18; 7, pp.1-20; 8, pp.7-12; 9, pp.1-9; 10, pp.40-59; 11, pp.448-480].

In 1994, Al-Humaidi [12] found in a study conducted in Qassim region in Saudi Arabia among 421 villagers living in 38 villages in this area that (76.5%) of them indicated the absence of migration from their villages. Moreover, (63.9%) of them pointed out very clearly that there were many people returning to their villages. Al-Humaidi concludes:

“Because those people who lived outside the village and enjoyed many services, not all of them will sacrifice and ignore such services for the sake of wanting to return to the village. Without the availability of some good services, I believe such people will not think of returning to the village”[12, p. 407].

From this perspective, will the rural areas in Saudi Arabia and in Qassim region in particular be a bliss area for living?. This is the main and the only objective of the study. Therefore, the study aims to know how urban people view rural areas. This objective will be achieved through knowing how the Unizah people -second largest city in the Qassim area with population of 91,106 in 1992 [13, p.7]- view rural areas.

Review of Literature

Among Western sociologists today, the debate concerning “community” and the differences between rural and urban communities are touched by them through social differences between these sectors. Their aim is to look for social differences between people who live in rural areas and those who live in urban areas. Therefore, differences between these two sectors in the availability of services and amenities are no longer discussed in these developed countries. A study done in a small village called Zenda by Stoneall [14, pp.26-43] in the state of Wisconsin in the United States of America showed that this village had its sewage system and radio station at the beginning of this century.

A content analysis for *Rural Sociology*, a scientific journal for the last decade (1986-1995) concerning this issue was done and showed that a total of 17 articles were written on the differences between rural and urban areas. Fifteen of these articles represent studies applied in the United States and some European countries, while the other two have been applied in Third World country [15]. All these articles discussed

issues not related to the environmental (physical) differences between these two sectors, but mostly discussed economical, familial and social change issues. These studies mostly discussed the issue of “lost sense of community” in the developed countries. Therefore; there was a belief that the shift to the city had destroyed men’s traditional sense of community the “Good Olde Days” and that such social harmony could only be found in the past or in the village, Slattery [16, p.246]. As indicated earlier environmental differences between these two sectors no longer exist. On the other hand, such differences are considered the most important factor behind migration to urban areas in the developing countries. Motives behind this migration are the dissatisfaction among these people in their areas and the lack of many opportunities, which can fulfill their needs [17, pp.129-141].

What is Rural Community?

How exactly can we describe rural community?. This question was raised many years ago when sociologists started to differentiate between urban and rural communities. Thus; if a group of people interacts in a specific place and time, could this mean we have community here. But is this the ultimate definition of the term community?. This term or concept of community has been the interest of sociologists for more than two hundred years, and still in sociological terms a satisfactory definition of it seems as far away as ever. The reason behind that is not due to the lack of interest, but it is to the different meaning of this term, which has been studied by social scholars and thinkers since the beginning of the nineteenth century, and most of these definitions of community reflect not so much what community is but what it should be [18, pp.7-12; 19, p.21]. Effrat [20, pp.1-32] describes the study of community as being like a jello, and says the concept does not hold together, but falls apart with attempts to grasp it. Therefore, a single definition of community is inadequate.

If there is a founding father of the theory of community, he will be perhaps Ferdinand Tonnies through his book *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, which, translated as Community and Society, was first published in 1887. In *Gemeinschaft* (community) human relationships are intimate, enduring and based on a clear understanding of where each person stands in society [21, pp.33-34]. He adds that culture of this community is relatively homogeneous, everyone is known and can be placed in the social structure of the community. Beside that cleavages or clashes among its members are little, and life is warmer, more homely and affectionate.

Opposite to the concept of community was *Gesellschaft* (translated as society or association) which refers to things that community is not. *Gesellschaft* lacks cohesion, human beings are relatively isolated and friction and strife occurs frequently. Tonnies's division of community could easily be applied on the community dichotomy, as adopted by Konig [22, p.180-195] and said the word *Gemeinschaft* in general should only be used to refer to local community (*Gemeinde*) which owns something in common, and this (*Gemeinde*) or local community is known as the rural community.

Tonnies's dichotomy has been criticized by Elias [23, pp.x-xli] who states that community in Tonnies was the symbol of a past and a better age, while association is a symbol of disturbing present. He attributes that to Tonnies's work published late in the nineteenth century at a time of transition during the dominant social belief of rising middle class of Europe in better future to come. But we can disagree with Elias in that, this dichotomy is perfectly applied on communities in developing countries today. Bell [24] echoed that and said in a study applied in Britain that people in his study in the village of Childerely, as did Tonnies, raised the importance of the countryside as a place of family ties, as good for children, as a place for mutual aid in times of trouble. He adds that residents of this village define the social situation of their village as that of *gemeinschaft* in nature, living under stress from forces of a *gesellschaft*. He concludes his argument by saying:

"Throughout the Anglo-American world, the rural-urban continuum remains an important source of legitimation, motivation, understanding, and identity" [24, p. 79].

