The Political Economy of the Migrant Labour System: Implications for Agricultural Growth and Rural Development in Southern Africa

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Introduction

Throughout the twentieth century most of the economies of southern Africa have been linked to South Africa in one way or another. With the march of history, some of these links are disappearing or undergoing metamorphosis, but important economic links threaten to outlast the present stage of political transformation. The system whereby South Africa has been able to use the region as a source of supply for cheap unskilled labour for her farms and mining industry is the link that is of interest to us.

Structurally and functionally, the relationship between South Africa and the rest of the region is analogous to one between a centre and its periphery. On the other hand, due to its excessive dependence on the North Atlantic powers for capital, markets, consumption tastes and technology, South Africa should itself be conceived of as a sub-centre.[1]

Although the South African mineral-based economy itself started out as a full-blown settler periphery to the centre of nineteenth century capitalism, Britain, it was forced by a combination of wartime needs and deliberate state actions to look somewhat inward and develop its own dynamism as a sub-centre with its own peripheral satellites.

The analysis that follows will utilize the 'centre-periphery' conceptual framework which allows us to see the dynamics of the southern African peripheral development model in terms of its *raison d'être*, internal consistency, functioning and potential for achieving its goals—however perverse. We are singling out one important component of that model: cheap labour exportation from the periphery to the centre of the sub-system, tracing that component in its historical evolution from the turn of the century onwards. We shall show how the migrant system has brought growth to the South African economy, and the mining industry in particular, while simultaneously bringing increased dependence, rural destitution and underdevelopment to neighbouring countries which constitute the periphery of the sub-system.[2]

Rationale for the Migrant System

Many reasons could, and have, however, been advanced for retaining and perpetuating the system of migratory labour in southern Africa. Many countries in the region see this as an additional method of earning foreign exchange and raising government revenue.

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1 For the pattern of South African linkages to the North Atlantic, see First, Steele and Gurney, *The South African Connection: Western Investment in Apartheid*, Harmondsworth (UK): Penguin Books, 1973, and J.C. du Plessis, 'Foreign Investment in South Africa', in Lityak and Maule (eds.), *Foreign Investment: The Experience of the Host Countries*, New York: Frederick Praeger, 1970.

2 Southern African countries which have traditionally supplied labour to South Africa are Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Botswana, Swaziland, Angola and Rhodesia, more or less in that order of importance.

Secondly, wage remittances are generally looked upon to supplement the generally low income of the migrant worker's family, especially during periods of crop failure. Thirdly, some see the migratory system as an opportunity for workers to acquire badly needed skills while being trained into a more disciplined work force for development tasks at home.

Fourthly, the system could be justified for employment creation reasons, assuming that the worker would otherwise be idle or underemployed if the opportunity to go to South Africa had not existed. Fifthly, in the absence of the magic commodity to earn foreign exchange, neo-classical international trade theory argues that factor movements (labour in this case) can effectively substitute for commodity trade although one would have to assume, of course, that neo-classical theory correctly explains the situation and that all gains from trade are not appropriated by one of the partners.

Sixthly, the earnings and other potential 'gains' from South African mine employment could be viewed as providing a 'growth pole' to the periphery economy. In particular, these earnings could buttress and widen the internal market, leading to the well known linkages and spread effects; the domestic economy could now support consumer-oriented industries which would in turn support corresponding producer-goods-oriented industries, and so on, spreading economic activities in a mutually supportive manner. Last, but not least, the mining industry in South Africa obtains a vital production factor which should increase its potential output, and in a mutually dependent world, the economies on South Africa's borders should in turn reap some of the benefits of that increased production.

These arguments are very powerful, if not persuasive; but before we evaluate them it is better to look first at the special characteristics and pattern of labour migrations to South Africa during the past eighty years or so.

