PERSISTENCE AND CHANGE IN THE
SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR MIGRATION SYSTEM -
A PHASE MODEL

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The labour migration system of South Africa is noted for its long history. In the local context the combination of two unique 'push' and 'pull' factors have effected the persistence of this system for over half a century. Influx control in the urban employment centres and communal tenure in the rural areas have jointly worked to slow down rural-urban inflows and have prevented the permanent stabilisation of rural-to-urban migrants in centres of employment. However, in recent times the legitimacy and effectiveness of influx control regulations have become the subject of considerable debate, whilst the pressure on arable land held in communal tenure in the rural areas is steadily increasing. The question arises, then, whether South Africa's labour migration system can continue to exert such a tight control over its labour force in future without seriously damaging the economy. In the light of these pressures, South Africa's labour migration system may be in need of revision.

This paper traces the institutionalisation of the migratory labour system in South Africa and identifies some of the strains to which the labour force working within the constraints of the system have been subjected in more recent times.

1. THE PATTERN OF LABOUR MIGRATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

In Southern Africa, as in other parts of Africa the dominant pattern of labour migration is of a cyclical nature. Rural migrants spend a portion of their adult lives in wage labour away from their rural places of origin and return-migrate periodically. Cyclical migration is consistent with South Africa's apartheid policy in that it effectively controls the movement of black people and the rate of black urbanisation. The migrant labour system of South Africa perpetuates the idea that black workers of rural origin shall enter the urban-industrial labour centre in a working capacity only. All other requirements of workers - including political rights and social security needs, are to be met in their rural areas of origin.

The South African migrant labour system is extremely flexible (Prothero 1974: 38) in that it allows employers to adjust the size of

their labour force to the demands of the market. The system guarantees
that during a downturn in the economy employers need not be saddled
with a labour surplus. The cost of maintaining this flexible supply of
labour is minimal as workers' social needs are largely to be met in
the rural areas of origin. It is assumed that basic wages and simple
working and living conditions are adequate for a migrant labour force.
In any case the high turnover rate of contract workers should counteract
any negative effects arising from a low standard of living and basic working
conditions.

Migrants typically form a substratum in the society in which
they enter in a working capacity only. Social benefits are pared to a
minimum, as it is understood that such benefits that are offered accrue
only to the worker and not to his family whose needs will be adequately
covered in the rural area of origin. Regardless of actual marital
status, migrants are typically treated as single men. Until very
recently, migrant wage rates tended to be based on this consideration
(cf Wilson 1942; Wilson 1972a).

The contract labour system in South Africa effectively pre-
cludes job mobility in the urban-industrial centres, hence aspirations
for occupational aspirations which arise after the initial migration
act also have to be met in the area of origin, a point to which we
shall return later. In town, migrants are typically employed as
unskilled workers for a contract period of approximately one year to
eighteen months. The migrant labour system denies migrant workers
the right to bring their families to live with them in town and limits
their opportunities to actively seek work in occupations and geographical
districts of their choice. Strict regulations control the entry of rural-
based workseekers into the labour centres. Officially, rural migrant
workers must be recruited in the home district. Loss of employment is
automatically followed by an intermittent return to the home district
where workseekers must wait to be recruited afresh. However, in
practice, workseekers manage to circumvent these rules and regulations
to a certain extent (cf Hofmeyr 1984).

Before 1968, migrant workers of rural origin could qualify for

urban rights in terms of long service with a single employer or in terms of
uninterrupted residence at one approved urban address. However,
after 1968 all rural migrants were allowed to enter the urban areas
as contract workers only. Contracts were renewable annually.
In more recent times the system of renewing contracts has been
streamlined but tight controls still remain effective.

2. TWO OPPOSING VIEWS OF LABOUR MIGRANCY

In justification of the migrant labour system it has been
pointed out that contract labour has simply been superimposed upon a
more traditional way of life in which warriors and hunters spent
long periods away from their families[1]. It is argued that the
traditional social system was organised in such a way that it could
cope with the absence of the male members of the community for longer
periods of time. In this way of thinking, the traditional division
of labour between the sexes is a reflection of the rural community's
capacity to cope with labour migrancy.

However, this type of argument is not acceptable in most
quarters. The migrant labour system has variously been criticised
for its disruptive effect on family life, and also because it acts as
a drain on the rural economy. Furthermore, the working and living
conditions for migrant contract workers are viewed as inhuman and
exploitative (Wilson, 1972a, b; Agency for Industrial Mission 1976).
Most critics of the system are genuinely amazed that labour migrancy
in Southern Africa has persisted for so long.

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1) Linkages between warfare and migration are not uncommon in the
    field of migration. For example, Kubat and Hoffmann-Nowotny
    (1981: 324) demonstrate the similarity between migration and
    military service, drawing mainly on historical observations of
    the institution of *Reislaufen*. In their view, military service,
    like hunting, is essentially a variant of the roving principle,
    which they postulate as the chief motivator of migration. Moving
    closer to home Rosen-Prinz and Prinz (1978: 8) compare warfare
    with migration in their historical review of the migrant labour
    system in Swaziland.