But how exactly the nature of rurality has been theoretically and empirically defined throughout the world?. An accurate and unique definition for this term which can be applied to all rural communities in the world is unachievable and also undesirable, due to the social, cultural and economical differences for each country. Therefore, the views of sociologists towards the nature of rurality as indicated by Willits *et al.* [25] range from considering it an ecological facet, an occupational dimension, a socio-cultural component or a structure of all these dimensions. Accordingly, rural life tends to be characterized by multiple role relationships among its members, that is each person will be linked to many other people in the community in a variety of different but overlapping ways. Thus, one person may have several relations with another person as a neighbor, as a colleague at work, and as a fellow member in the activities that took place in the community. Rural community is considered small, isolated, made up of people who have little communications with outsiders, homogeneous, the members have a strong sense of group solidarity, non literate, there is no much division of labor, and behavior is traditional, spontaneous and uncritical..

In a recent study by Willits and Luloff [26] concerning how urban people see rural places and people, they pointed out that urban people of Pennsylvania viewed rural areas as friendlier, safer, and less stressful than other areas. They even said that the urban people's suggestion of preserving rural areas and business or industrial development that would urbanize the rural areas was not so popular among urban people. Till today, urban people see rural areas as Tonnies's dichotomy.

The distinction also depends largely on variations in cultural varieties in language and religion and may be greater in some rural areas than in certain large cities. Complex technology is common in certain farming regions and scarce in some urban areas. Culture itself can and obviously does more bilaterally between open country and city, but this does not mean that ruralsim and urbansim are exportable commodities. Because there is

no such thing as urban culture or rural culture, but only different culture contents somewhere on the rural-urban continuum [27].

A quick review for this term in some countries in the world can clarify this ambiguity. In Saudi Arabia, this term had two definitions. In the 1974 census, there was no statistical or administrative definition of what is meant by a rural community?. Reasons for that as indicated by Gamie [28, p.17] were the census dealt only with communities in the form of either principal cities or population aggregates. Each population aggregate is composed of one or more large communities and their dependencies. Also, inhabitants of population aggregates are partly composed of nomads and of sedentary farmers, and in this sense the Saudi rural communities are characteristically peculiar. On the other hand, the 1992 census defined the rural areas by four categories. *The Village*, defined as a place for permanent living and has a known name among people and mostly has population not less than 50 inhabitants. *The Farm*, defined as one building or a group of scattered buildings occupied by the owner of the farm or the farmers (people who work in the farm) and this farm is unconnected with village or city and consist of one farm or many farms. *The Watering Place*, defined as a place having one well or many wells of water which are used by bedouins who may live near these wells or not, and this place does not have any buildings. *The Aggregate Demographic Place*, defined as a place consisting of a group of people not more than 50 persons living together and this place differs from the other three categories [29, p.28].

In addition to that, the economic activity beside the population's density is used to differentiate between the urban and the rural sector in Saudi Arabia. These areas that are characterized by the low population and the people engaged in primary activities, such as farming, animal raising, fishing, and mining are known as rural areas, and excluding that is known urban areas. But the early-published figures of this census showed that the statistical term has been used to define the rural communities and particularly adopted the American model. Thus, places, which have population over 2,500 persons, are defined as urban and the other is rural. Also, France, Portugal, Luxembourg, Germany and Austria used the community size 2,000 to set the limit between rural and urban communities. Ireland has used the figure 1,500. It goes to 5,000 in Belgium. Holland, Greece and India. In Denmark, it goes down to only 250 inhabitants, but again raises to 40,000 inhabitants in Korea. Other societies combined community size with population density for this distinction. In Japan, rural communities are those having a population density less than 4,000 per square kilometer, and , in the meantime, having a community size less than 5,000 inhabitants. Accordingly, Japan considers a community as urban if its population is over 30,000. If its less than 30,000, it has to have a population density over 4,000 per square kilometer in order to be granted the urban status. While England uses population density alone as a criterion to differentiate between rural and urban places. Thus, a community is rural if it is less than eight inhabitants per acre. But in Italy, occupation is used for such distinction. A community is rural if over fifty percent of its population is engaged in agriculture. Last but not least, in Egypt, rural communities

are administratively defined as all communities other than cities, capitals of governorates and also other than capitals of counties [28, p.17].

Research Methods

This study was conducted in Unizah city in the Qassim region, in the northern part of Central area of Saudi Arabia during the period of October to March 1996-1997. Unizah city in nature is farming community due to the farms surrounding the city and it was known in the past as rural area. Due to the development process that Saudi Arabia went through this image about Unizah changed. Farming business is no longer considered the primary job for most of the people, as a matter of fact the majority of people work in the government sector and some in the private sector. People who devoted themselves as full time farmers are seldom in the city.

