

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

SCHOOL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

MA AFRICA : *Human and Sustainable Development*

PIED 5275 – **Political Economy of Resources and Development**

*Migrant Labour in Southern Africa: an Historical and Theoretical Perspective*

Supervisor

Ray C. Bush

Student

Giuliano Martiniello

## INDEX

- <i>Introduction and Objectives</i>	3
- Migrant Labour as <i>Unfree</i> Labour	5
- Colonial Systems of Forced Labour: the Rise and Fall of Migrant Labour	10
- Crises and Structural Adjustment: the consequences on the pattern of migrant labour	18
- Bibliography	22

## Introduction and objectives

Migration has been a phenomenon existent in all human societies. In the past groups of pastoralist moved perpetually in search for better fields and water sources for their people and periodically in relation to the rain fall. Continuous interactions, on a regional scale, of exchange and conflict linked the nomadic populations of merchant and pastoralist with more settled populations. To these cultural and environmental characterizations, we could say biologic, we should add some more political and military causes of the migrations as is the case of the displacements of rural communities in consequence of political violence and famines.

In social scientists' works the causes of international migrations have been interpreted in heterogeneous terms: motivations of strictly economic character, that is that wage differentials, different opportunities of employment and social well-being between and within different countries areas engendered "push" and "pull" factors which attracted or repulsed people; motivations of individual character which on the base of rational choices and preferences can alternate creatively different strategies and options within the familiar strategies of survival and livelihood; motivations of political and military character, in reference, as an example, to the political violence and the inter-ethnic conflicts or to the famines, which engendered considerable and uninterrupted forced flows of refugees (Zolberg, 1981).

The motif we are going to purport will look at migrations labour in Southern Africa. The project aims to locate in a historical and theoretical perspective the phenomenon of labour migrations adopting an analytical framework which tends to identify the nature, the character, the social composition and the lines of continuity and change in the space/time.

The essay intends to analyze the labour migrations not as a simple process that involves the spatial mobility, rather to understand the nature of the social relations that underpin and the processes that sustain these phenomena. We want to place migrant labour within the analysis of the

logic, the genesis and the structures of the capitalist mode of production and thus within the social relations of production and different labour processes that define it historically.

The work will focus on the analysis of the different forced labour regimes that have been developed in the region starting by the colonial administrations. We will analyze how the migrant labour, which has been constituted, as we will see, as a pattern of forced and controlled labour spatial mobility in the region, has developed, which has been their cause and consequences, which has been the political, economic and social actors involved as components in shaping the politics of the control of the mobility and the politics of the social reproduction of the labour force.

These processes will be analyzed within the picture of the *primitive* accumulation of capital starting from Marx's characterization of *free labour*, clarifying, in addition, how other forms of subsumption of labour to capital (unfree) were set up, through the *manus longa* of the state, to sustain the process of reproduction of capital. Then we will focus on the impact of the systemic crises on the pattern of migrant labour and the consequent process of restructuring of the material and political structures on a global scale.

Relevant attention will be reserved to the land issue, in colonial as well as in contemporary times, since we will show that the presence of a constant flow of migrant labour has been highly dependent, among other things, on the separation of the producers from their means of subsistence, i.e. the land, and their consequent transformation in a rural proletariat or semi-proletariat.

The scale we adopt in this framework is regional since economic processes cross the frontiers of the single states and create economic poles of accumulation which influence the overall pattern of development in the region. The region will be understood as a space crossed by different kinds of forces, political and social, in perpetual conflicts and interaction between them. The process of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 1982) will be understood in a long historical perspective exploring the role of the land and of the agrarian question in colonial and contemporary eras, during the post-war boom of the capitalist economy as during the crisis and the policies of structural adjustment, since these are analytical instruments necessary to comprehend how the capitalist

transformation of the domestic agriculture, the consequent translation of the political and social structures and the *metamorphosis* of the territory will affect the explanations about the causes of movements of labour force.

### ***Migrant Labour as Unfree Labour***

The theoretical context in which we would like to locate this study is delineated by some researches on the labour mobility within the historical capitalism. Labour power migrations constitute a privileged and fundamental field of analysis since understanding the processes of control of the labour force, through the creation of different regimes of labour coercion (contract labour, indentured labour, forced labour, *chibaro*, etc), represents a key that consents to rebuild the inclusive forms of subsumption of the labour to capital. It offers simultaneously a privileged perspective from which interpret the transformations in class composition. Our analysis tries to understand the social forces, the political actors and economic processes that have driven this process. The series of contradictions we want to explore are not merely the expression of the contraposition between *objective* processes and *subjective* agents, rather they are intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production and of which the migrant labour is itself a manifestation. We need first of all to conceptualize, in a wide historical time and geographical space, how the dialectic between labour and capital, as a social relation of production, originates and evolves.