At this juncture one should mention that critics are divided
in their long-term forecasts for the migrant labour system. According
to one school of thought, circular migration must inevitably give way
to one-way migration at some stage.   In this way of thinking, circular
migration represents an economic disequilibrium which must eventually
be resolved.   In contrast to international migration elsewhere,
South Africa's migrant labour system has built-in props which act as
'boosters' to artifically control migration, ostensibly for the benefit
of both the supply and the demand side.   If these props are removed,
the migrant labour system in its present form will collapse and
equilibrium will be restored.

According to a second viewpoint, the migrant labour system
has persisted mainly because it has become a regular feature of South
African society.   Labour migrancy is an institution, and as such,
its removal, however desirable from a human rights point of view,
will have wide-reaching consequences (cf Nattrass 1977; Bell 1972:
355-356 for a relevant discussion of the Southern African situation;
for a similar viewpoint concerning South American circular migration
cf Laite 1978).

3. A PHASE MODEL OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MIGRANT LABOUR SYSTEM

Viewing the South African migrant labour system as an institution
goes a long way towards explaining its persistence. Contrary to popular
opinion the migrant labour system has not remained static.   As any
institution, it has evolved and undergone substantial changes in time.
It is suggested here that the adaptation of the migrant labour system
to changing circumstances has played a major part in ensuring its
long-term stability.

An institution is shaped not only by the rules and regulations
which are formulated within its charter.   People who pass through an
institution also determine its course.   Similarly, migrant workers in
reacting to the migrant labour system have helped to shape the migrant
labour system as it operates today.   As we shall see later, the migrant
labour system, in the course of its evolution, may not always have been

the focus of negative reactions on the part of the workers.

In the following section, we shall briefly distinguish between three phases or institutional models of labour migrancy in Southern Africa. The phases are described in chronological order of their appearance but the descriptions are intended to be typical rather than historical. We shall distinguish between the early, the classical, and the modern migration system.

Against this institutional background, we shall seek to distill the changing significance of cyclical migration in terms of personal development and life satisfaction for the individual migrant.

3.1 Phase I: Early target migration

Labour migrancy was introduced into Southern Africa in the late 19th century when cheap labour was needed in the rapidly developing mining industry. Large-scale mining and agricultural enterprises were the first big employers of labour migrants. At this time labour was not forthcoming and negative incentives, such as hut taxes, were employed to force tribesmen to join the migrant labour force for short intervals in order to obtain cash for tax purposes (Skinner 1965).

In this early stage of labour migrancy, recruitment and conditions of employment are not sufficiently regulated so one cannot speak of a regular institution. Clearly, labour migrancy at this stage is beneficial only to the demand side. At this time, tribesmen may have regarded the migrant labour system as an external factor which was imposed upon the regular pattern of tribal life. Nevertheless, one might make the supposition that while the system of labour migrancy was still in its infancy, it did not pose a threat to the tribal way of life. In this early phase of labour migrancy, village life is the dominant mode of existence for labour migrants, interrupted only by some few brief spells in the work centre. The migrant career is typically of short duration and by mid-life a villager can expect to make no further trips to labour centres.

3.2 Phase II: Classical target migrancy

3.2.1 The institutionalisation of classical target migration

During this second phase, the system of labour migration is firmly established as a regular feature of the South African economy. The push and pull forces which regulate labour movements between the supplier and receiving areas are fully developed and ensure that industrial and agricultural needs for seasonal and contract labour are regularly met.

This period is also characterised by a change in the motivational structures underlying participation in labour migrancy. Whilst negative incentives still play a prominent role, they are gradually supplemented by positive motivations. The typical targets of the early phase of labour migrancy, such as the need to pay hut taxes, remain, but additional targets emerge, such as the need to make bridal wealth payments, purchase cattle, and fulfil modern consumer aspirations for clothing, bicycles, modern farming implements, education, etcetera.

More importantly, as labour migrancy becomes more institutionalised it also becomes an integral part of the traditional way of living. Tribal people become more accustomed to the benefits of cash wages and develop novel expectations and tastes for modern goods. At the same time seasonal and contract work away from home is taken only during the non-agricultural season and during other times in which labour is not needed at home. Thus, labour migrancy dovetails with subsistence farming and the two lifestyles are by and large compatible.

Social scientists observing the migrant labour scene during this classical period remark that labour migrancy has become a way of life among some tribesmen (cf Southall 1952; van Velsen 1961). It is no longer superimposed upon tribal life as in the early period, but is fully integrated into the traditional lifestyle of rural Africans. As migrants become better acquainted with the workings of a cash economy, they also learn to appreciate some of its advantages. In contrast to the migration of the earlier period, migration now becomes 'voluntary'

in the sense that there is a desire to acquire cash to fulfil needs
which occur from time to time in the course of a lifetime.

3.2.2   The rationality of classical migration

The classical phase of labour migrancy is possibly the only
period in which the benefits of labour migration outweigh the costs
for both the supply and the demand side.   According to Sheila van der Horst
(as cited by Bell 1972: 355) the system at one time "represented a
reasonable compromise for both African and employer".   It is most
certainly this period which springs to mind when economists such as
M.P. Todaro and Elliot J. Berg argue some of the more beneficial
aspects of labour migration.   The theory of the backward-sloping
labour supply put forward by Berg (1961) accounts for the typical
motivations of the classical labour migrant.   It also justifies low
wages for migrants.   According to this theory, low wages need not
depress work satisfaction among migrants but will ensure a constant
supply of labour.

