

A Comparative Analysis of Two Labour Reserves in Early 20th Century Southern Africa

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Introduction

Southern Africa has through much of its 20th century history been characterised by a centre-periphery regional economic system. At the centre has been South Africa (minus its African reserves) and the rest of the region the periphery. Key has been the migrant labour system whereby the centre has been able to extract cheap labour from its periphery. The cheapness, however, is disputed by among others Burawoy (1976). The labour-supplying periphery was actually composed of two tiers. On the one hand were the African Reserves, comprising the Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuthatswana, etc., politically a part of South Africa. On the other hand were the independent states of Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. A question that very often arises is how the two tiers reached the same position in the regional economic system, given that the independent states were not, like the African Reserves, subject to the whims of state intervention by South Africa. Two broad models are frequently advanced to answer this question: the Lewis model of development in labour-surplus Third World countries (Lewis, 1954), and the Marxist analysis (Legassick, 1974; Bundy, 1979; Wolpe, 1972; Arrighi, 1970 and others). It is the inadequacies of both models which constitute the focus of this paper, which is an attempt to compare and contrast the processual development of the two tiers of labour-supplying states in Southern Africa. Three related theses will be advanced: first, that foreign imperialist interests, and not economic supply and demand factors, served to reshape pre-capitalist subsistence economies in the region; second, that the introduction of capitalist relations of production required the creation of sources of cheap labour from within the existing prosperous peasant production sectors within the economy; and third, that migrant labour was never just a source of cheap labour but also a system of how power is organised and resistance fragmented (Mamdani, 1996).

The centre-periphery relationship seen among these Southern African states represents, in most respects, a microcosm of the various dialectical dichotomies, on a broader international level, between developed and underdeveloped nations, between metropolis and satellites. The question at the centre of development theory has been why this inequality? exists between rich and poor nations. The North-South Dialogue (Brandt, 1981) represented practical concerns about this dichotomy. It is generally believed, at least by those who subscribe to the dependency and underdevelopment theories, that development and underdevelopment are outcomes of the same process.

One such unequal exchange occurs in connection with migrant labour. The underdeveloped peripheral states of Southern Africa periodically exported their strong, able-bodied men for work in the developed centre. The essential character of this migration is one of dichotomization between centre and periphery, the separation of maintenance and renewal costs for the migrant labour (Burawoy, 1976). The former costs are in the form of wages, temporary housing and the provision of food and health-care, while the latter costs are to ensure the long-term survival of the labour supply through

the sustenance of a below subsistence pre-capitalist production system. The separation, however, is not complete as the subsistence has to partially rely on remittances from migrants and the migrants, on the other hand, rely on the latter sector as a means of social and economic security to return to when they no longer have a job. Such costs are normally borne by one economy that of the place of origin. In the case of migrant labour, however, the host economy meets only the maintenance costs, while renewal or reproduction costs are left to the peripheral economy, that of the supplier states. The dichotomization process involves the use of supermarket forces to maintain a certain level of precapitalist production while at the same time ensuring a flow of labour from this precapitalist sector to the capitalist production system in accordance with its labour needs. The result has been the integration of the peasantry into the wage employment sector while maintaining their pre-capitalist relations of production in their own state. This process has been clearly noted for Rhodesia and South Africa by Arrighi (1970) and Bundy (1979), respectively.

The two tiers of peripheral states under present consideration have diverse histories. The African Reserves, comprising about 13% of pre-1994 South Africa's land surface, were created by the South African government through the 1913 Land Act. This date does not mark the start of their peripheral function in the economy, but it does serve to emphasize the formalization, through direct state legislative intervention, of their peripheral status. As a part of South Africa and subject to the whims of the state, migrant labour was never just a source of cheap labour but was also a way of addressing the age old question of stabilizing alien rule (Mamdani, 1996). In contrast, the neighboring countries that comprise the second tier of the periphery were not subject to such legislative action. Still, both tiers have shared the same relationship with the centre. The precapitalist social formation of both tiers was originally characterized by prosperous, self-sufficient, communal production systems (Bundy, 1970 and Parson, 1980). In both cases, these were restructured to suit the needs of an emerging capitalist mode of production which came with the development of mining and commercial agriculture in South Africa and secondly to regionally further a form of British indirect rule.

