

Households and continued mining migrant labour: a view on today and the future

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Historical background



- In the labour thesis theory Harold Wolpe flagged mining migrant labour as an apartheid phenomenon. At centre of this, Wolpe argued that, to achieve continued labour migration to the mines and to ensure a prolific labour supply the apartheid government needed to ensure that the labour sending areas remained unchanged and underdeveloped.
- Moreover, to achieve a cheap labour regime the government needed to also ensure that subsistence agriculture in the homelands, which would in turn supplement the cheap wages afforded to migrant workers
- Supporting the labour thesis, some scholars today have continued to argue that migrant labour indeed is a thing of our apartheid past and that the migrant labour system today is on a significant decline.



Literature = Facts & figures today

HOWEVER

- Workers, mainly from the Eastern Cape continue to constitute a significant percentage in the South African mining industry, currently sitting at 35% of the 240 000 workers recruited by Teba (The Employment Bureau of Africa) (Forrest 2016).
- Census data (2011) suggests that in the informal settlement of Nkaneng in Rustenburg IsiXhosa speaking people (mainly migrant labourers from the Eastern Cape) account for 42% of the population in that community whereas the local Setswana speaking people account for a mere 15.5%
- Recent events in Marikana list at least 24 mine workers from different towns of the Eastern Cape that died at Marikana. The heavy presence of non-locals at the events of Marikana suggests the centrality of migrant workers to the industrial action.

Research questions?



- In light of the fact that the migrant labour system is still in place despite the authoritarian institutions that maintained it falling away, how do we explain the continued reliance on migrant labour by people from Mpondoland to the platinum belt?



Methods.....

- Extended case methods (Flagstaff- Lusikisiki- Rustenburg)
- Ndakeni Location (Flagstaff) =1 family
- Mdikana Location (Lusikisiki) = 1
- Interviews with 10 Mine worker's wives (5 in each town)



General findings...

- There is compelling data that Mining migrant labour is still continuing.
- However it remains debatable whether or not that the system remains as that of ,cheap migrant labour as gains were made as seen in wage increases after the events of Marikana improved the lives of mine workers.
- Moreover, the improvements of mining hostels into dignified mine settlements restored the dignity of the worker.
- Mine workers homes have tremendously improved and compared to those of middle income earners (teachers, nurses, etc.)

HOWEVER

- The presence of sub- contractors and the ever growing number of informal settlements in the platinum belt challenges the strides made against cheap migrant labour.

Facts and figures

- Former labour reserves and labour sending areas (Flagstaff and Lusikisiki) remain unchanged and underdeveloped
- With an estimated 9000 hectares of land for agriculture and proximity to a potential ocean economy, these remain unused.
- Unemployment in the OR Tambo district municipality is at 66 % and at Ingquza Hill Local Municipality (Flagstaff and Lusikisiki) is estimated at about 75%.
- The only sources of employment in these areas in Financial services (Banks) Retail, and transport services (taxis)

Socio-economics of the households

- Subsistence farming in the labour sending areas has significantly declined.
- Unemployment in the Mpondoland region is at an all time high
- As such there is a high reliance on social grants and credit from Somali and Ethiopian owned shops to sustain everyday livelihoods in household of mostly more than 8 people



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- Labour sending areas remain economically unviable and do not offer much socio-economic activity for people in the working age group.
- With the social pressure of assuming the traditional role as a home builder (*Umzi*), male figures in Mpondoland resort to the generational 's known source of income in the region, mining migrant labour.
- Social reproductive work performed by women in the form child rearing and day to day management of the household as well as other socioeconomic community engagements in forms of *Imibutho and Stokvels* place immense pressure on the traditional male to also play an active role in the maintenance of his house hold. Therefore migrant labour.
- With inherent ambition to better the lives of their families, there is also great agency amongst men in Mpondoland to take up migrant labour and do as those who came before them did through *Umsebenzi* in order to earn respect as providers in the communities. Feeding of the masculine self

Implications for industry

- If socio- economic conditions of the labour sending areas remain unimproved migrant labour will remain as a primary alternative for most men in Mpondoland.
- This in many ways will maintain pressures on the mining industry in particular the platinum belt which seems to be the employer of choice for new migrants.
- This means we will continue to see pressure in housing around areas in Rustenburg and consequently a rise in informal settlements as 'labour waiting areas'.

THANK YOU