The neo-classic theoretical models take back the labour migration essentially to a passive response to the “push” and “pull” imperatives, emphasizing the role of the “laws” of the supply and demand within the international division of the labour market. This ideology was constituted on the basis of an abstract image of the rational individual as a protagonist of the labour migration according its behavioural, rational and cultural attitudes. However this conception abstract people from their material and social base because the significance of labour migration does not lie simplistically in behavioural or rational choices and preferences of the individuals, or in the spatial

mobility *per se*, but in the position in the social relations of production occupied before and after such spatial movements, within one social formation and or state or between different social formations (Miles, 1987).

Labour migration must be comprehended as a process embedded in social relations.

We refer to capitalism as Marx does as a *Mode of Production*. A mode of production is something that is socially produced by human beings, it refers the way people produce and reproduce their means of subsistence so it can be potentially changed. Thus the economic forms in which men produce, consume and exchange are *transitory* and *historical*. It is the form of commodity production and the social forces (especially classes) which take part to the whole process struggle for the control of the generation and distribution of economic surplus in a set of society.

The social relations of production and the mode of production they constitute are not purely economic in character. The assumption that economic relations can be separated by political and ideological relations is questionable.

Marx himself worked from this perspective, he attributed a complex interaction, of dialectic kind, between different relations, and even though there are place in his writings where he over-emphasized the role of the economic relations in determining the relations between the rulers and the ruled, defining the state as “*a committee of affairs of the bourgeois class*”, elsewhere he stressed on the additional character of economic relations: “*Since the state is the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their interests, and in which the whole society is epitomised, it follows that the state mediates in the formation of all institutions*” (Marx, 1976, vol. 1: 915-916).

The main objective of this system of production, which is at the same time of circulation of money and exchange of commodities, its real essence, is the production of *surplus value*. In the capitalist society, where the workers do not produce for themselves but for capital, exploitation occurs when a minority group, i.e. the owners of the means of production, are able to appropriate of the surplus produced by others.

According to the *Labour Theory of Value*, the total value of a given commodity coincides with the total labour-time crystallized on its production; it includes this surplus value as well as the amount of value of the goods that provide the workers' livelihood.

In other words, the labour forces produce more value than it receives for its own subsistence.

The sale and purchase of labour power is thus an integral moment in the process of accumulation of capital. In Marx's view the wage form represented the essential mediating form of the capitalist social relations and one that constantly reproduced by those relations themselves. According to Marx without a class dependent on wages there can be no production of surplus value and thus no capitalist production (Marx, 1973). Marx thus attributed a clear interdependence between capital and wage-labour as two sides of the same coin, where the wage labour refers to the process of commodification of labour force and thus to a peculiar method of surplus extraction and appropriation.

Which were the social prerequisites and the historic conditions that sustained the emergence of this system? Marx again defined this almost clearly: *free* labour and the exchange of free labour against money, in order to reproduce money and convert it into value; the separation of free labour from its objective realization, from its means and material of labour, the land, which functions as his natural laboratory (Marx, 1964: 67).

Marx's characterization of wage labour as *free* labour does not contradict its exploitative character in relation with capital but defines the freedom of the workers to sell their labour power, as his own commodity, to different employers on the market of wage labour since they were free from relations of *patronage*, bondage and servitude imposed by the landlords. However, this freedom is conditional because of the constraints of the market. It is subject to the diversified and uneven demands of the capital and dependent on the cyclical nature of the capitalist production, characterised with its periods of crisis and re-composition when workers are expelled from the production process.

Historically this transformation is understood as one of the main features of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. This transition was based mainly on the separation of the peasants from their means of subsistence so that they were forced to sell their labour in order to get their subsistence (Brenner, 1977).

Indeed even though Marx's opera represents an angular stone to understand the dialectic between class and labour and the consequent class struggle in Europe, it shows silences and limits. Since it was supposed that this relation would have spread unilaterally all over the surface of the globe and would have assumed the wage form nothing was said about the shape and the character of the relation between capital and labour outside Western Europe.

Even though in some writings Marx was aware that the "*veiled slavery of wage labourers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery as its pedestal*" (Marx, 1976: 925), he never approached the problem of historical persistence of *non-wage* and *un-free* labour within the colonial capitalist mode of production. He saw wage-labour and slavery as antithetical.

However, Marx's analysis reflects a Eurocentric view of capitalism and an excessive faith on the irreversible evolutionary capability of capitalism, not acknowledging that several forms of *unfree* labour were used extensively during the development of capitalism.