These centre-periphery relations have stimulated ideological and intellectual controversy. The ideology of the ruling apartheid regime of pre-1994 South Africa affirms white supremacy, the belief that blacks will continually be dependent on whites. The underdevelopment that characterizes the peripheries is attributed to the culture of the citizenry (Lipton, 1977), and the migrants from these states are seen as "living off the resources of another country rather than arguing the number of those trying to eke out a subsistence from traditional agriculture at home" (Leistner, 1975, p. 40). Closely linked to this school, at least in its basic theoretical assumptions, is the Lewis model of development in labour-surplus Third World countries (Lewis, 1954). As will be elaborated upon later, this model explains underdevelopment in terms of inequality, which is seen as leading to differences in factor payments and wage rates. Migrancy is, therefore, simply a tangible effect of the invisible hand of the market as labour flows from areas of lower factor payments to those of higher ones. There is an obvious flaw in this analysis. Essentially it fails to place the phenomenon within an historical perspective which would, for example, show the evaluation of underdevelopment through the application of various extra-economic measures.

The other mode of analysis that has predominated has been the Marxist view. This view holds that the introduction of capitalist relations of production in mining and later in agriculture, and their dire need for cheap labour, mark the beginning of a concerted drive for peasant production underdevelopment to create a labour supply source. The major proponents of this view have focused on the internal dynamics of capitalism

in South Africa and on how it created its own periphery in the African Reserves. Little, if any analysis has considered a similar process adopted in connection with neighboring countries - which were also to function as part of the periphery. In most analyses, the function of these latter countries is that of serving as escape routes when South Africa could not generate enough labour within the Reserves and thus had to turn outside. The implicit assumption here is that the impact of capitalist development on pre-capitalist social formation has been limited to the political boundaries of South Africa.

Overlooked in this analysis are several key facts: British capital dominated the mining industry; Britain was the colonial power in the neighboring countries; South Africa was a former British colony and was at some point in its history subject to indirect rule like all other British colonies; and since the founding of the Union in 1910, South Africa had been urging the incorporation of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. The first three points imply British cooperation in the generation of labour and a regional approach to Southern Africa, in which one sector provided the minerals and the other the labour and the subjects. The last point - the incorporation bid - suggests that South Africa sought total control over the generation of labour in the three neighbouring countries similar to the control it had in the African Reserves. All three points support the view, to be advanced later in this paper, that South Africa's neighboring states were subject to the same underdevelopment process as seen in the African Reserves. This similarity will be demonstrated in this paper through a discussion of the Transkei and Botswana, two areas that are representative, respectively, of the African reserves and South Africa's independent neighbors.

The African Reserves: The Case of the Transkei

The Transkei, as an African Reserve in South Africa, represents one tier of the peripheral states - that which lies within South Africa and is thus subject to the direct political whims of the South African state. The fact that it has developed as part of the periphery is a consequence of and a response to the limitations placed on it by the South African state and was thus reflective of its political status vis-a-vis the centre. The process of underdevelopment - the development of a reservoir of cheap labour for both mining and farming in South Africa - involved the processual dichotomization of the labour-force maintenance and reproduction functions of the economy, i.e., the creation of a migrant labour force. The key functions of the state became those of bringing such a labour force into existence and of ensuring its continued existence in the long run, i.e., the conditions that created it had to be produced again and again (James, 1978). This constituted a necessary condition for primitive capital accumulation in South Africa. Migrant labour, as we note earlier, did not only help meet the labour needs of society but also helped preserve native institutions and sustain a system of governance.

Arrighi's (1970) study of the proletarianisation of the Rhodesian peasantry (referred to earlier) represents a similar process in another labour-reserve economy. His basic argument - contrary to that of dualism and modernization theorists, represented by Barber on the same proletarianisation process in Rhodesia is that the supply of African labour to the European farms, plantations, and mines was primarily a result of structural changes as opposed to wage-rate increases or the operation of "law of economics". The Transkei exhibits the same phenomenon - manifested in two key periods. One is characterised by the centre's use of non-economic mechanisms, such as land appropriation and the imposition of taxation on the peasantry - mechanisms which acted as push factors, inducing the flow of labour to the labour-starved capitalist sector of the economy. A second period is characterised by a self-sustaining process of underdevelopment. Through the periodic absence of the most able-bodied men, agriculture - in-

cluding arable and animal husbandry, both of which were male-dominated - was to suffer lower yields. Thus, even more migration was produced, and a "vicious circle" created.