During the classical migration phase, labour migrancy
becomes a familiar routine in many rural communities which derive
maximum benefit from it by deploying labour at both fronts, the urban
and the rural.   The classical migrant typically dovetails his
agricultural work and wage labour.   Berg (1961) maintains that a
clever migrant is capable of operating successfully on two fronts
simultaneously: at the home base and at the workplace.   Thus, labour
migration supplements income derived from agricultural pursuits and
improves the standard of living in the home community.   Economic
theories depict the classical migrant of this period as a rational
man, who derives real benefits from the migrant labour system by
utilising his resources wisely and by finely timing his entries
and his exits into and out of the migrant labour system.   For example,
it is demonstrated that it can pay dividends for a rural community to
do without the labour of some members of its community for longer
periods of time if these migrants eventually find well-paying jobs
in the work centres and remit of their cash earnings to the home
community (Todaro 1971).

Under such circumstances it is also understandable that the
classical target migrant might have been willing to forego social
security benefits at the place of work.   It would be rational for
a migrant to minimise his consumption in the workcentre in order
to maximise the economic return on wage labour to the family left
behind.   In some instances, reduction of demands concerning working
and living conditions and social security benefits may have been
accepted by the migrant as the price to pay for instant cash earnings
(a similar argument is put forward by Hume, 1973,for migrant workers
in Europe).

In all probability the classical target worker, like his
predecessor, perceived the work situation in terms of its instrumental
value only.   The hardships endured to secure and keep a job until
a particular economic advantage was gained may simply have been
accepted as part of labour migrancy.   Older reports of labour
migration cite cases of migrants covering distances of hundreds of
kilometres on foot to come to work on the mines, the predominant
employers of migrant labour at the time.   Hardships, dangers and
indignities may have been the risks which a classical migrant thought
it necessary to endure in order to secure a cash income for his rural-
based family.

Some social scientists argue that the system of labour
migrancy can be beneficial to the rural community as long as the
community maintains strict control over the movements and allegiances
of its absentee members.   It follows that under such conditions the
migrant labour system need not pose a serious threat to the stability
of the rural family.

Just as labour migrancy in the early and classical era did
not necessarily disrupt the social fabric of the village, there is
evidence which suggests that the migrant labour force of the classical
era remains relatively unaffected by the negative influences of city life.
Contrary to initial expectations, the migrant labour system of this
era does not appear to cause widespread schizophrenia among migrants

who are forced to divide their lives between the city workplace and
the rural village.   As migrancy emerges as an accepted way of life
among rural blacks, labour migrants tend to adapt to alternating
lifestyles by compartmentalising value systems to suit the requirements
of a particular moment (Gluckman 1961).

3.2.3 Protective systems for the classical migrant worker

Certain mechanisms operate during this period of labour
migrancy which ensure the mental integrity of the migrant labourer.
Migrants typically set out to find wage labour with their peer group,
which continues to function as a support group throughout a migrant
lifetime (cf O'Connell 1980).   Having proved their manhood in the
world of work, members of the peer group return home periodically to
perform the social rituals required of each passing stage of life.
The initiation into the tribe perhaps being the most significant mile-
stone and common experience which forges enduring links between peer-group
members.   The members of this peer group work together, play together,
share the same living quarters in town, and reminisce about home life
during their spare time, and how they intend later to return home as
heroes.   During the classical period of labour migrancy, a certain
prestige is attached to labour migration, which is not only selective
of the fittest and most enterprising lads in the village, but also of
the best integrated.

Philip Mayer's (1961, 1962) work has given us many insights
into this type of 'encapsulation' of migrants in their peer groups.
The mechanism of encapsulation shields migrants from the negative
effects of urban life, and sustains them while they are exposed
to the trials and tribulations of a foreign working and living environ-
ment.   Classical migrant workers who are fully integrated into the
peer group system may remain naively unaware of their urban environment,
others may remain aloof by choice.   Mayer (1980) describes groups of
migrants who go to great lengths to uphold the traditional rural values
and consciously reject urban values as decadent and overly materialistic.
During the classical phase of labour migrancy, such groups are outwardly
conspicuous in that they shun modern western dress and continue to wear

traditional dress in town. In essence, it is perfectly possible for
the encapsulated migrant to be in the city but not of it.[1]

More importantly, encapsulation ensures the psychological well-
being of migrants removed from their home environment. Migrants involved
in such a support system retain the value system of the village intact.
The rural value system renders migrants immune to the corruptive in-
fluences of urban life and the migrant labour system. There is also
evidence to suggest that the classical migrant encapsulated in his peer
group experiences fewer urban-associated problems and may be able to
lead a fairly carefree life. The peer group is also the custodian of
traditional moral values. For example, burial societies ensure that
members are given a decent burial which conforms with traditional
custom. Mutual aid societies also guard against men neglecting their
family obligations.