*Unfree* labour occurs when an individual procures the right to utilize a labourer labour's service by gaining property rights in the latter, forms of unfree labour are the serfdom and slavery (Miles, 1987: 31-32). Within the Marxist tradition the interrelation between the capitalism and migrant labour has always been considered as an *epiphenomenon* of the "late capitalism", characterized by the movement of labour force (unskilled) from the periphery to the *core* where they are proletarianized. However, it has been shown that that expanded reproduction of *non-wage* or *unfree* labour is a long established historical fact. Coerced movements of workers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries from Africa to Caribbean (Barrat Brown, 1995), from Europe and Asia to America were necessary to the development of the economic system as a whole. From 1800-1930 seventy millions of people followed the pioneers in North and South America (Harris, 1995,4), from 1800-



1950 approximately 60-70 millions of Indian, Chinese labourers were sent to North America, Australia and Europe (Harris, 2002). Labour migration is thus a consequence of the spatial movement of capital accumulations so theoretically it is a central feature of the capitalist mode of production (Wood, 1982). However labour migrations are not simply the consequence of the process of unequal development or of environmental and economic pressures that characterize the capitalism, labour migration is itself a cause of unequal development in the sense that it helps to reproduce that conditions (Amin, 1995: 32).

The different forms of control and exploitation of labour force, divided between different areas (centre, periphery and semi-periphery) according to the different location within the international division of labour of the world economy reveal the *interdependent* and *coexistent* nature of the different forms of capitalist relations of production within the historical capitalism: “*free labour is the form of control of labour force used in the core, whereas coerced labour is used for less skilled labourers in the peripheral areas, this combination represent the essence of capitalism*” (Wallerstein, 1974: 127).

However this comment can be a useful tendential statement since the geographical demarcation proposed is too rigid to include the variety and the flexibility of labour forms in the core areas as outside them (Cohen, 1988: 6).

In addition the process of control of the labour force has been associated, as we will see in the case of Southern Africa, with a process of *racialization* of the civic sphere in order to define a hierarchy of labourers that could perform the poorer and over-exploited jobs in the core of the economic system as well as in its remote areas (Miles, 1982).

There is thus a wide variety of forms of adverse incorporation, historically determined and politically constructed, within the capitalist relations of production all over the world.

What is relevant to our conclusion is the character of migrant labour as one of the forms of *unfree* labour, which is as one form of labour coercion, we will see analyzing the case of Southern

Africa, which is in a relation structurally interdependent and at the same time contradictory with capitalism development.

## **Colonial Systems of Forced Labour: the Rise and Fall of Migrant Labour**

Modern Southern African historians agree that the phase between the last three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century represent the period of the incorporation of the region within the capitalist world economy. This process has different interlinked realms, it implied, on one hand, the transformation of the productive sphere and thus of its relations of production, in such a way as to create production activities integrated in the international division of the labour, on the other hand, the alteration in the sphere of the *governance* so as to structure state institutions that worked as an integral part of the interstate system (Arrighi, 1978). This economic and politic incorporation represented the main cause of the dissolution of African polities and the disintegration of the productive autonomy of African peasantries.

This process was neither linear nor automatic, as Bundy (1979) and Arrighi (1973) show respectively for South African and Southern Rhodesian peasantries.

According to their arguments there was a substantially more positive response of the African peasants to the opportunities the market economy than it is usually estimated and that an adapted, “flexible” form of the traditional subsistence method was providing viable alternatives for African to wage employment. The image of “traditional” and static pattern of subsistence, on which the African people are alleged to lie, should be thus substituted by a more dynamic concept of articulation of strategies of subsistence according to the changing historical conditions.

The political resistance of African Kingdoms to the process of incorporation was overcome through a combination of two strategies: a) the foreign military intervention, in virtue of its superior strength, has, generally, curbed the resistance of the traditional authorities reluctant to the

incorporation; b) the political strategy of *Indirect Rule* through which the colonial regimes substituted the disinclined political authorities with cooperant authorities.

However, though this was a period of rapid and successful adaptation by the African peasantries to the emergence of a commodity market, this period was crucial in “transforming the bulk of African rural population from their pre-colonial existence as pastoralist-cultivators to their present existence as sub-subsistence inhabitants on eroded and overcrowded land, dependent for survival on wages earned in “white” industrial areas and farms” (Bundy, 1979: v). Another historian, van Onselen, defines the process of rural impoverishment in this terms: “The decline of peasant workers, increases in population and the restrictions on the amount of land available were all forcing a growing number of African workers into the cash market of the regional economic system” (Van Onselen, 1976, 117). Within both descriptions the land issue appears fundamental to understand the whole process of transformation of the social practices, of production’s organization, of the political “traditional” structures. We will explore the existence of causal relation between the negation of the access to the land and the entrance in the wage employment provided mainly by the mines in South Africa, Southern and Northern Rhodesia and the settlers plantations of Natal, acknowledging that has been the subordination of the women in pre-colonial social formations which made male migrancy possible (Bozzoli, 1998)

Although by the turn of the century thousands of Africans were working on the Southern African mines, between the 1903 and 1905 the South African Native Affairs Commission estimated a shortage of 300,000 labourers each year to match the necessary growth of the production forces and affirmed further that “natives looked for a wage employment only as a mere supplement to their subsistence means” (Wallerstein, Martin, Dickinson, 1982).

