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The reduction of Mozambican workers in South African mines, 1975-1992: A case study of the consequences for Gaza Province - District of Chibuto

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Chapter I. INTRODUCTION

In 1897 there were some 60,000 Mozambicans working on the Rand; in 1910 there were 90,522 Mozambicans working in Transvaal mines – 41.6 per cent of all Africans in the Transvaal mines.[1] These statistics show the dominant position of the Mozambican participation in South African mines in terms of the number of workers. Despite the increased recruitment of migrants from other countries in the region, as well as South Africa itself, in the following decades, Mozambicans continued to constitute at least 20 to 30% of the mine labour force until the 1970s. Between 1970 and 1975, 90,087 Mozambicans were employed on average each year. However, this presence was dramatically reduced in the second half of the 1970s – to an average of 46,254 each year. This pattern continued into the 1980s and the early 1990s.[2] The reduction of Mozambican workers in South African mines produced a significant crisis in Mozambican economy and society.

The main questions asked in this study are 'what were the reasons for the reduction of Mozambican workers on South African mines from the middle 1970s to 1992 and what were the consequences for the economy and society of a key region of labour supply – the Gaza Province- District of Chibuto'? In answering the second question the study

[1]P. Harries, 'Kinship, Ideology and the Nature of Pre- Colonial Labour Migration: Labour Migration from Delagoa Bay hinterland to South Africa, up 1895', in S. Marks and R. Rathbone *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African class formation, culture and consciousness, 1870- 1930*. Longman, 1982, 142- 166; R. First, *Black Gold: The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant*. Sussex Harvester, 1983, pp 32- 33.

[2] J. Crush, A. Jeeves and D. Yudelman, *South Africa's Labour Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold mines*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1991, pp. 234-35.

focuses on the changes that took place in the economic and social relationships at the level of households.

I. 1. Rationale

The mining industry can be seen as the most important factor in the process of regional integration. From its inception, in the last third of the nineteenth century, this sector has needed large numbers of workers many of whom were recruited from different parts of Southern Africa. Mozambican workers were part of this process from the beginning and constituted a major segment within the migrant work force. This massive presence of Mozambican workers in the South African mining industry was important to the Mozambican economy. There were agreements concerning the supply of Mozambican workers to South African mines between the two states from the late nineteenth century. The system of deferred pay and the complementary accords about ports and railways conferred substantial advantages on the Mozambican state and economy. On the other hand, wage labour on the South African mines constituted a significant source of income for Mozambicans, especially in the rural areas of southern Mozambique. The erosion of this form of employment had significant consequences for Mozambican economy and society. These consequences have not thus far been fully explored and understood especially at the local level.

This study explores this context and especially the consequences of the reduction at level of rural households and it hopes, through the case study of Chibuto, to deepen and improve understanding of the recent history of rural areas of Mozambique. Chibuto is a

district of the southern province of Gaza that was selected because it was one of the main areas of recruitment during the period covered by this study

I.2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The presence of Mozambican workers in South African mines dates back to the last third of the nineteenth century. The context, motivation and consequences of the participation of Mozambican workers in the mines have been analysed by different authors. There is a vast literature on migrant labour in earlier periods. Harries analysed the nature of the migration to South Africa in the pre-colonial period. He focused on labour migration from southern Mozambique (Delagoa Bay hinterland). Harries explained that workers from Mozambique started the movement to South Africa in the 1850s initially to the Natal sugar plantations. The discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and gold on the Rand accelerated this movement. He also emphasised the internal causes of the increase of the number of workers from Mozambique – the decline of the local economy, the restructuring of trade opportunities, the decline of cattle-herding and agriculture, etc. He talked of a deep dependence on migration to South Africa especially in southern Mozambique.[3]

Covane analysed the economic relations between Mozambique and South Africa from 1850 to 1964. He focused on labour agreements and regulations. Covane emphasised the role of the Portuguese military campaigns in southern Mozambique in the middle 1890s. The Portuguese victory against Gungunyana (the Gaza emperor) established their effective control in the region (1897). They signed an accord with the Chamber of Mines