Prior to incorporation as a periphery (pre-1870), as in much of pre-colonial Africa, Transkei was characterised by the predominance of a rural subsistence agriculture (Bundy, 1979). Utilizing communally owned land and family labour marked by a simple division of labour based on age and sex, agricultural production was primarily for subsistence or home consumption, with limited, if any, external market relations. Wolpe (1972) and Sahlins (quoted in Bundy, 1979) respectively, have referred to this production system as "African redistribute economy" and "primitive economy". Sahlins has further characterised such economies as those where

...most production is geared to use of the producer or to discharge of kinship obligations rather than to exchange and gain. A corollary is that de facto control of the means of production is decentralized, local and familial. The following propositions are implied:

- 1) Economic relations of coercion and exploitation and the corresponding social relations of dependence and mastery are not created in the system of production;
- 2) In the absence of the incentive given by the exchange of the product against a great quantity of goods on a market, there is a tendency to limit production to goods that can be directly utilized by the producers" (Sahlins in Bundy, 1979:15).

The discovery of diamonds in Kimberley (1870) and later of gold in the Witwatersrand (1886) led to a large-scale foreign capital inflow that was to characterize the subsequent mining activity as the dominant feature of the period 1870-1910. This era marked the emergence of capitalism and the most critical stage of infant primitive capital accumulation and (the stage) of the generation of surplus value. The central or key problem of this stage of capitalism is that of output maximization and cost minimization. This calls not only for the formation of a labour-force, but for a cheap labour force in the midst of an autonomous, self-sufficient, pre-capitalist production system. The latter system, in its form, could not be relied upon to provide such cheap labour, as long as it paid more to labour to be in the subsistence sector than it did for it to be in the wage sector. Left to market forces, labour flow from the subsistence sector could not be expected, and state intervention to induce such flow became a necessary option. The resolution - which had to avoid raising wages since this would make mining and the infant commercial agriculture less profitable, if not uneconomic - was to lie in the restructuring of the predominant production system from an independent existence to a more dependent one. This was accomplished, on the one hand, through its systematic underdevelopment, which forced peasants into partial wage employment, and, on the other hand, through the nursing along of commercial agriculture as a food supplier for the mining towns.

Two key factors were responsible for the independence of the peasantry: first, its having access to land on its (peasantry's) own terms and readily available markets for its surplus produce which was out of a rational response to the food needs of the mining towns. State intervention was promoted (with a view to its emerging) as the supplier of food to the mining towns and thus to its displacing of the peasantry from this role. In 1910, the state introduced discriminatory subsidies favorable to white farmers, in the form of fencing, dams, houses, veterinary and horticultural advice, and the Land Bank easy credit facilities. Through the establishment of white farmer-controlled marketing

boards, prices were guaranteed for the white farmer. Conversely, the state spent literally nothing on peasant agriculture (Lipton, 1977). Restrictions on peasant exports from the Transkei and other reserves were imposed, thus depriving the peasantry of its market (Bundy, 1979) The end result of the above two measures were to place the peasant producer at a competitive disadvantage to white commercial farmer, in the former case, and to deprive him of a market in the latter case. There was resultant erosion of peasant independence, which led to progressive rural decay as the magnitude of migration increased year after year. The effort price of participation in peasant agriculture fell far too short of that in the labour market.