In the colonies, indeed, the capitalist mode of production encounters the resistance of the producers who own their means of production, thus it tries with forcible means, extra-economic, to clear away the other modes of production which are based on the independent labour of the producers.

The ways which were used to mobilize labour force were numerous, articulated and coordinated by the colonial states: the imposition of taxes to force the sales of the means of subsistence and translate the discretionary character of the African participation in the money economy in a necessary one; the restriction of the access to the land; forms of indebtedness that to be extinguished required a seasonal participation of Africans to the mines or plantations or in the settlers estates works, forms of forced labour or *chibaro* as in the Portuguese colonies; legal discriminations in the allocations of provisions and grants in the form of implements, seeds and agrarian assistance only for the white capitalist agriculture. In Mozambique in particular the role of *regulos* (administrative local chiefs) was fundamental in the everyday extraction of taxes and recruitment of forced labour (O'Laughlin, 2002).

Also in Natal and other British Protectorates this practice expressed the dualistic character of the institutions of colonial *governance*.

A plethora of state regulations was imposed on African peasantries throughout all the regional system in the early twentieth century. In South Africa, the *Land Act* of 1913, forbade the purchase or the rent of land for African outside the "scheduled African areas", i.e. native reserves and African locations that amounted to the 7.3% of the national land, and abolished the farming-on-the-half system that allowed the Africans who owned their own ploughs and oxen to cultivate and live on the white settler property in exchange for half the harvest (Magubane, 1979). In 1922 the *Native Taxation and Development Act* forced all the Africans males between sixteen and sixty-five to pay a poll tax and a hut tax. In Southern Africa this strategy of both separation of the producers from their means of subsistence, of imposition of compulsory services in labour or in kind was soon extended throughout the region: the Land Apportionment Act (1931) in Rhodesia, the Decree of August (1911) and January (1912) in Katanga, the 1897 *Regulamento* in Portuguese colonies which prescribed compulsory labour service and the Regulations of 1906-1907 in South-West Africa designed to restrict the peasants access to land and cattle in order to guarantee a steady labour supply (Martin, 1980).

The separation of the producers from their means of subsistence was the first step of an integrated strategy aimed at creating a stable flow of cheap migrant labour in the regional system.

A set of political measures of control, segmentation and recruiting of the labour force and of differentiation of the jobs for the “white” and “blacks” ensured a racial division of the labour force in the mines and plantations.

The almost simultaneous action of regimes of forced labour in Southern Africa pushed the labour force towards an employment in the capitalist economy through regional migrant labour. As first put in evidence for Mozambique, the *chibalo* constituted an instrument to extract labour force to be used in labour services locally and at the same time a threat to push people to accept contracts to work in the mines (First, 1982) since the acceptance of a contract labour with one of the main recruiting agencies represented an exemption from the “social” obligation to provide a basic amount of labour time for colonial infrastructures which were necessary to exploit the human and material resources of the colony. Those agencies recruited, legally and illegally, labourers in the whole Southern Africa to work in the mines of Witwatersrand or in Rhodesia, WENELA (Witwatersrand Native Labour Association) and RNLA (Rhodesia Native labour Association). In Angola the system of labour force was sustained by the state which required direct labour for public works and recruited it by compulsory methods, even though it recruited forced labour for private economic enterprises as well (Birmingham, 1992: 27-29).

In Namibia the institutionalization of contract labour played a fundamental role in breaking down traditional African societies. By 1920s South West Africa administrators had established with the help of Southern Labour Organization and Northern Labour Organization, an extensive contract labour system that channelled thousands of Ovambo towards diamond mines or to work on railways and harbours (Cooper, 1999).

These agencies of recruitment of labour force which operated in position of monopsony, on behalf of the interests of the mine owners, were forwarded by bilateral political, economic agreements between the dominant South African economy and other satellites states in order to

create an even more organic and integrate economic and political framework that could sustain the process of accumulation of capital. The *Modus vivendi* signed in 1903 by the South African government and the Portuguese colonial administration of Mozambique assured a stable flow of migrant labour, it was updated until 1974 (Munslow, 1983). This shows the structural and long term relation that linked the capitalist mode of production and migrant labour in the region and at the same time has proved the fact that the South African connection integrated on an unequal base different countries and different social formations within the regional division of the labour, compelling the satellites to “specialize” themselves in the selling of their labour force.

The Southern African mines have been historically exploited thanks to two kinds of migrant labour: unskilled workers recruited in the fringes of the region and skilled workers imported from Europe.