Two hundred respondents were chosen randomly from Unizah people to fill the questionnaire. The total return was 160 questionnaires, 13 of them were excluded due to the absence of many answers. Thus, 147 questionnaires were used in the analysis. This study was a part from a comprehensive study covering many sociological issues. Before collecting the data the questionnaire was distributed to ten people living in Unizah city to clarify any unclear or misleading questions. After that the questionnaire was reviewed by a Arabic language expert and suggested corrections were made.

A list of 10 five-category Likert-type items asked about how urban people of Unizah view rural areas. The responses of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree were scored so that the higher the score, the more positive the perceptions of rural life.

Statistical analysis

Results of the study were divided into three sections as follow:

Respondents' characteristics

The personal characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. The Table shows that the majority of the respondents (64.6%) are not young. While 97.3% can read and write, with 76.2% of them having high school education and above. Most of the respondents (83.0%) are working in the government, which indicates that Unizah is enjoying an urban life. Less than one tenth of the respondent are working in the private sector or self-employed of the other 13 respondents (8.8%), half of them are full time farmers and the rest are retired with one college student. Concerning the issue of origin, only 37.4% of the respondents raised in farming families compared to 62.6% raised in nonfarming families.

Table 1. Respondents' characteristics

Variable	Frequencies	Percentage
Age: (N=147)		
young (23<36)	52	35.4
middle (36<51)	71	48.3
old (51>)	24	16.3
Education		
illiterate	4	2.7
read and write	4	2.7
primary education	10	6.8
intermediate education	17	11.6
high school education	36	24.5
college education	67	45.6
post-graduate education	9	6.1
Job		83.0
government official		3.8
private sector	122	4.8
self-employee	5	8.8
other	7	
	13	37.4
Raised in farming family		62.6
yes	55	
no	92	

Perception of rurality

Table 2 shows that Unizah's people in general have a positive image towards rurality according to the high percentages of their answers to these items which measure people's perceptions towards this issue. This possessiveness towards some social aspects, varies among these items, which means that the more the items measure issues, urban people yearn for the high percentage the item gets. It was mentioned earlier that in *Gemeinschaft*, human relations are intimate, enduring, clashes among its members are little, and life is warmer, more homely and affectionate. This could be seen very clearly in item numbers 2,3,4,5,8 and 10. Such findings are supported by Willits *et al.* [25] and Willits and Luloff [26] in their studies in Pennsylvania. Therefore, it is safe from these findings to state that Unizah's life has been dramatically changed to urban life in the last few decades, and is no longer considered as farming community.

Respondents' characteristics and perception of rurality

An attempt was made to figure out whether the respondents' characteristics affect their answers to this issue or not. Accordingly, the answers of each respondent for these ten items were grouped together in order to form a single variable for measuring perception towards rurality. Then Pearson Correlation Coefficients test (r) is applied with age and education, and Chi-Square test (χ^2) with job and growth of the respondents. The reason for using two tests for finding perception towards rurality is due to the differences in the level of measurement such research variables have.

Table 2. Respondents' perceptions of rurality

Items	Strongly agree n=147	Agree n=147	Un- decided n=147	Disagree n=147	Strongly disagree n=147
1.Farming in Unizah is a fundamental occupation and has effect on most of other jobs.	10.2%	26.5%	23.1%	32.7%	7.5%
2.Farm is the best place for family living and growth of children.	27.9%	27.9%	16.3%	25.9%	2.0%
3.Rural peoples' life with nature make them nice and happy.	44.9%	41.5%	10.9%	2.7%	0%
4.Urban crowded life is a major cause for crimes.	26.5%	44.2%	10.2%	16.3%	2.7%
5.Income from farming business is important, but enjoying farm life is better.	32.0%	44.9%	11.6%	10.9%	0.7%
6.Family farm is a good tool for securing sufficient food with low price for Saudis.	18.4%	38.8%	13.6%	23.8%	5.4%
7.It is better for the state to support family farm to preserve it.	46.3%	23.1%	13.6%	12.2%	4.8%
8.People's migration to rural areas will solve many problems.	25.9%	40.1%	16.3%	15.0%	2.7%
9.If Saudi farming is hurt will other economic activities will suffer too.	28.6%	42.2%	6.8%	19.0%	3.4%
10.Farming is life with nature, therefore it is beautiful job.	48.3%	43.5%	5.4%	2.7%	0%