[3] P. Harries, 'Kinship…' pp 42- 166

in 1897 in which the system of recruitment of workers from Mozambique was established. Many more accords about labour supply were signed in the following years between the Portuguese, the South African Government and the Chamber of Mines. These accords, argued Covane, were periodically revised in response to changes in the political and economic context during the first seven decades of the twentieth century.[4]

In attempting to understand the migration of Mozambicans to South African mines, it is also important to place this process in a comparative perspective. In this respect, the work of Beinart, Kimble, Delius, and Crush on the Mpondo, the Sotho, the Pedi, and the Swazi respectively are extremely useful, because it helps in understanding the local dynamics of regional migration.[5] Even though there are many similarities between these cases and the Mozambican migrant system, their dynamics were not uniform and important differences existed between them and the case of Mozambique. For example, while the need to acquire military equipment such as guns and ammunition significantly influenced the first phase of migration of the Basotho and the Pedi, as already noted above and confirmed by the field work in Chibuto, this was not the primary cause of the migration of Mozambicans into South Africa.

It is important to understand the context of the reduction of Mozambican workers on South African mines. The concept of the internalisation of labour has been used by some

[4] L. Covane *As Relações Económicas entre Moçambique e a África do Sul, 1850- 1964: Acordos e Regulamentos Principais*. Maputo: Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique, 1989, pp. 37- 39

[5] W. Beinart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland, 1860- 1930*. Cambridge University Press, 1982; J. Kimble 'Labour Migration in Basutoland, c1870- 1885', in S. Marks and R. Rathbone (Ed.) *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness 1870- 1930*. Longman, 1982 pp, 119- 141; P. Delius *The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers*

writers as an explanatory framework. According to Clarke, "by internalisation of labour is meant the switching in recruitment dependence from foreign labour reserve sources to ones located inside South Africa."[6] It is clear that the implementation of the policy of internalisation played a vital part in the reduction of foreign labour in the mines, including Mozambican workers. But the central question concerning internalisation is 'why did it take place?'

There is a significant body of literature that attempts to answer this question. There are authors who emphasise political factors. James argued that the political context of the region in the middle 1970s can be seen as the main cause of internalisation. In James' perception, the withdrawal of over 80,000 Malawian workers from the mines by President Banda and the independence of Mozambique (1975) were determinant factors. The members of the Chamber of Mines felt that the industry had become extremely dependent on foreign workers. They thought that this dependence was dangerous for the stability of the mining industry. Thus, concluded James, they decided to turn to domestic labour for their future needs.[7]

The political argument has been criticised. Crush, Jeeves and Yudelman responded:

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and the British in the nineteenth-century Transvaal. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983; J. Crush, The *Struggle for Swazi Labour, 1890- 1920*. University of California Press, 1987

[6] D.G.Clarke, 'Foreign Migrant Labour in South Africa: Studies on Accumulation in the Labour Reserves, Demand Determinants and supply relationship'. Geneva: International Labour Organisation, 1977, p. 83

[7] W. James, *Our Precious Metal: African Labour in gold Mines's Labour supply 1970- 1990*. Cape Town, 1992, pp. 3-5

The theory of internalization assumes that the interests of the South African government and the employers are congruent. It makes no distinction between the South African government and state, ignoring the role of bureaucracy and the military. Finally, it assumes that the mining houses and their member companies speak with one voice on the issue.[8]

Crush's contribution to the debate emphasised the internal divergences in the Apartheid state and differences between state and the mines. In Crush's perception, the mines were not interested in a full policy of internalisation, at least in the early 1980s. That was because of the skills, experience, discipline and submissive behaviour of foreign workers.[9] For this reasons, the workers from Mozambique continued to work on the mines, even if in smaller numbers.

The process of mechanisation is also important for contextualising the reduction of Mozambican workers on the South African mines. From the second half of the 1960s the process of mechanisation began. It was characterised by more investment and the introduction of new techniques in the mining industry. Ruth First noted that mechanisation in gold mines was accelerated by the liberalisation of the price of gold, and its consequent rise from 1972/ 1973. In this analysis, mechanisation contributed to the reduction of the black labour force and to an increasing need for a stable work force.[10] Thus, this process can explain the general reduction of the workforce in the mining industry and the consequent reduction of foreign workers.