It was most certainly expedient for employers to actively
support the encapsulation mechanism introduced by the migrant workers
themselves into the classical migrant labour system. Employers could
use encapsulation as a means to isolate migrant workers from the
mainstream of the emergent urban-based black workforce and accelerate
the substratification process within the workforce in the urban-industrial
centre. Also, a stratified workforce ensured a certain degree of
flexibility of the labour supply. Employers may have made calculations
along the following lines: as long as encapsulated migrant contract
workers retain the values of their 'homeboy' reference group, they will
not be inclined to make invidious comparisons with the emergent permanent
worker group concerning the latter's better working and living conditions,
and increased opportunities for job mobility. Moreover, the labour

1) Similar systems which serve to retain the interaction patterns of
    the place of origin, are known to operate in one-way as well as
    circular migration systems (Kubat, Hoffmann-Nowotny 1981: 319).
    According to Gans (1962) the ethnic groups encapsulated in "urban
    villages" may last indefinitely. Essentially, ethnic groups are
    the migrant's social organisations and represent a re-articulation
    of the social ties left behind.

force encapsulated in the peer group system will be disciplined within
its own ranks, and most importantly, it will be prepared to comply with
all the rules and regulations of the work organisation if these are
mediated through the peer group system.

During the classical era the encapsulation control mechanism
is also reflected in the socio-spatial arrangements at the place of
work. The worker compound separates contract migrants from the main-
stream of urban life. Members of the contract migrant workforce are
typically recruited through the 'homeboy' social network, and accommodated
in homogeneous 'homeboy' groups in the worker compound.

However, not all encapsulating peer groups of the classical
era are carry-overs from village life. During this period urban-based
groups are formed which fulfil similar roles. The ingoma dance groups
are a case in point. For purposes of this paper it is important that
the ingoma dance tradition among migrants is a reflection of both the
persistence and the adaptability of the migrant labour system. Therefore
it might be useful to describe the function of ingoma dance groups in
some detail.

The ingoma dance is typically a migrant dance with traditional
rural overtones, and members of the permanent urban labour force would
usually not wish to associate themselves with it. According to
H.J. Thomas (1983), an expert on ingoma dance among Durban migrants,
the dance may have its origin in tribal, warrior dance, but it has been
modified in the urban setting. To illustrate this point, Thomas cites
the case where ingoma dancers perform dance routines in the city which
differ substantially from those routines which are commonly danced in
their own areas of origin.

Ingoma dance groups became extremely popular among migrants
during the classical period of labour migration and are still sponsored
by employers of contract labour to this day. The ingoma dance appears
to have been encouraged by employers of labour to instil discipline into
the labour force at a time of widespread labour unrest in the 1930's.

At this time employers issued members of dance groups with badges
which also served to identify them as law-abiding elements in the
migrant labour force.   Even today, the ingoma dancers observed by
Thomas tend to identify themselves with the more peaceful elements
in the labour force.   In this connection it is perhaps telling that
the criteria currently used for judging the ingoma dances performed
in local competitions feature elements such as "unity of movement"
and "troop discipline".   Frequently the dance leader doubles as the
man in charge of the production team at work.

3.2.4 Social security during the classical phase of labour migrancy

From this discussion of the encapsulation mechanism we gain a
picture of the classical migrant as an essentially rural-oriented
worker who remains psychologically insulated from all facets of urban
life despite long-term exposure to the urban environment during a
migrant career.   This despite the fact that the classical target
worker tends to spend a greater proportion of his adult life in
the urban-industrial setting than the early target worker.   Never-
theless, the classical migrant, similar to his predecessor, retains
his rural frame of reference and is permanently reintegrated into
rural life by mid-life.   The final return to the rural home is not
an incisive, traumatic event, because the social network of the
village extends to the urban workplace.

Furthermore, the classical migrant has adapted to a system
which provides no social security benefits to its workers.   Under
such circumstances, intermittent periods of unemployment between con-
tracts are essential for the welfare of the classical migrant and his
family.   During periods of unemployment spent at the rural home rural
values are reinforced, and investments in rural security are made in
monetary terms and in the form of goodwill.   Remittances are frequently
made in the form of gifts to traditional leaders who keep rural resources,
such as land, in trust while migrants work in town.   During intermittent
returns to the area of origin, the migrant learns to fulfil his duties
and obligations in the home community.   For the classical migrant this
practice of role-playing is essential if he is to be reintegrated into

rural society as a full member of the local community after retirement
from urban-industrial work.

Thus, the migrant contract worker conforming and adapting to
the exigencies of the migrant labour system during the classical era
of labour migrancy makes regular social security payments throughout
his working lifetime.   Although the urban employers of the classical
era make no welfare payments to contract workers as such, labour migrancy
allows the migrant sufficient time off from work to make his own arrange-
ments.   It is also important to note that the migrant labour system of
the classical era requires that the gratification of many of the migrant's
social needs must be deferred until such time as the migrant returns
permanently to the family he has left behind in the rural village.
Thus, return migration is indeed the end-goal and the culmination of
the classical migrant's working life.

To conclude this discussion of the classical era of labour
migrancy, one might remark that this was the 'golden era' of labour
migration.   The classical era of labour migrancy is characterised
chiefly by compliance and adaptation of the workforce to a system
imposed upon a traditional way of life.   Theoretically, both the supply
and the demand side were blissfully unaware of or blind to the long-term
consequences of labour migrancy for the development of the labour
centre and the rural periphery.   In the next phase which follows
after the classical era of labour migrancy, the happy coexistence
between the employers and suppliers of labour gives way to a less
harmonious relationship.   Outwardly, the labour migration system of
the new era, which for the want of a better name, we shall call the
'modern' system, may differ very little from the classical one from
which it evolved.   However, some subtle differences exist.