Characteristics and Pattern of the Migrant System

It was not long after the 1652 landing at the Cape that the Boers dispossessed the local African inhabitants of their land and forced them to work as slaves on grain and wine farms. They soon reinforced their slave labourers with fresh importations from East Africa and South Asia. With the formal end of slavery, the local slave system was transformed into share-cropping along lines similar to the South of the United States.

Soon after the discovery of diamonds and gold at Kimberly and on the Witwatersrand in 1867 and 1885 respectively, local Africans were again stripped of their land and through a system of land, head and hut taxes were forced to provide cheap labour to the mines. Under the leadership of Cecil Rhodes and others, diamond and gold mining and marketing syndicates were set up, with the Anglo-American Corporation emerging with control over 40 per cent of gold production (or almost a third of the world's), a third of South African coal, about a quarter of its uranium and almost all its diamonds (and almost all the world's for that matter). Anglo-American has also branched into industry, commerce, banking and investments abroad.

White miners were recruited from Europe and America. As the mines were still short of labour, in 1904 a move was made to get Chinese workers from Hong Kong and by 1907, just before white workers forced their repatriation, Chinese migrant workers had approached the 60,000 mark. The total number of miners had risen from just over 160,000 in 1906 to over 750,000 today, with Africans accounting for 90 per cent.

In order to ensure regular labour supplies, in 1900 and 1912 the Chamber of Mines established two African labour recruiting agencies: the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) to recruit from Mozambique, Malawi, Rhodesia, and Angola; and the Native Recruiting Corporation (NRC) to recruit within South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland. These agencies recruit for fifty one gold, copper and platinum mines of the Witwatersrand and Orange Free State while smaller agencies recruit for the coal mines of Natal.

In order to ensure adequate labour supplies from local sources, the Native Land Act (1913) was enacted to allocate only 13 per cent of all national land (usually the less fertile) to Africans who then constituted over 90 per cent of the total population (87 per cent). This created the desired land hunger which in turn released many Africans for work in the mines and on white farms.[3] With population pressure and absence of subsequent land redistribution, it is no wonder that one of the hardest hit African areas—the Transkei (a 'Bantustan'—the South African term for cheap labour reservations located within South Africa itself)—in 1969 supplied over 170,000 migrant workers with most going to the mines. Even as early as 1955, a government commission reported that in the Transkei and Ciskei, on an average 360 families were occupying land which could barely support 103.[4]

Africans in South Africa try to avoid mine work as safety and working conditions are very bad and wages are much lower than in industry. Most of those going to the mines come from cheap labour reservoirs or 'Bantustans'. This explains why up to now South African mines rely on foreign African labour to the tune of 70 per cent of the work force. In 1961 the average annual African wage in manufacturing was R370 while it was only R146 in gold mining.[5]

The disparity between white and African mine wages finally reached a 20:1 ratio in 1969 as a result of a series of legal measures dating back to 1889 when it was 7.5:2. Since that time the average African nominal wage has risen from R57 a year to R199 in 1970. The corresponding white wage rose from R666 to R4,006 per year over the same period. In real terms, Francis Wilson found that white earnings were constant from 1911 to 1946 and increased steadily thereafter attaining a net increase of 70 per cent by 1969, but real African wages fell by 8 per cent up to 1946 and by 1969 they had merely attained their 1911 levels.[6]

In each labour-exporting state, labour recruitment is regulated by a labour agreement or convention between the recruiting agency and the state. Recruiters are issued with permits or licences for which they pay varying amounts in fees, depending on the number to be recruited. These agencies in turn sub-contract the work to 'runners' who do the actual search for recruitees. These runners are also licensed. Once a recruitee is brought up, the agency pays a head tax to the government of the labour-exporting state. In many cases the recruitee himself pays a certain sum, apparently for the 'privilege' of going to work in the mines.