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[8] Crush, Jeeves and Yudelman, *South Africa's Labour…*, p. 103
[9] J. Crush 'Mine Migrancy in the Contemporary Era' in J. Crush and W. James (Eds) *Crossing Boundaries: Mine Migrancy in an Democratic South Africa*, Cape Town, Creda Press, 1995, pp. 14- 32
[10] R. First *Black Gold: The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant*. Sussex Harvester, 1983, pp. 50-61

It is important to note that there is a substantial literature that explores the issue of mechanisation. For example Freund discussed the mechanisation in gold mines,[11] and Leger focused on coal mines.[12] In this study, the relations between mechanisation and the reduction of Mozambican workers is explored. The link is complex because a significant part of Mozambican workers were classified as experienced and or skilled. Head, for example, noted that the mining industry resisted when the South African government tried to stop the recruitment of workers from Mozambique in the middle 1980s. It was because, argued Head, the mining industry knew the high level of difficulties of replacing the skills of Mozambican workers**.**[13] This study includes a discussion of the role of the unionisation of mineworkers in South Africa and the impact of the economic policies of the government of Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and their influence on the reduction of Mozambican workers on South African mines. To this end hitherto unexplored sources including unpublished papers, Mozambican journals and newspapers as well as political pamphlets of FRELIMO are used. These sources helped reveal Mozambican perspectives on these events and so help to deepen our understanding of them.

Changes in the nature of recruitment are important in analysing the impact of wider changes on economy of rural households. The Centro de Estudos Africanos analysed

[11] B. Freund 'South African Gold Mining in Transformation' in S. Gelb (Ed) *South Africa's Economic Crisis*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1991, pp. 110- 118
[12] J. Leger 'Coal Mining: Past Profits, Current Crisis?' in S. Gelb (Ed) *South Africa's Economic Crisis*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1991, pp. 129- 155
[13] J. Head 'Migrant Labour from Mozambique: What Prospects?', in J. Crush and W. James (Eds) *Crossing Boundaries: Mine Migrancy in an Democratic South Africa*, Cape Town, Creda Press, 1995, pp. 134

Mozambican migrant labour in South Africa in terms of patterns of recruitment. Investigators from the Centre explained the context of the reduction of the Mozambican workers in South African mines from 1976 and analysed the changes of the structure of recruitment. They noted that the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) stopped subsiding food and transport for workers within Mozambique. Thus, it transferred a significant part of the costs of recruitment to workers.[14] Davies emphasised the negative effects of the reduction and fluctuations in recruitment. This process was far more rapid than the capacity of supplier states to absorb the former migrants in terms of employment. And, he added, the patterns of reduction were irregular, in other words it was subject to unforeseeable fluctuations. It was difficult, argued Davies, for supplier states, like Mozambique, to make a plan for internal employment under the reductions and fluctuations of recruitment in the 1980s.[15]

A valuable perspective on the consequences of the reduction of Mozambican workers is provided by Covane (2001). His study focused mainly on the population of the south of Gaza province. Even after independence workers preferred to migrate to South Africa because of the lack of attractive employment in Mozambique, at least in terms of wages. Covane, focusing on the 1970s, argued that the reduction in the recruitment of Mozambicans affected the economy in general terms and also affected the rural economy and consequently a significant number of families in southern Mozambique. In Covane's

[14] Centro dos Estudos Africanos (CEA) – Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM) 'The South African Mining Industry and Mozambican Labour in the 1980s: An Analysis of Recent Trends in Employment Policy', Geneva: International Labour Organisation, 1987, pp. 16- 18; See also A. Manghezi 'History and Organisation of Labour Recruitment in Southern Mozambique', Maputo n/d (c.1987)