The accessibility of land to the peasantry was to be another target of state intervention. The 1913 Native Land Act and the subsequent 1936 Native Land and Trust Act were to be key to the land question. Under the 1913 Act, thirteen per cent of the country's land mass was allocated to some seventy percent of the country's population, thus effectively depriving the black population of landholding rights outside these "homelands", as the designated thirteen percent of land came to be known. Transkei, as an African reserve, became part of these homelands. Blacks were to lose the land they held outside the homelands, and large-scale movement - for the most part forced and violent into the homelands was to result in overpopulation, overuse of the soil, and resultant soil erosion. In the Transkei, as was the case elsewhere in the reserves, land could no longer support the population, and wage employment became the alternative to agriculture. The cheap labour requirements of the capitalist economy made some level of peasant production necessary - to meet the renewal costs of the labour force - while the capitalist sector took care of the maintenance costs. It is this necessity to sustain some level of an agricultural base for the migrant, which was to set a limit, below which underdevelopment or beyond which the collapse of the migrant labour system would be imminent. A too low subsistence level, on the other hand, could spell permanent migration to the capitalist sector and a fully proletarianized workforce and thus the transfer of the renewal or reproduction costs to the capitalist sector in this case, that of South Africa. Once created, the system of migrant labour tended to recreate itself. The departure from the peasant agricultural sector of its young, healthy, and most productive members - leaving behind the women, children, and the sick - left the rural economy at its barest subsistence level and made wage employment imperative.

The External Suppliers: The Case of Botswana

Botswana, together with Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, etc., is part of the tier of peripheral states - those states which were outside South Africa and thus were not subject to the direct whims of the South African state, as is the case with the Reserves, but which turned out to behave functionally in the same way as the Reserves vis-a-vis South Africa. In 1975, this tier contributed some seventy per cent of the labour force to the gold mines. The popular position, from within the Marxist and non-Marxist theoretical viewpoints, is that when South Africa could not meet its labour needs from within, it turned to neighboring countries. Implicit in this view are: 1) that it was easier for South Africa to get the labour from outside its political boundaries than from within and 2) that, not unrelated to 1), an Arthur Lewis two-sector model for the development process of labour surplus in Third World nations applies. A comparative look at the two case studies of the Transkei and Botswana points to South African labour recruitment difficulties and the use of different measures to stimulate migration. As was discussed in the case of the Transkei, the South African state dealt directly with the peasant through specific legislation. The possibility, however, to do this in Botswana did not exist. South Africa had to deal here with a local Colonial Administration, on the one hand,

and local traditional rulers on the other, the latter of whom, under the indirect system of rule, were left with considerable authority over matters affecting the tribe. The key to capitalist penetration in this case was principally in the hands of Britain, which was the colonial power. This part of the essay, as was the case in the section on the Transkei, seeks to discuss the process that produced a labour reserve economy in Botswana.

Given the fact that Bechuanaland (now Botswana) was a British colony and colonialism's basic premise is the right of one country or people to impose its will on another in accordance with its (the colonialist country's) self-interest, it is self-consistent to draw a direct relationship between colonialism and underdevelopment or, more specifically, between colonialism and migrant labour in Botswana. In accordance with the needs of capital accumulation in South Africa, British colonial policy was to have as its trademark the systematic subordination of a dominant, autonomous pre capitalist mode of production (to these needs). This was to involve the transformation of social and economic fabric of the colonized according to the needs of an economy external to them. As Rosa Luxembourgh was to put it:

Since the accumulation of capital becomes impossible in all points without non-capitalist surroundings ...capital needs the means of production and the labour power of the whole globe for untrammelled accumulation; it cannot manage without the natural resources and the labour power of all territories" (Luxembourgh 1968:365)

This notion runs counter to the popular notion of modernization theory that capitalist development involves the encroachment on and eventual erosion of pre-capitalist production systems.

Botswana, much like the other peripheral territories of southern Africa, underwent the process of the subordination of its pre-capitalist production system to the labour needs of capitalism in South Africa. My basic argument, like Arrighi's argument in his study of the proletarianization process of the African peasantry in Rhodesia, is that the supply of labour from the traditional subsistence sector of the Botswana economy is a function not of the demand and supply factors of the economy but of forces non-economic and external. Two periods are identifiable in the transformation process. First, as in the case of the Transkei, it was a question of creating the migrant labour system and second, that of the reproduction of the system. As we noted in our study of the Transkei, the pre-colonial period was marked by the predominance of an autonomous, self-sufficient pre-capitalist production system, which was characterized by a communally owned land tenure system and an agricultural production system geared towards home consumption, with limited external market relations. This autonomy was first sundered in the 1800's with the beginning of contact with various manifestations of capitalist society, such as the traders, in their role as representatives of the manufacturing world (Parson, 1980). The other visible group of newcomers, the missionaries, on the other hand, in furtherance of their "civilizing mission", discouraged certain traditional attire as being too revealing and unchristian. The combined effect of these two groups was to displace a certain amount of locally produced articles and cause the penetration of mass-produced goods from outside. The extent of both contact and impact was not great and did not undermine the prevailing mode was not great and did not undermine the prevailing mode of production, but did bring the potential for this.