Malawi, Mozambique and Lesotho provide the largest contingents to the mines outside of the 'Bantustans' as the average annual recruitment for 1969 to 1973 in the table below shows:

TABLE 5A

AVERAGE ANNUAL RATE OF RECRUITMENT TO GOLD AND PLATINUM MINES AND COLLIERIES[7]

Country	*Numbers*
Swaziland	7,000
Botswana	20,000
Mozambique	100,000
Malawi	120,000
Lesotho	100,000
South Africa	100,000

Sources: Republic of South Africa, *Bulletin of Statistics*, and *Financial Mail;* Botswana, Central Statistical Office: *Statistical Abstract;* Lesotho, Bureau of Statistics; *Annual Statistical Bulletin*; Swaziland, Central Statistical Office: *Annual Statistical Bulletin* (several issues). Labour Commissioners provided extra information.

3 Francis Wilson, *Labour in the South African Gold Mines 1899–1969*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972; and Sheila vander Horst, *Native Labour in South Africa*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1942, give an excellent review of the history of this period.

4 See, South African Government, *Summary of the Report of the Commission for Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu Areas within the Union of South Africa*, Pretoria, 1955, p. 113.

5 Francis Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

6 *ibid.*, p. 46.

7 These figures are extremely rounded and are very broad indications only. They exclude migrant farm workers whose numbers are even less certain.

The Mozambican arrangement has a long history. It dates back to 1909 when Portugal and South Africa signed the Mozambique Convention under which Portugal has annually supplied no less than 100,000 African men to work at any one time in the mines in return for deferred payments and taxes payable directly to Portuguese authorities in Mozambique. In 1928, the convention was amended to include a 'gold option' under which Mozambican African labour has earned gold for metropolitan Portugal itself. Upon recruitment, Africans sign a twelve- to eighteen-month contract under which they get their full wages for the first six months, but are paid only 40 per cent for the balance of their contract. The rest is transferred to the South African Reserve (Central) Bank. Every three months the Bank of Portugal through its subsidiary in Mozambique, Banco National Ultramarino, exercised its option to receive the deposits either in foreign currency (rands) or in gold at the official price of $42 per ounce since the Smithsonian Agreement (or at $35 per ounce, before). Portugal almost always preferred gold.

The gold bars were shipped to Lisbon through Lourenco-Marques. Portugal then payed the miners in local escudos upon their return to Mozambique.[8] At wage rates prevailing in 1974, Portugal could easily have realized an annual profit of at least $75 million if it had resold the gold on the world market at current prices of $170 per ounce.

The other labour-exporting states are very unlikely to have obtained the terms that Portugal had. Malawi has subsequently banned all fresh recruitment for the mines in the aftermath of the 1974 crash of a plane, in Botswana, carrying new Malawian recruits to South Africa.

In response to Malawi's ban and to uncertainties surrounding the likely policy of a new African government in Mozambique, South Africa concluded, effective from 1 January 1975, an agreement with Rhodesia to supply 20,000 recruits annually on initial one-year contracts. The number is projected to rise to 100,000 per annum over a five year period.[9]

With governments operating with dwindling revenues, especially in the aftermath of the food-crop and energy crisis of 1973 and 1974, the example of the Portuguese has since been emulated by all other labour exporters. By agreement with South Africa, the wage retention clause has been amended, again effective from 1 January 1975, to require 60 per cent of the worker's wages to be deducted and remitted directly to authorities in the labour-supplying country. The worker would then be paid in local currency after the state has deducted head and income taxes.

The new terms soon sparked riots at mine sites and resulted in a mass exodus of workers from South Africa. This was especially serious in Lesotho[10] where the underdevelopment effects of South African exploitation are so glaring and where the line between official ineptitude and collaboration is particularly thin.

Most of the recruits come from remote areas of the exporting countries. The mines prefer recruits of this kind as they are said by mining officials to be 'undemanding, obedient and disciplined'.[11] By the end of their tour, at most 20 to 25 per cent of the labourers are estimated to have acquired any technical skill, and from 60 to 65 per cent return home as unskilled as ever. About 10 per cent become assistant (to white co-miners), supervisors or 'boss boys' in local colloquialism. According to laws designed to protect white miners against potential African competition, only the white miners are allowed to perform skilled jobs.