[15] R. Davies 'Algumas Implicações dos Possíveis Cenários pós Apartheid para a região da África Austral', in *Estudos Moçambicanos*, 8, 1990, pp. 143- 189

argument wage labour from the South African mines had constituted an important income for many families in southern Mozambique. The reduction in recruitment meant a cut in the main source of income for many families.[16] However, Covane's discussion of the consequences of this reduction at local level is limited. He does not detail the nature and the extent of this impact on the rural areas. The present study analyses this issue by bringing to the fore the voices of a significant number of workers and their families from rural areas of Chibuto and by an exhaustive engagement with other relevant written material already mentioned. It suggests that rural areas were affected negatively by these cuts in recruitment because it made it difficult for many thousands of men to find employment in the mines and, as a result, unemployment increased, the productivity of agriculture decreased, the local market diminished and so on. This situation left many thousands of households in economic and social difficulties and they tried to employ other strategies such as the exploitation of available natural resources as well as commercial activities.

The study hopes to improve our understanding of the consequences of the reduction of Mozambican workers on South African mines. The inclusion of life experiences of workers and of their families hopefully deepens this understanding. It further explores the coping mechanisms and strategies adopted by the affected families in dealing with the elimination of incomes from the mines and the strategies employed by those who strove

[16] L. Covane *O Trabalho Migratório e a Agricultura no Sul de Moçambique (1920- 1992*), Maputo: Promédia, 2001, pp. 237- 251

to be among the few who were recruited amidst the big reductions in recruitment. It explores household dynamics and cleavages of gender and generation.[17]

Using the perspectives provided by livelihood analysis,[18] the study also analyses the role of the migrant income within a wider range of livelihood strategies pursued by households and individuals. The concept of livelihood has been subject of debate; however, this research uses the concept that, according to Murray, is generally adopted:

> A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.[19]

[17] For comparative analysis see: W. Beinart, *The Political Economy*...; J. Kimble, 'Labour Migration…'; P. Delius, *The Land…* P. Harries *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c 1860- 1910*. Johannesburg, 1994; P.Delius *A Lion amongst the Cattle: Reconstruction and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1996; and M.Epprecht. *'This Matter of Women is Getting Very Bad': Gender, Development and Politics in Colonial Lesotho*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000

[18] See Murray, C. 'Changing Livelihoods: The Free State, 1990s'. *African Studies*, 59, 2000, pp 115- 142

[19] Ibid, p. 116

I.3. Methodology

The research was conducted in terms of conventional historical techniques. The study attempts to treat workers as more than statistical elements or an abstract labour force and set out to draw on their perspectives, narratives and voices. It analyses family life, regular and supplementary economic activities, and the needs of workers. The research combined written sources and oral history. In terms of written material, journal articles, books, theses, papers, memorandums, legislation and so on were consulted in Wits libraries (especially Cullen Africa, Main and Education Libraries) and in other libraries and archives in Johannesburg and Pretoria. In Maputo, written material in the libraries of the Eduardo Mondlane University including Historical Archive of Mozambique (Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique) was consulted. Additionally, available primary written records in institutions such as the Labour Ministry and Recruitment agencies were consulted. These included sources such as legislation, statistical data, journals and newspapers (for example *Tempo* and *Estudos Moçambicanos*), and agreements between Mozambican government and South African government or Chamber of Mines. I contacted Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA), the major recruitment agency of workers to South African mines in Mozambique, and the Ministry of Labour of Mozambique in June and in September 2005. I consulted written material and interviewed officials.

Oral history allows access to the stories of marginalised and or unprivileged people, and so allows a multiplicity of standpoints to be brought to the surface. I am aware of the widely discerned limitations of oral history, for example the difficulties chronology or

dating, issues of bias, the difficulties of memory and the reliability of information.[20] But I dealt with the problem of the lack of chronology through the reference to well-known events such as the independence of Mozambique (1975), the natural calamities (floods of 1977 and drought of 1982-1983), the phases of internal war and so on; it is important to note that even though internal war began in the second half of the 1970s in the country, it reached Chibuto only in 1983. In order to diminish the impact of bias, problems of memory and reliability of the information, I opted to explore internal consistency and cross-checked with other sources. During the research, I also made sure that the informants understood the purpose of the field work; and a suitable environment was created during the interviews. The fact that I speak the local language (Shangaan) was a crucial advantage that enabled easy communication with rural informants.