The regional migrant labour system of unskilled workers has been fuelled by a strict control of the mobility of the workers to avoid that the workers could choose where to sell their labour force, and to settle a racial division of labour in the mines and settlers plantation and a sexual division of labour in the household that separated the place of maintenance of labour force from its renewal (Burawoy, 1980).

The Industrial Conciliation Act (1924), the Master and Servant Act, the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act (1953), the Native Act Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents) all together expressed in racial terms the ideological content of the law (Wolpe, 1980: 308-310).

This regulation of the circulation of the labour force intended to separate the workers from the household and the place of the production from the place of social reproduction. In this way the capitalists could avoid to afford the welfare and social costs of the reproduction of the labour force externalizing them on the women labour, not monetised, in rural areas and pay wages below the minimum standard.

As Palmer, Parson wrote:

*Elements of the pre-capitalist system were deliberately permitted to survive under capitalism...between the first decade of twentieth century in the south and the third decade in the north of Southern Africa, there were created variations of the “dual economy” which kept African families split but constantly moving between rural and urban “reserves” or settler estates.*

(Parson, Palmer, 1982: v).

It has been established an interdependent relation between the productive worker and the reproductive worker, since the remittances of a portion of the wages earned in town helped the social reproduction of the household in the rural areas. Within the household the non-monetised work of the women, sustained the worker providing a sort of social “welfare” in the period of injury, in the period between the labour contracts and when he was not more able to work. The regulation of the movement of the people between the place of work and “home” prevented the stabilization of the households in the urban areas, which would have meant more costs of settlement, nurturing, education, infrastructures, etc.

The migrant labour was necessary to maintain this form of the production since it forwarded stable interrelation between rural and urban areas, town and countryside and it expressed the conservation of reciprocal obligation of the family.

The migrant labour system should be understood as a cheap form of labour, in which the state and the racist ideology appear as means to reproduce segregation and racial discrimination and to reproduce a particular mode of production. However, since it benefits mines owners, providing cheap and constant labour force, it implies, at the same time, political costs that the state brings to maintain and enforce this stable flow of cheap labour force.

Participation in the migrant labour has tended to be incompatible with employment in advanced and skilled positions (Arrighi, 1973:216-217) since more qualified jobs were reserved, thanks to the legislative and repressive action of the state, to white workers, which organized in

chauvinist trade union, pressed the state to hold the *colour bars* and thus their privileged positions in the division of the labour.

The colour bars and the system of *pass laws* erected a system of control and segmentation of the mobility of different sections of the labour force (Legassick, 1975).

The reproduction of a system of migrant labour was based on the inability of the migrant workers as a group to press the state institutions which subordinate them to other fractions of the labour force. Under the capitalist state the migrant is treated as a right-less subject with no rights of residence, representation, citizenship: he has no political rights and only limited legal rights in the urban areas. The label of “foreign workers” was used with the aim to prevent the stabilization of the migrant workers in the urban areas and the relative claims of citizenship.

As Wolpe explained the apartheid regime was not simply the extending of the policy of separate development, it expressed the will to maintain the rate of surplus value in face of the intensification of the pressures of white workers and of the deterioration of pre-capitalist economies that sustained the overall reproduction of the labour force (Wolpe, 1982).

It not only provided cheap labour and white labour aristocracy but split black workers on a regional and sectorial scale. The new division and control of the territory and populations corresponded to the conflicting demands of wage and labour processes differentials that existed between mine and agricultural sectors and the industrial production (Martin, 1990, cap.11). The first two needed an unskilled, temporary and prevalently foreign semi-proletariat labour force, the latter needed a more qualified, stable and permanent urban workers (fully proletarianized). Influx controls carefully prevented the lure exerted by the industrial sector where better wages were paid would operate.

In the 1970s migrant labourers accounted for the 80% of the blacks employed (Wilson, 1972:109-110). Thanks to the monopolistic access to the labour reservoirs, as Malawi, Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho, Transkei, which were constructed through the limitations of labour reserves in the urban areas, migrant labour was able to be reproduced by the concomitant and



coordinated actions of the different states and recruiting agencies. In these countries there is no household which has not been affected by migrant recruitment in the mines (Cohen, 1982: 101).

The decline in the contribution of the Reserves and other external areas to the subsistence necessary for the reproduction of the labour force undermined the whole structure of the production. Here lies, the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist mode of production in Southern Africa since it created rural and urban impoverishment that in turn posed several constraints to the social reproduction also of the urban workers which started to exert pressures in the form of class struggle towards the apartheid state.