South African mines are known for their bad safety and working conditions. In 1964 the death date from accidents was officially put at 2.25 per thousand, so that out of 348,294 miners employed that year, 784 died from mining accidents.[12] During the last 30 years, on average, 560 African miners have died from underground mine disasters each year.[13]

8 See *Financial Times* (London), 16 October 1974, and 4 March 1975, p. 5.
9 *Financial Times*, 4 February 1975, p. 23.
10 *Financial Times*, 9 January 1975 and *The Economist* (London) 18 January 1975, pp. 45–46.
11 See United Nations Unit on Apartheid, *African Labour in the Mines of South Africa*, No. 20/73 (1973), p. 4.
12 Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, *Report of the Board of Directors* for 1964, Johannesburg, May 1965, p.2.
13 According to official reports cited in the London *Observer* (16 September 1973), p. 12.

Health conditions are also deplorable. Silicosis and other lung ailments cripple many. As soon as a miner is diagnosed as having this disease, he is repatriated to his home country (usually to await a slow death) accompanied by only a small lump-sum gratuity. In 1964, in one mine (Whitbank) 109 accident victims were compensated a total of R8,967, averaging R82 each.[14] Working conditions are so bad and the work load so heavy that the mining companies themselves have estimated that by the prime age of between 40 and 50 years, many returning recruitees are physically worn out.[15]

Recruitees range in age from 15 to 50 years, the greater number (65 %) being between 20 and 35. The majority of those who are married are separated from their families during the period of the contract and are not allowed to leave the mine premises except for occasional approved trips into a neighbouring town for shopping. They live in compounds which are fenced off from surrounding areas. Within each compound there are a number of dormitories which hold 100 to 200 people per room. Workers sleep on triple-decker concrete beds.[16]

The average length of a contract that the recruitee signs with a mine is nine to twelve months, with maximum extensions up to eighteen months or two years at a time. This amounts to a complete turnover every one and a half or two years—hence the need on the part of mining officials constantly to pursue new recruits. For many reasons in economic terms this process is very costly to the mines.

In the first place, the high turnover means continual processing, fresh training or retraining (usually lasting between 4 and 9 days) for each recruitee. By the time a worker is confident in his job he is about ready to return home except in the case of contract extensions. Even these extensions are limited to a maximum of two years without interruption. The loss in productivity is obvious. But in view of the low-skill content of most African mine work, the loss in training should not be exaggerated, especially if one consideres the fact that once the miner has gone through the training period, the company tries to extract as much as possible out of him in terms of longer working hours and low wages.

In fact it is easy to see how the mining companies extract a net gain from this system of temporary migrant workers. The high-turnover rates prevent African miners from organizing trade unions with their potential for promoting nationalism and class consciousness. Formation of such unions could well set the stage for a calling into question of the entire socio-economic structure, not only in South Africa, but also in their homelands where this modern form of human bondage receives direct or indirect official endorsement.

Secondly, the short term contracts are very convenient to mining authorities who are thereby absolved from providing pensions, sick pay and other benefits that generally accrue to workers under normal long-term working arrangements.

On the other hand, the labour-exporting states do realize some foreign exchange and revenue. But one should not lose sight of the fact that to obtain these earnings over 45 per cent of Lesotho's labour force (numbering over 250,000 in 1972) had to be committed to South African farms and mines; and for Botswana about 25 per cent of the male population of between 15 and 54 years is usually in South Africa. It is upon these and similar drawbacks that the next section will dwell, arguing for a basic reversal of the cheap-labour-exporting policy pursued by these states.