Age and education are quantitative variables, while job and growth are qualitative (nominal) variables. Thus; Pearson Correlation Coefficient test was used with the former variables and Chi-Square test was used with later variables Baily [30, pp.404,413]. The tests showed statistical significant relationship at 0.05 level of probability with age and growth only, while no statistically significant relationship has been found with education and job, Tables 3 and 4. This means that the old people and those who came from farming families are more likely to favor rural life than urban life. Such findings are expected since most of these old people and those who grew up in farming families compare their current situation with their past. Such comparison is not in the scope of the availability of materials which modernize their life and make it more easy and comfortable. This favoritism for the hard past is due to the craving for the sense of community that modern life lacks. Such findings were echoed in a developed country's

study (the USA) by Hynson [31] that rural elderly expressed greater satisfaction with the community, were generally more happy, and were less fearful of their immediate surroundings than their urban counterparts. Also, Miller and Crader [32] found that rural people in general tend to have the highest levels of interpersonal satisfaction compared to urban people.

Table 3. Pearson correlation coefficient of respondents' characteristics with their perceptions towards rurality

Independent variables	Correlation coefficient
(N=147)	
Age	0.1725*
Education	-0.0123

* Significant at .05

Table 4. Chi-square test of respondents' characteristics with their perceptions towards rurality

Chi-square	Df	Level of sig.
(N=147)		
Job=5.79130	4	0.21529
Growth=5.95028	2	0.05

It is clear from Tables 3 and 4 that respondents' personal characteristics such as education and job have no effect on their perceptions towards rurality. You cannot say that educated people, or those who work in the government are different from each other in their perceptions towards rurality in Unizah city. Such findings give us a clear indication that other issues should be used to differentiate between respondents towards rurality such as contact with rural areas and others. Also, other items or statements dealing with rural topic should be asked in addition to current research's items.

Conclusion

Lack of services in rural areas and the backwardness of such areas compared to urban sector at the beginning of this century in most of the world's countries considered ground for establishing the science of rural sociology. The Country Life Commission, created by U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt in 1910 which identified and analyzed the main social problems that affect rural America, is considered the cornerstone in formation of this science [2, p.18]. Accordingly, presumed differences between urban and rural areas were argued to be minimal and closing over time. Moreover, some variables, such as social solidarity, were found to be equally evident in certain urban neighborhoods in these developed countries. But many socio-economic differences still engross most of the researches in this area in the developed countries.

Saudi Arabia is one of the developing countries which spent a lot of its wealth to modernize its areas. Such development covered most of the country's regions. Many studies indicate that modernization mostly had many negative effects on the people

particularly in the sociological dimensions. Modernization has such an effect on the Unizah city which enjoyed this development. Rural places were seen as more peaceful and quiet, more wholesome, more free of crime and violence. This was observed in a very conservative and religious area like Unizah which is an indication that the ethics that Islam calls for can be applied at any place and anytime. These values should be protected and encouraged by the scholars to make the people cling to them.

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هل هناك نعيم ريفي؟ وجهة نظر اجتماعية في مجتمع زراعي

إبراهيم بن عبد الله الحميدي

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ملخص البحث. أثبت الواقع اختفاء التباينات المادية بين المجتمعات الريفية والحضرية في العالم المتحضر وبالذات في الغرب ، نتيجة لعمليات التنمية والتحديث التي مرت بها تلك المجتمعات. لذا نجد أن المقارنات التي تتم في الدراسات الاجتماعية بين أهل الريف والحضر غالباً ما تنحو نحو معرفة وجهات نظر هؤلاء الناس نحو أمور اجتماعية أو اقتصادية بحتة ، لا إلى الفوارق المادية بين هذين المجتمعين. من هذا المنطلق قامت هذه الدراسة بتبني وجهة النظر هذه وتطبيقها على مجتمع مدينة عنيزة في منطقة القصيم في المملكة العربية السعودية والتي تعرضت لعمليات تنمية وتحديث كغيرها من المدن السعودية. تم تصميم استبانة لمعرفة وجهة النظر هذه إضافة إلى جوانب اجتماعية أخرى وتم اختيار ٢٠٠ فرداً من سكان هذه المدينة عن طريق العينة العشوائية. تم استبعاد ٥٣ استبانة وذلك لعدم وصول عدد كبير منها والباقي كان ينقصه كثير من البيانات. لذا بلغ عدد الاستبيانات المستخدمة في الدراسة ١٤٧ استبانة فقط. أوضحت نتائج الدراسة تأييداً لما يوجد في الأدبيات الغربية من افتقاد سكان المدن لما تمتاز به الحياة الريفية الاجتماعية من ترابط وقوة وعيشة جميلة مما يدل على أن مجتمع عنيزة قد حدثت به تحولات جذرية نتيجة لعمليات التنمية. كما بينت الدراسة أيضاً أن كبار السن وكذلك الأفراد الذين نشأوا في عائلات زراعية هم أكثر من غيرهم شعوراً بهذا الفقد وأكثر حنيناً للحياة الريفية الماضية.