3.3 Phase III: The modern migration system

The modern era sees several types of migrants and urban workers
rubbing shoulders at the workplace.   During the modern migration era
the ranks of the classical migrants are thinning (Mayer 1980).   There
remain some few pockets of encapsulated migrants, and one would expect the

migrants who conform to the classical pattern of migrancy to be
represented mainly in the older cohorts of the migrant labour force.

During the modern migration phase the meaning of migrancy
changes dramatically.   Superficially seen, the modern migrant's
motivations are possibly very similar to those of the classical
migrant.   However, the modern migrant operates within a revised set
of constraints.   In the modern era, the labour surplus of the less
developed rural areas has increased enormously, whilst the rural
resource base has become impoverished.   Under these circumstances,
the urban-industrial economy acts as a powerful magnet.   However,
stricter controls on migrant mobility are introduced during the
modern era which limit access to employment opportunities for
migrants of rural origin.   1968 Influx control legislation effect-
ively creates a permanent contract labour force of rural migrants
with few or no opportunities of status change.

Due to longer exposure to western-industrial influences,
the modern migrant's standard of living and expectations have risen
enormously.   The typical targets of classical migrancy included
sporadic cash requirements for bride wealth, investment in cattle,
and minimal education for children.   During the modern era these
classical targets have been transformed into permanently unsatis-
fied needs and wants.   As a consequent, the modern migrant has be-
come a slave to the migrant labour system.   The modern migrant is
a permanent target worker for the duration of a working lifetime
(Nelson 1976).   For the permanent target worker, the motivation
to migrate is economic necessity rather than sporadic cash needs.
Regular household expenses drain his earnings and make it virtually
impossible for him to save.   Thus, successful contact with the urban-
industrial world has improved the standard of living of modern migrants
and their dependents to the extent that it has become a liability.

In sum, the push forces propelling modern migrants to seek
urban wage labour are dominant.   This applies not only for the simple
targets of the classical era but for a succession of never-ending targets

commensurate with the raised expectations of this period. Expectations and the standard of living have risen to such an extent that wage incomes are needed to maintain an adequate standard of living and indeed to substitute for rather than to supplement the rural sub-sistence base. It is at this point that the classical target worker has become a permanent target worker and at this stage that the myth of the alternating circular migrant, the "man of two worlds" (Houghton 1960; Lipton 1980) is exploded by the emergence of the "man of no world", whose resource base is shrinking in one world and who is effectively denied access to another world (Schlemmer 1976, 1983).

During the modern period the long-term effects of labour migration on the rural social system have become more and more evident. Agricultural production has decreased due to over-utilisation of rural resources. Over-population has led to land shortages which in turn has diminished the carrying capacity of the land. Increased wealth in the form of cattle has led to extensive soil erosion and permanent settlement has negatively affected the agricultural yields. Structural constraints which further limit migrant access to the rural resource base include land reform and resettlement of rural people. In short, the rural resource base is steadily decreasing in the modern era.

Under these circumstances there is little incentive to invest in rural resources or to play-act in rural roles during a working life-time. The role of subsistence farming is assigned to those who are too young or too old to work in town (regarding the latter Dasgupta, 1981, speaks of senilization of rural communities). There are in-dications that the rural economy has adapted to this new attitude on the part of migrants by allowing for a lump sum investment in land later in life or at retirement rather than expecting migrants to build up goodwill in the rural community gradually in the course of a lifetime. At the urban end, many modern migrants isolate themselves from the peer group system in town. As a result the traditional rural authorities and the family left behind no longer have a tight hold on the migrant as in former days.

3.3.1 Quasi-stabilisation among modern migrants

Theoretically, the set of structural constraints outlined
above would set the scene in which circular and repeat migration
would gradually give way to one-way migration, and a large proportion
of the migrant contract labour force could be expected to settle
permanently in town. Under normal circumstances in which migration
patterns are an accurate reflection of the economic opportunity
structure, this set of constraints would have paved the way for one-
way migration. However, in South Africa, the apartheid system has
artificially retained the flexibility of the rural labour supply
through influx control legislation and has thereby created a
perpetuum mobile of cyclical migration. In South Africa, the
artificial bolstering of the urban push and the rural pull forces
has effectively stemmed one-way migration.

One must mention in passing that a small proportion of the
migrant workforce of the classical and modern era will have managed
to set foot permanently in town. This category of stabilised workers
of the classical era are the forefathers of the so-called urban blacks
of the modern era. In this connection it is important to note that
work and residential roles are closely interwoven in a Catch-22 type
situation in South Africa. Before 1968 a rural migrant might
qualify for urban residential rights either in terms of seniority
of residence or occupation, but in actual fact, it was not strictly
possible to qualify on one count only. In order to seek for work a
migrant had to have secured an accommodation base. However, accommodation
of a more formal nature was only granted to migrants who could provide
proof of formal employment. Nevertheless, at some stage enterprising
migrants who may have wished to achieve some type of urban security
solved this problem and became permanently or quasi-stabilised in town.
We use the term quasi-stabilised here, because as in so many other
parts of Africa, the rural "sheet-anchor" or rural "haven of safety"
(cf Brown *et al* 1970) has been retained.