14 Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
15 See South African Government, *Summary of the Report of the Commission for Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu Areas within the Union of South Africa*, Pretoria, 1955, p. 95.
16 I gathered most of this information in interviews: first, with two NRC recruiting agents at Mbabane, Swaziland, 31 July 1973; second, with the Lesotho and Botswana Labour Commissioners in Maseru and Gaberone in August 1973; and finally from interviews with ten former Malawian recruitees in Blantyre in September 1973. The information gathered in these interviews only served to corroborate and complement what is already available from publications.
17 M. Harris, *Portugal's African 'Wards'*, New York: American Committee on Africa, 1958, p. 28. This is corroborated by Duffy, *Portuguese Africa*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.

Reappraisal

In evaluating the migrant labour system, the underdevelopment effects and the tendency towards increased dependence that the system fosters will serve as our analytical base.

Many of the countries exporting cheap labour to South Africa have come to depend increasingly on this 'option' to provide employment for an expanding population. This option has certainly mitigated the trend of population migration from rural to urban areas of the source countries as young Africans go to the Rand, Kimberly and to Natal collieries and farms straight from the rural areas of Lesotho, Malawi, Botswana, etc. This might help to explain the fact that the cities and towns of Botswana, Swaziland, Malawi and Mozambique are proportionally smaller (*vis-à-vis* the total population) than those in other parts of Africa.

Dependency on South Africa in this sphere in many cases substitutes for the development of an independent employment policy on the part of these governments. Since manpower constitutes a nation's most important resource, employment policy becomes a major sector of any meaningful economic development strategy especially for countries with relatively high labour-to-capital ratios.

In many countries we are examining, labour policy is designed in such a way as to leave rural workers without much choice except to migrate to the mines. In colonial Mozambique, in particular, this policy bordered on physical coercion as those who could not find employment in the narrow urban sector faced emigration or arrest as vagrants or parasites:

> 'When the hunt for *shibalos* (or vagrants) is intensified in a particular district, the recruiting posts of the W.N.L.A. (the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association), which are strategically placed throughout southern Mozambique, are suddenly deluged with Africans anxious to sign mine contracts'.[17]

External dependence in the employment area in time becomes self-reinforcing to the extent that labour-exporting governments eventually develop a vested interest in the continuation of the unfair labour arrangement. For example, a few years ago when Botswana suggested to Lesotho and Malawi that they jointly negotiate for higher wages and better conditions for recruits from their territories working in the mines, the latter balked for fear of jeopardizing the 'gains' which they thought they were getting under existing arrangements.

There are a number of underdevelopment effects on the labour-exporting countries which derive from the migrant labour system as a whole; and it is to these that we now turn. Given (i) the pattern of contract extensions and renewals and (ii) the fact that the majority of recruits are between the prime ages of 20 and 35 years, the absence of this most vigorous and productive sector of the population obviously retards development at home, especially in the rural areas from which they spring. It is not hard to see how the migration system has a depressing effect on agricultural output and overall rural productivity. In rural Lesotho it is obvious to the naked eye that those who remain on the farm—usually women and children—cannot carry the burden effectively.

Many studies have been undertaken to assess the impact of the exodus of male labour from the rural areas to the mines and farms of South Africa. In a study on Botswana, Schapera found reverses in agricultural productivity: 'Owing to labour migration, many people are no longer available at home to attend the routine tasks of tribal life, and as a result both animal husbandry and agriculture have suffered.[18]

In an examination of a typical African rural district within South Africa itself, Houghton and Walton found the rural exodus responsible for rural blight and stagnation: 'In many cases land is not ploughed for the simple reason that there is no one to do the ploughing'.[19] Furthermore, an examination of the

18 I. Schapera, *Migrant Labour and Tribal Life*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 230.
19 Hobart Houghton and E. Walton, *The Economy of a Native Reserve*, Petermaritzberg: Shuter and Shoter, 1952, pp. 112–114.

trade statistics of Botswana and Lesotho reveals a trend towards greater and greater reliance on food imports. Ironically, the supplier is South Africa, and it would not be surprising if most of these food imports were produced by migrant labourers from these countries. Underdevelopment at the periphery and increased dependence on the centre clearly spring from the same sources—the migrant labour system.