The inability of the migrant labour system to sustain itself reverberate on the reproduction of the labour force and increasingly pushed Africans to struggle for better conditions of life in the *compounds*. The conflict was based on competition over the redistribution of income within the working class. Thus there is no simple correlation between productive levels in rural areas and migrant labour while social, political and other economic conditions and imperatives may affect this. Migrant labour cannot be taken as given but it is created and reproduced by the conjunct actions of the states and the private enterprises. Thus whether the state disengage itself from the separation of the geographical places of the maintenance and renewal of the labour force, because it is pressed by internal or external forces and challenges, the migrant labour system can also disappear. The political independences of the Portuguese colonies, led by the guerrilla movements FRELIMO and MPLA respectively in Mozambique and Angola, the struggle for independence in Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe and the growing importance of the African trade unions, meant that the South African government would have to become more dependent on internal migrant labour.

The creation of Bantustans reflects the need to internalize the labour force supply since the geo-political balance in the region was severely altered and the pillars that sustained the spatial, political and economic expansion of the apartheid throughout the region, were in ruins. As Ruth First argued the 1980s represented a big change in the pattern of recruiting and of mobilization of the labour force in the mines (First, 1982). The Southern African case shows that a system of

migrant labour is jeopardized whether and when external labour reservoirs gains political autonomy and when the social and economic contradictions on which the system was based explodes in the form of internal/external fronts of resistance.

### **Crisis and Structural Adjustment: consequences on the pattern of migrant labour.**

The success of the nationalist cause depended greatly as in the cases of Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique and Angola, on the mobilisation of a mass support from rural peasantries. The resistance of African peasantries is not new, it has been expressed in extended and continuative practices of peasant insurgency manifested in the form of every day struggles against the agents, colonial and private, of the forced labour (Isaacman, 1993). Sabotages and desertions from work were expression of processes of active resistance to labour forced regimes.

Their support to the nationalist projects was mainly based on the claims of a redistribution and restitution of the land and access to political and civic rights. However, the “urban bias”, expressed in the national policies and institutions of the neo-independent Southern African states, aimed to extract and transfer value from the rural countryside to the urban sector to sustain the expenses for industrialization efforts and urban consumption (Bryceson, 2000: 53).

The peasants have been always subjected to such value transfer, and then exerted by the colonial authorities and/or local chiefs, which had counterproductive effects and posed disincentives to peasant production. The influences of the global crises, a crises of over-production and over-accumulation of systemic nature (Arrighi, 2002), manifested in a period of permanent stagflation 1973-1993 (Brenner, 1998) could not be refrained neither by the exponential augmentation of the gold value, remained the last store of the value. The South Africa crisis was linked to the constantly dropping real revenue. Differently from the crises of the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was of technological nature and that of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, determined by the lack of stable supply of cheap labour power, this was the result of the increasingly expensive exploitation of low

grade ore in relation to the competition of North American and Australian gold and to the general tendency of declining terms of trade (Saul, Gelb, 1973).

The crisis was characterized by an escape in the financial speculation engendered by the process of demonetization of the gold (Bracking, 1999), and by the decisions of the International Financial Institutions to raise the interest rates, which linked with the tendency of the elites to perpetuate politics of borrowing to sustain the developmentalist/nationalist projects, gave in turn life to the enormous burden of the debt.

The almost universal implementation of the IMF and World Bank sponsored prescriptions, determined by the enforcement of the acceptance to adopt Structural Adjustment Programmes by the African countries as political conditionality to have access to the international funds of credit and “aid”, caused changes in the economic and social viability of African peasantries.

The instruments to overcome the crises where deregulation, devaluation of the currency, liberalization of trade and finance, high rates of interest, politics of austerity, cuts to the social expenditure, privatization of public sectors and social services but above all the mechanisation, down scaling of the plants and retrenchments of the labour force. The Chamber of Mines in the end of 70s started to cut recruitment of Mozambican miners. In 1987, 200,000 African miners lost their jobs in South Africa (Maloka, 1997). The protraction of the crises undermined one of the two pillars of the strategies of livelihood of rural peasantries which had combined wage works in the mines and settler plantations and household subsistence production which the dualistic institutions of colonial governance had contributed to mould, in order to survive (O’Laughlin, 2000).

No more agents scatter across the region controlling migrant men to extract cheap labour, which made increasingly rural families dependent on commodities and money income for consumption and for financing investment in their own agricultural production. Rather we assist to the redundancy of the workers in the production system and thus to the erosion of the pattern of labour migration that has important consequences for rural life.

The other pillar of the rural livelihood depended on the access of the land for rural peasantries.

As Bernstein argued, the end of 1970s coincided with the final wave of major land redistributive reforms (Bernstein, 2002). The era of Structural Adjustment and liberalization has opened new opportunities for land grabbing at the expense of peasants in many parts of Southern Africa, by local and foreign interests or alliance between them. The international forces restructured international investments patterns through investments in highly capital-intensive production facilities on a global scale, including food production and manufacturing plants, giving a push in the globalization of markets, privatization of land tenure and in the commercialization of agriculture.