It is perhaps more accurate to speak of quasi-stabilised
migrants rather than urban immigrants (denoting permanent residence

until death) in the Southern African context.   It has been observed
that a large proportion of South African migrants who have obtained
urban rights still maintain rural links and expect to retire to their
areas of origin.   In fact, these urban-based migrants may send their
children back to the rural home in their early stages of life, so the
migrants' offspring may effectively embark on a migrant career path
similar to that of their own.   This practice is better understood
if we consider that it has been policy to make the urban areas un-
attractive places to live in for blacks.   For example, until recently,
urban education facilities were purposely neglected in the urban areas
so that migrants would not be tempted to bring their children to be
educated in town (Bell 1972: 355; cf also Heisler 1974 for a similar
policy of retarding labour stabilisation in urban areas in Zambia).
We have already remarked on the lack of urban social security which
necessitates rural return at retirement age.

During the modern era, the high rate of unemployment following
the world recession has increased competition for jobs in the labour
force, and a modern migrant practising the career interruptions indulged
in by classical migrants would stand little chance of reentering the
migrant labour system at a later date.   Thus, planned returns to the
rural home for longer periods of time during a working lifetime have
been largely replaced by involuntary returns when a migrant has been
declared redundant by his employer or has lost his job.   Similarly,
older migrants may delay the final return home indefinitely if they
have no savings, because they stand little chance of regaining an
urban job.

In many aspects, then, the permanent target worker of the
modern era is almost indistinguishable from his more stabilised
counterpart.   Gone are the days when migrants left their workplaces
in town to assist with tasks in the rural areas during the agricultural
season.   Similarly, the timing of long leave to coincide with the
agricultural cycle has largely fallen by the wayside.   Only older
migrants remember the days when a target worker could afford to
interrupt his working career for longer periods between trips to town.

As time goes on, the obligatory report to the recruitment office in the rural home base introduced in the new era, has been streamlined and a contract worker has the opportunity to come back to his old job after his annual leave on the so-called call-in card system. On the other hand, since 1968 a migrant can theoretically no longer qualify for urban rights.

The recommendations of recently formed commissions of inquiry into labour matters have effectively tightened influx control regulations for migrant workers seeking employment to the advantage of blacks living permanently in the urban areas. On the other hand a court ruling of 1983 granted a migrant contract worker the right to bring his family to live with him in town on the grounds of continuous service. It remains to be seen if this ruling sets a precedence for migrants wishing to escape the restrictions of the migrant labour system. So far only isolated migrants have come forward to claim urban residential rights for their families. However, if larger numbers of migrants were to avail themselves of this advantage the distinctions between the contract and the permanent urban workforce would become minimal.

It would appear then, that unlike the clear-cut divisions in the black workforce described by Mayer (1961) in his classical work on labour migrancy of the earlier era, the distinctions between various classes of urban-industrial workers of the modern era tend to be more subtle. At this point it will be necessary to define the distinguishing characteristics of the early, classical, and modern migrant types in qualitative terms. Let us look at the manner in which migrants evaluate their working careers and at the quality of migrant life in general.

4. THE QUALITY OF MIGRANT LIFE

The distinction between the classical and the modern migrant can best be described in terms of differential quality of life. However, before attempting to make such an assessment, let us define quality of life.

4.1 A working definition of life quality

Obviously, the quality of life concept is a relative one.
There is no absolute standard of privilege or deprivation. The
concept of relative deprivation, the negative mode of life quality,
is literally as old as the hills and has variously come under scholarly
scrutiny in the last decades. Among others Stouffer *et al*. (1949),
Merton (1957), Davis (1959), Davies (1962), Runciman (1966), and Gurr
(1970) have provided new insights into the concept. More recently,
the concept of relative deprivation has been formalised in the so-
called gap theories of life satisfaction or deprivation (Andrews,
Withey 1976; Campbell *et al*. 1976; McKennell 1978; Andrews,
McKennell 1980; McKennell, Andrews 1980, 1983; Mason, Faulkenberry
1978; Michalos 1980, 1982). In this formal statement relative de-
privation or privilege lends itself to rigid empirical testing.

According to the gap-theory of life satisfaction, life satis-
faction is an aggregate of individual life satisfactions experienced in
various aspects or values in life; life satisfaction being defined as
the 'gap' between expectation and achievement in life in general or
in its various aspects and values.

Researchers are agreed that life satisfaction and deprivation
can be subjectively experienced and also measured at the global or
aggregate level as well as in specific facets of life. In its
theoretical and empirical application the gap model refers to both
objective and subjective evaluations of satisfactions, privileges,
achievements, and aspirations.

One might argue that the gap model does not take sufficient
cognisance of the important distinction between expectations and
aspirations. It is suggested here that the more subtle distinction
between aspiration and expectation made, for example, by Gurr (1970)
may be bracketted for the sake of simplicity and convenience by
entering only the more salient of the two elements into the
satisfaction equation. In the most simple case, expectations will
equal aspirations. Aspirations may also outstrip expectations,

in which case it may be more feasible to refer to the element which
most closely approximates the real-life standard of reference.
However, the subtle difference between aspiration and expectation
may qualify the end experience or life satisfaction.