In the context of this research, the district of Chibuto was visited at three different times - in the first half of July 2005, in September 2005 and in December 2005. The main focus of research was Alto-Changane, a rural area of this district, where most of the interviews with former mineworkers and their families were conducted. Alto-Changane is situated 56 Kilometres from the centre of Chibuto. In Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, as already pointed out, the representatives of the recruitment agencies were also contacted during these months. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese and Shangaan. In Alto Changane, most of the interviews were conducted in Shangaan, the local language, because even though Portuguese is the official language in Mozambique, a significant

[20] See, for example, P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. Oxford, 1978: 2- 18; S. Humphries, *The Handbook of Oral History: Recording Life Stories.* London, 1984, pp. 21- 22; J Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, London, 1985 pp 174- 187; V. Bickford- Smith., S. Field and C. Glaser 'The Western Cape Oral History Project: The 1990s', *African Studies*, 60, 1, 2001, pp 13- 14

number of workers in this locality do not speak Portuguese fluently. The relevant parts of these interviews were translated in to English, afterwards.

A significant number of interviews (17) with workers and their families in Chibuto were done. These included both formal and informal interviews. Individual and collective interviews with workers were also done in Alto Changane (Chibuto). The combination of both forms helped to ensure the quality of the oral information. In individual interviews workers spoke freely and told me individual experiences that were important to the research; however collective interviews were complementary and made it possible to understand divergent testimonies - for example, a collective interview with three former mineworkers in Chibuto led to an interesting discussion and internal process of verification amongst them.[21] This combination helped me to analyse the material critically, and assisted me to ensure the reliability and the utility of the information.

I also interviewed representatives of recruitment agencies and members of the government (Ministry of Labour). In this latter institution I interviewed three representatives of the Department of Migrant Labour - including the former and the head of this Department. This collective interview was important in that I was able to collect official information through the voices of the representatives of the government of Mozambique; in addition, they made available statistical data showing the number of workers in South African mines as well as the income from deferred pay. However, the main difficulty I found in this interview was the exaggerated secrecy with which they

[21] Interview with José Magaissa Maposse, Jossias Tivane and Matchuquetane Macuacua, Chibuto, conducted by N. Gaspar, 14/07/2005

treated issues such as the role of the government in the mechanism of deferred payment and its relevance for the welfare of workers and their families, and so on.

The availability of recent primary written sources in Mozambique is difficult in general owing to organisational issues and the tendency of secrecy especially in the institutions of the state. The local administrative authorities have no data about the number of mineworkers from Chibuto; and, it is almost impossible to collect organised data on the origins of workers from TEBA. The lack of this type of data makes it difficult to determine the evolution of the number of workers in the South African mines. Thus, the research was not able to be as exact about figures as I had hoped.

The main body of the study is organised as fellows: The **second chapter** focuses on the development of the migrant labour system in southern Mozambique and especially on the participation of Mozambican workers in the South African mines from the second half of the nineteenth century to the independence of Mozambique (1975). The accords between the South African authorities and the Portuguese colonial government of Mozambique and the evolution and dynamics of the system of recruitment of Mozambicans in the South African mines throughout the first three quarters of the twentieth century are presented and analysed in this chapter. The benefits of this system for the two states involved as well as for mines and especially workers and their families are also examined.

The **third chapter** focuses on the dramatic reduction of Mozambican workers in South African mines from 1976. It analyses the context and the way in which the reduction of these workers was done. The chapter discusses internalisation of labour in the mines, mechanisation of mining industry and policies of the government of Mozambique after the independence. It also examines the consequences of this reduction for the economy of Mozambique in general.

Chapter four focuses on the consequences of the reduction of Mozambican workers in the mines for the rural areas of the district of Chibuto. It analyses the role played by the massive participation of workers in the mines for the economy and society of the rural areas of the district before independence; and, it examines the consequences of the reduction for the local economy and society through analysis of households of Chibuto after independence of Mozambique.