By 1800, some limited migration was taking place, as some 2,135 Batswana were at that time working at the Kimberly mines (Schapera, 1947). The numbers were small, and, according to Schapera, the reason for migration was limited to a desire for

money to purchase agricultural tools and to obtain guns for defence against the land-hungry Afrikaners. Increased, grain production was also reported, as new, missionary-introduced farming techniques were used (Parson, 1980). Coupled with these changes in farming techniques, as a cause of increased production and the independence of the peasant, was the abundance of land and its easy accessibility to the peasantry.

Due to an increased imperial competition among the Germans, Afrikaners, and British for control of the region and to Botswana's importance as a gateway to the interior (where Britain had commercial interests), the country was declared a British Protectorate in 1885 and was thus incorporated into the British Empire. Botswana's function within the wider imperial economy, however was not altogether clear upon incorporation, given the fact that its incorporation was a result of imperial competition in the region and beyond and had little to do with economies of the territory, except for its importance as a route to the interior. It was to be the discovery of gold in 1886 at the Witwatersrand and the resultant emergence of a British capital dominated mining sector - that was to make the territory's function within a regional imperial economy fairly obvious, i.e. as in other High Commission Territories, as a labour supplier to the South African economy. Given the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the peasant economy, market forces could not, as was the case also for the Transkei, be expected to produce such a labor force. It was thus left to the colonial state to create and sustain such a labour force. State policies for generating labour, however, are based on conditions in the peasant economy. In the case of the Transkei, mining opened new markets for peasant produce and thus fostered peasant prosperity and led to less propensity on the part of the peasant to go into wage employment. The same, however, cannot be said of Botswana. There is no documentary evidence attesting to the magnitude of Botswana's exports at the time, but given the fragility of the country's climate of low rainfall and periodic droughts, it is sound to suspect that these exports were not large or overly extensive. What can be strongly argued, however, is that production was sufficient to meet the subsistence needs of the peasants and to sustain the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the economy.

The colonial state was instrumental in the process of labour creation, i.e., the semi-proletarianization of the peasantry through the processual, partial pushing off the land. The latter was achieved through various policies whose overall effect was the subordination of the territory to the requirements of capital accumulation in South Africa and, through that, in the world, and it was thus a turning point away from the voluntarism that characterized earlier migration. As was argued earlier, the process is very similar to the one that took place in the Transkei and is distinctly different from the ones that occurred in the Portuguese colony of Mozambique and in Rhodesia under UDI. The latter attained the status of labour supplier through labour supply agreements such as the Mozambique Convention of 1909 with the Portuguese authorities. Under these agreements, labour generation was left to the other party, in the case of Mozambique to the Portuguese authorities.

Historically, land has been extensively used in the destabilization of peasant production, and Botswana was no exception. According to Kowet (Kowet, 1978), the promulgation of boundaries that created tribal reserves and resultant land shortages was one measure that induced labour migration: land shortages were created with the cession of the southern part of the country to the Cape Colony and the subsequent establishment of white owned freehold farms on what was previously tribal land. The latter was land that was conceded to the British South Africa Company, and it constitutes some of the most arable land in the country. The most affected groups were the Balete, the Batlokwa and other groups in the Tati who lost most of their land to the

company. It is not surprisingly, therefore, that the early heavy migration was from these tribal groups. The distinction between the Tribal Reserves and freehold farms, representing white settler territory, was very much similar to that in South Africa after the 1913 Native Land Act strictly prohibiting land transactions by the settlers. One clause in the British South Africa Company's land-sale deed to white farmers stated that "...neither the proprietor nor any successor in the title shall sell, alienate, or transfer the said farm or any portion of it to a native" (Massey, 1980:125). The impact of the concession was thus to aggravate the shortage of arable agricultural land and thereby limit food production. This pressure, however, as we noted earlier, was limited to certain tribal groups, who were to constitute the bulk of the early heavy migrations. These proclamations were to also serve a second function, that of creating tribal groups that were to become the subject in the colonial system of indirect rule.