This last point is important as it applies to the migrant
experience. Previous research undertaken by the author has re-
vealed that among older migrants it is expectations rather than
aspirations which tend to serve as a reference guide for evaluating
their life circumstances. It was also discovered that the aspirations
of older migrants, who might be expected to conform to the classical
model of migrancy, had been blunted by the recurrence of thwarted
aspirations. Thus, the aspirations of older migrants have frequently
been adjusted downwards to match the rewards which they have painfully
learnt to expect.

Gaps between achievement and aspiration can result from
various combinations of increases and decreases of constituent ele-
ments. For example, an increase in satisfaction occurs when achieve-
ment increases more rapidly than aspirations rise. An increase in
satisfaction is also manifest if aspirations increase more slowly
than achievements, or if aspirations decrease. In quantitative
terms, the resulting satisfaction may be equal in all three instances,
but a qualitative or experiential difference between these types of
satisfactions might be postulated.

This difference in the meaning of satisfaction can be ex-
pressed in terms of levels of satisfaction, using the level of aspiration
as the pegging point or reference standard for determining satisfaction
levels (Møller, Schlemmer 1981). Thus, one can refer to various
levels or orders of satisfaction, or alternatively to 'active' and
'passive' satisfaction. In the last case, 'passive' satisfaction
denotes that self-actualisation or personal development is singularly
lacking in the experience of satisfaction.

4.2 The quality of working life in successive phases of labour migrancy

Let us apply the concept of quality of life to the three types of migrants distinguished in this paper.

4.2.1 The quality of working life for early migrants

According to the gap model of quality of life outlined above, we would expect the early migrant to have suffered from negative job satisfaction. Motivations to migrate at this phase of migration history are determined wholly by so-called push forces. The labour exporting society sees little or no benefit of the work of their migrants because wage earnings are immediately reabsorbed by the labour importing society in the form of taxes.

4.2.2 The quality of working life for classical migrants

During the classical period of labour migrancy, the quality of working life may have reached a one-time peak, at least in theoretical terms. Motivations to join the labour force during this period have shifted towards the positive pole. Migrants are increasingly in a position to work the migrant labour system to their own advantage so that the rural community benefits from the cash income. As we have seen, particularly in the case of the prototypical classical migrant: Mayer's 'red' or 'encapsulated' migrant, the retention of the rural frame of reference serves to enhance the value of job benefits. Due to the fact that the rewards of work are exported from a higher developed economy into a less developed one, their value is instantly inflated. Furthermore, as we have pointed out, the preservation of a rural and less materialistic orientation through the encapsulated peer group tends to further enhance the value of urban rewards.

Thus, during the period of classical migrancy, achievements in the world of work are increasing at a faster rate than rural aspirations and expectations. In terms of the gap model of quality of life, the classical migrant contract workers are in a unique position to experience positive, albeit most certainly lower-order satisfactions from labour migrancy.

At this point we should perhaps emphasise that the job
satisfaction to be gained from contract work during the early and
classical era is purely of an extrinsic nature. Given the nature
of the menial jobs offered to migrant workers, this is to be ex-
pected. As one social scientist has wryly observed, only a robot
may derive intrinsic work satisfaction from menial work. Never-
theless, extrinsic rewards of work, such as cash income, may have
represented true value during the classical period of migrancy. As
we have noted earlier, its real value in the eyes of the migrant
was, in any case, likely to be inflated.

There is every reason to believe that the classical migrant
does not view the urban industrial setting as the arena in which to
achieve non-monetary gratifications from work. Higher-order gratifi-
cations from work are to be gained in the area of origin. To illustrate
this point, I wish to draw on some earlier research observations which
demonstrate how, from the classical migrant's point of view, the city
and the job is valued purely in instrumental terms. The conception
of the migrant contract worker in the city conveyed to the author by
male migrant workers in pre-independence Zimbabwe was that of a hunter
who stalks his prey in the city. As these workers explained: *"The
city is our hunting ground - we are only hunting here; our homes are
elsewhere in the country"*.

The hunter analogy is very apt. It projects an image of
the city as a dangerous and exciting place of work, which provides an
opportunity to demonstrate one's prowess and skills. Success in this
environment is also dependent upon an element of luck. The hunter
analogy evokes the notion of a series of forages and dangerous missions
into enemy territory to stalk and hunt down one's prey. The migrant-
hunter may have to wait for longer periods until he achieves a kill,
but this delay is worthwhile if the final outcome is positive. Most
importantly for our argument here is the idea that the spoils of the
hunt are not consumed at the place of the kill itself but are brought
back from the hunt to the home base. Here the successful hunter is
given a hero's welcome and the spoils of the hunt are consumed by the
family left behind.

4.2.3 The quality of working life for modern migrants

By contrast to the limited job satisfactions available to
classical migrants, the opportunities for deriving work rewards are
far more varied for modern migrants and include higher as well as
lower-level satisfactions.   Thanks to his greater commitment to
urban-industrial work, the permanent target worker may be able to
achieve some occupational continuity and mobility which provides a
basis for the intrinsic experience of satisfaction from work. Never-
theless, the negative modes predominate as the majority of the contract
migrants of the modern era still occupy the lower rungs of the job hierarchy.