The analysis of the land reforms in Zimbabwe and South Africa (Bernstein, 2004, Moyo 2000, Cliffe, 2000) show the different interests mediated in these reforms and the logic they obeyed.

Even though there have been differences in their actuation between the two kinds of reforms they can be both inserted in “market led” World Bank sponsored approaches. In both countries the claims of redistribution, restitution and change in the racial bias of land tenure have been simply disregarded. In South Africa the commitment to redistribute the 30% of the national land expressed in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (1994) represented a part of the poverty policy for rural South Africa (Department of Land Affairs, 1999). However the principle which regulated the land reform has been the respect of the property rights. The reform was based on the logic *willing buyer/willing sellers* and the state simply mediated this relation through the conditional concessions of grants. The poor and landless people where *de facto* excluded since they would have to bring the risk, face the up front costs, build on their own education and farming skills required for modern farming. In eight years only 1.2% of the land, previously occupied by Afrikaners, had been redistributed (Lebert, 2001). This process excluded the 70% of the rural population from the redistribution process: for 7 millions of people which live on 65,000 commercial white farms and for 12 millions of African who still live in the *homelands* nothing changed (Braeckman, 2003).

Far from adopting a programme which would favour the access to the land for the landless people, the female headed households and the dispossessed, denied for one hundred years of this

fundamental right, the ANC government has undertaken the modernization of the rural system centred on the exportation of primary commodities, delivered by highly technologic farms (capital-intensive), towards the international markets.

This represents government's attempt to introduce a wilder commercialization of land, and to promote the interests of a black agrarian entrepreneurial class, not those of the property-less.

We have to understand the crisis in the context of the operation of global forces and local class antagonism, it is this interaction that determines the character of the crises (Bush, Szeftel, 2000).

The household unit is even more an unstable unit, and there is no clearer divide from household subsistence production and migrant wage labour, rural households increasingly have to combine food production with different ways of generating income.

As Bush and Cliffe argued in their writing on agrarian reforms in migrant labour society, i.e. in societies where agrarian capital (national or international) dominates land ownership and production processes, and where the combination of "wage and hoe" is a necessary prerequisite to reproduce the labour force, they should be concentrated on the overwhelming majority of rural dwellers, of jobless and landless people rather than, as in the colonial era, on rich peasants (Bush, Cliffe, 1984: 87). Uprooted from their lands and from the relative cohesion of their social structures, aggravated by the liberalization and commercialization of land ownership and tenure, considered as redundant as unskilled workers, defined as illegal and over-numbered, they represent the disregards of the production and labour processes that now do not need them anymore. They are the scum of the capitalist civilization which excludes them including them, labelling as expression of obsolete and archaic social and economic modes of production. It pushed them in the *terra di mezzo*, in that space, geographical and social, where they are isolated, increasingly atomised and exposed to any kind of social, political and economic marginalization and insecurity.