The Hut Tax of 1899 and early-1900s native tax together constituted a second means of labour inducement: they were to be yet another means of forcing peasants into wage employment - this time in order to earn the cash necessary to pay the taxes. The tax instrument has been widely and successfully used in colonial Africa as a means of inducing labour flow from peasant production to the production in colonial plantations and mines. The imposition of the taxes (which were payable only in cash) on a predominantly non-monetary economy - in which there were no other avenues of earning cash than the predetermined ones - left the peasantry with no other option but to periodically migrate to the mines of South Africa. The absence of the most able-bodied men, very often at times most critical to peasant agriculture left both arable and pastoral agricultural management to those least able to handle them - women, children, older men' and the sick which resulted in a general decline in agricultural productivity, a condition that was to lead to more migration and further declines, thus setting up a vicious circle. Massey (1977) has argued that the taxes were not specifically intended as devices for inducing a flow of labour to South Africa, but were instead the primary means of raising revenue for the colony. The evidence, however, points to collusion between British-dominated capital in South Africa and the Colonial Administration in the territory. The administration's view was summed up by Bechuanaland's Assistant Resident Commissioner in 1903:

It is my most earnest desire to assist in my power the native labour movement. I have talked to all chiefs and headmen about the advantages of work, etc. I recently got Khama to call public meeting to try and induce his people to go out (Schapera, 1947:149).

The chiefs were to share in the revenue derived from their recruiting activities (paid per recruit), and, in addition, they imposed their own taxation, in the form of a tribute, on the returning migrants. The chiefs, under the umbrella of the colonial state, thus contributed to increasing the migration.

Natural disasters afforded yet another opportunity for labour-migration generation and perpetuation by the Colonial Administration. According to Massey (1977) peasant production was hit in the early 1900s by a devastating rinderpest and drought. Relief assistance from the missionaries and the Administration was heavily biased against families that had men who could work in the mines (Massey, 1977).

The combination of the aforementioned individual acts or measures was to lead to the integration of Botswana into a Southern African regional economic system as a subordinate member supplying labour. As we noted in our study of the Transkei, it became necessary that there be some mechanism to ensure the reproduction of the labour force, a reproduction whose costs, under a migrant labour system, are borne by an

economy separate from that of the host. Some level of peasant production had to be promoted to meet the reproduction costs and thus make possible cheap labour costs to the labour-receiving economy. In order to ensure this, the administration imposed a number of restrictions which prescribed the period of time for which labourers could enlist for services in South Africa, prescribed the means for ensuring their return, etc. These restrictions were included in Proclamation No.6 of 1899, which required that recruiters have their licenses renewed annually, a renewal that would be granted provided that there was compliance with certain other restrictions. The restrictions were meant to maintain the level of subsistence agriculture necessary for the survival and renewal of the migrant labour-force. These restrictions were, however, opposed by South Africa, and it is this opposition that was to lead to South Africa's union and hence was to mark a key distinction between our two case studies.

Conclusion

For both the Transkei and Botswana, state intervention was the key instrument in ensuring a systematic dichotomization between capitalist centre and precapitalist periphery, of the maintenance and renewal costs of the economy's labour force. The precapitalist social formations of both were prosperous, self-sufficient, communal production systems. In both cases, these were restructured to suit the needs of an emerging capitalist mode of production which came with the development of mining and commercial agriculture in South Africa. This structural functional make up of the region, however, was not achieved without resistance by both the Africans in both peripheries and white working class in South Africa. One can thus see the outcome as more of compromises between the contending forces but which in the main favored the centre. The benefits were not only economic, through migrant labour, but also political in the form of furthering a system of governance.

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