Regarding extrinsic job satisfaction, the value of monetary
rewards of work is deflated for modern migrants due to rising costs of
living and migrants' expectations of a higher standard of living. It
is also possible and recent research is suggestive of this supposition,
that the modern migrant is less compliant than his classical counter-
part and is therefore less willing to suffer the indignities and in-
justices of the migrant labour system.   Modern migrants appear also
to be less willing or capable of relying on the rural social security
system during periods of involuntary unemployment as evidenced in
recent labour unrest in South Africa.   Whereas the classical migrant
might accept the migrant labour system as a necessary evil and might
even attempt to rationalise his membership in the system, the modern
migrant will tend to stress the injustices inherent in the system.
Thus, the modern migrant is more likely to feel alienated and frustrated
than his predecessor.   Under such circumstances, we might expect that
the larger proportion of modern migrants would be dissatisfied with
their job situation.

So far, we have considered primarily the behaviour and actions
of individual migrants.   During the modern era there is, however, some
evidence of a shift from individual toward group reactions among labour

migrants.[1]   Labour strike actions which are typically motivated by pay issues, are fairly common occurrences in the modern era.   In fact, one might consider whether the isolation of hostel-dwelling migrants does not serve to reinforce solidarity among the ranks of dissatisfied marginal workers during periods of unrest.   Despite this new trend toward mass strikes the dominant pattern of non-conformity tends to be based on individual rather than collective reactions.   In the modern era there are still considerable constraints on migrants' participation in collective bargaining processes.   Unionization among contract migrants is still very low.[2]   It is also individuals rather than groups who seek to penetrate the urban system in terms of the quasi-stabilization mechanism discussed earlier or who seek voluntary withdrawal from the labour migration system through return-migration.

Apart from collective solutions, what options are open to individual migrants seeking a higher quality of life in the modern era of labour migration?   From a theoretical point of view, one might stipulate that the modern migrant would have to give up his migrant status in order to achieve satisfaction in all spheres of life. Expressed in structural terms, this implies that in order to achieve personal well-being the migrant would have to resolve the inconsistencies inherent in the migrant status.   This solution inevitably calls for the individual to shed his migrant status and opt either for permanent return migration or for permanent settlement in town.

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1)   This is a basic distinction in the macro-theoretical explanation of migration processes put forward by Hoffmann-Nowotny (1981; cf also Richmond's, 1983, review article).   Hoffmann-Nowotny argues that structural tensions generate anomy which may be individual, collective, or class-based.   According to this view there is a tendency in modern mass migration for immigrants to be limited to certain lower levels of satisfaction in terms of "undercasting", which could lead to renewed migration.   In the South African context migrant undercasting, which has been described here in terms of encapsulation mechanisms, is inextricably related with cyclical migration rather than stabilization in town.

2)   A 1978 survey conducted among Durban-based migrants revealed some 7% trade union membership among the 510 Zulus included in the sample.

As an aside, one might remark that the classical worker was probably more willing than the modern migrant to resolve his status inconsistencies by straddling two worlds, the rural and the urban. For example, from the viewpoint of the classical migrant the occupation of a lower status position on a particular status dimension in town may have been cancelled out by the fact that a higher status position could be attained on the same dimension in the rural context.

The modern migrant, however, appears to be more determined to resolve the status inconsistencies, which are by definition inherent in the migrant status, in one world. Small minorities of modern migrants have managed to circumvent influx control regulations in order to settle permanently in town with their families. However, contrary to popular thinking, recent research suggests that the typical modern migrant seeks a rural rather than an urban solution to the split-personality of the migrant (Møller, Schlemmer 1979, 1981). That is, under the given circumstances, the majority of modern migrants in South Africa would opt for permanent rural rather than urban residence if equivalent opportunities to earn a living were available.[1] By the same token, quasi-stabilisation rather than permanent settlement in the work centre is the more popular option for migrants seeking to resolve their status inconsistencies during a working lifetime. The increasing numbers of migrants who are seeking alternative accommodation during their working lifetime as illegal lodgers and peri-urban settlers are examples of modern migrants' attempts to ease some of the strains and inconsistencies of the migrant labour system. According to this long-term migrant strategy, status consistency is achieved first in the urban area during a working lifetime, and later in the rural area after retiring from labour migrancy. Despite its current popularity, this modern pattern of circular migrancy may not persist for long. This is due to the shrinking land resources available to labour migrants. One of the basic conditions for classical labour migrancy no longer holds.

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1) See also the paper by Schlemmer and Møller in this volume.

Clearly, modern migrancy in South Africa is at the cross-roads. Its longer-term persistence will depend largely on the system's capacity to accommodate the rising expectations of a modernising labour force which requires greater opportunities for job advancement and new types of social security benefits. Therefore, a reappraisal of the basic assumptions which underly the migrant labour system is essential. The question of relaxing influx control measures to increase employment opportunities and promote job advancement is particularly pertinent. Access to alternative landholdings for landless migrants is an equally pressing issue in view of the changing rural circumstances of the modern migration era. If such questions are not resolved satisfactorily, discontent among modern migrants can only be expected to continue to rise in future.

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