Word count: 6,593

## Bibliography:

- Amin, S.** (1995) "Migrations in Contemporary Africa", in Baker, J., Aina, T.A. (eds), *The Migrations Experience in Africa*. Sweden, The Nordic Africa Institute.
- Arrighi, G., Saul, J. S.** (1973). *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa*. London/New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Arrighi, G.** (1979). "Peripheralization of Southern Africa, I, Changes in Production Processes", *Review*, III, 2, autumn, pp.161-191
- Arrighi, G.** (2002). "The African Crisis", *New Left Review* 15, May-June, pp. 5-36.
- Barrat Brown, M** (1995). *Africa's choices: thirty years of the world Bank*. London: Penguin.
- Bernstein, H.** (2002). "Land Reform: Taking a Long(er) View", *Journal of Agrarian Change*, vol.2, n.4, October.
- Bernstein, H.** (2003). "Land Reform in Southern Africa in World Historical Perspective", *Review of African Political Economy*, vol.30, n.96, pp.203-226.
- Birmingham, D.** (1992). *Frontline Nationalism in Angola and Mozambique*. London: James Currey.
- Bozzoli, B.** (1983). "Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol.9, n.2.
- Braeckman, C.** (2003). "Une Reforme Agraire Bloqué", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September.
- Brenner, R.** (1998). "The Economics of Global Turbulence: a Special Report on the World Economy", 1950-98, *New Left Review*, 1/229, May-June, pp.39-137.
- Brenner, R.** (1977). "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism", *New Left Review*, 1/104, July-August, pp.25-92.
- Bryceson, D., Kay, C., Mooji, J.** (2000). *Disappearing Peasantries: Rural labour in Africa, Asia and Latin America*. London, ITDG Publishing.
- Bundy, C.** (1979). *The Rise and the Fall of South Africa Peasantry*. London: Heinemann.
- Burawoy, M.** (1980). "Migrant Labour in South Africa and United States", in Nichol, T. (1980) *Capital and Labour: studies in the capitalist labour process*. London, Athlone Press.
- Bush, R., Szeftel, M.** (2000). "Commentary: the struggle for land", *Review of African Political Economy*, 27, n.84, pp.173-180.
- Bush, R., Cliffe, L.** (1984). "Agrarian Policy in Migrant Labour Societies: Reform or Transformation in Zimbabwe?", *Review of African Political Economy*, n.29, pp.77-94.
- Cliffe, L.** (2000). "Land Reform in South Africa", *Review of African Political Economy*, n.84, pp. 273-286.
- Cohen, R.** (1988). *The New Helots. Migrants in the International Division of Labour*. Aldershot: Gower
- Cooper, A.D.** (1999). "The Institutionalization of Contract Labour in Namibia", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol.25, n.1, March, pp.121-138.
- First, R.** (1976). *Black Gold, The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant*. Center of African Studies, Eduardo Mondlane University, Sussex: The Harvester Press,
- Gutkind, P.C.W., Wallerstein, I.** (1985). *The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa* (second edition). London/Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Harris, N.** (2002). *Thinking the Unthinkable: the immigration myth exposed*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Harris, N.** (1996). *The New Untouchables: the immigration in the new world order*. London: Penguin.
- Harvey, D.** (1982). *The Limits to Capital*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Isaacman, A.F.** (1993). "Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa" in Cooper, F., Isaacman, A.F., Mallon, E.F., Roseberry, W., Stern, J.S. (1993) *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America*.
- Lebert, T.** (2001). "Timbering at the edges, Land reform in South Africa 1994-2001". Report for

the International Conference on land access., Bonn 19-23 March.

- Legassick, M.** (1975). "South Africa: forced labour, industrialization and racial differentiation".  
in Harris, R., *The Political Economy of Africa*, New York/London: Wiley.
- Magubane, M. B.** (1979) *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa*.  
London/New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Maloka, T.** (1997). " Mines and Labour Migrants in South Africa", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 10, N.2, June.
- Marks S., Trapido, S.** (1987). *The politics of race, class and nationalism in twentieth-century South Africa*. London: Longman,.
- Martin, W. G.** (1990). *Semi-peripheral States in the World-Economy*. New York, Greenwood Press.
- Martin, W. G.** (1987). "Incorporation of Southern Africa, 1870-1920", *Review*, X, 5/6, pp.849-900.
- Martin, W. G., Wallerstein I., Dickinson T.** (1980). "Household Structures and Production Processes" *Review*, V, 3, 1982, pp.437-458.
- Max, K.** (1964). *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*. London, Pinter.
- Marx, K.** (1968). *The German Ideology*. Moscow, Progress Publishers.
- Marx, K.** (1973). *Grundrisse*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Marx, K.** (1976). *Capital: a critique of the Political Economy*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Miles, R.** (1982). *Racism and Migrant Labour: a Critical Text*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Miles, R.** (1987). *Capitalism and Unfree Labour: Anomaly or necessity*. London, Tavistock Publications.
- Moyo, S.** (2000). "The Political Economy of Land Redistribution in Zimbabwe 1990-1999", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 26, n.1, pp.5-28.
- Munslow, B.** (1983). *Mozambique: Revolution and its Origins*. London/New York: Longman.
- O'Laughlin, B.** (2000). " Class and Customary: The ambiguous legacy of *Indigenato* in Mozambique", *African affairs*, 99, 394, pp.5-42.
- O'Laughlin, B.** (2002). "Proletarianisation, Agency and Changing Rural Livelihood: Forced Labour and Resistance in Colonial Mozambique", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 28, n.3.
- Palmer, R., Parson, N.** (1983). *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa*. London: Heinemann.
- Saul J.S., Gelb J.** (1986). *The crisis in South Africa*. Monthly Review Press, New York.
- Van Onselen, C.** (1976). *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933*. London: Pluto Press
- Wallerstein, I.** (1974). *The modern world-system: capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world economy in the sixteenth century*. New York, Academic Press.
- Wilson, F.** (1972). *Migrant Labour*. Johannesburg, South African Council of Churches.
- Wolpe, H.** (1980). " Capitalism and cheap labour power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid" in Wolpe, H. (1980) *The Articulation of Modes of Production*. London, Routledge.
- Wood, C.H.** (1982). "Equilibrium and Historical-Structural Perspective on Migration", *International Migration Review*, 16(2), pp.298-319.
- Zolberg, A.** (1981). "International Migration in Political Perspective", in Kritz, M.M. *et al.* (1981) *Global Trends in Migration*. New York: Center for Migration Studies.