According to the standard neo-classical theory of economic development, the underdevelopment of these peripheral states derives from 'structural characteristics' of low savings, low *per capita* incomes, low productivity, etc., which could be remedied by international aid and local effort. But it seems to us that these states are underdeveloped, and are becoming increasingly so, because of their incorporation as satellites to South Africa which exacts labour inputs from them and harnesses them to provide a market for its products.[20]

It is often argued that labour finds its way into mining work in order to supplement low family earnings resulting from poor harvests which are in turn blamed on poor soils, bad weather, excessive soil erosion and low carrying capacity of rural land. In many cases, poor performance on the part of rural land springs from neglect—lack of measures to conserve the soil through manuring, irrigation, proper crop rotation, and so on. Even bad weather in the form of drought in many ways springs from a backlog in tree planting as rural vegetation is removed to provide fuel and building materials. One can see, therefore, that general neglect in preserving the rural ecosystem to a large extent has its genesis in labour shortages (both in terms of numbers and quality) which are created by the labour-exporting system itself.

Furthermore, neo-classical 'economic growth' men have argued that in labour-surplus economies, labour can be pulled out of agriculture without affecting productivity which means that the marginal product of labour in agriculture is zero, if not negative. Needless to say, such theoretical possibilities lack empirical content, especially in Southern Africa where one would not just be removing labour at random, but removing the best workers (both in terms of creativity and physical vigour).[21]

In view of early physical exhaustion, health and other hazards attending recruitees one wonders how beneficial the continuation of the migration system is to the labour-exporting countries. It seems that the South African economy is not satisfied with breaking one generation of rural labour (especially the vital 20 to 35 year group), but its policy of high labour turnover ensures the breaking and tearing down of succeeding generations of the rural sector's most vital resource. As a result the labour-exporting peripheral state has no choice but to fall back on its own resources in order to repair and reproduce fresh labour supplies. Even the meagre government revenue originating from labour-recruitment fees and taxes would hardly be sufficient for medically rehabilitating the sick and exhausted. From an immediate fiscal standpoint therefore, the whole operation would appear to be ruinous to the peripheral state.

A number of observations could be made on the general economic picture. To begin with, income repatriated home by recruitees could be higher if the wages were reasonable. Widespread strikes in 1973 and 1974 resulted in large percentage wage increases, but these gains are minimal when one considers the low levels in the base period and the rate of inflation associated with the two years. Moreover, African wages would have to rise by many thousands per cent to come anywhere near parity. It is clear from various sources that present wages are at, or even below subsistence level in which case wages paid are just enough to ensure that the workers have sufficient energy to report for work.[22]

20 For a generalized treatment of the workings of these underdevelopmental processes and mechanisms, see recent contributions by S. Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale* (vols. I & II), Monthly Review Press, 1974, and Andre Gunder Frank, 'The Development of Underdevelopment', *Monthly Review*, vol. 18, no. 4, September 1966.

21 On a more human level, mining recruiting agents and some ill-advised government officials offer as benefits the opportunity to earn the bridal price or dowry that mine work accords, as if rural Africans would not get married in the absence of the modern money economy heralded by the mining industry.

22 See 1973 hearings before the British Parliament; House of Commons, Expenditure Committee (Trade and Industry Sub-Committee), 'Minutes of Evidence on Wages in South Africa', *Command Paper no. 268* (i–x), London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1973: see evidence by De Beers, Consolidated Gold Fields and by Prof. Charles Harvey and Adam Raphael.

In view of the fact that a disproportionately large amount of mine work assigned to recruitees is of very low-skill content, the potential gains on this front are also minimal; it appears that for the overwhelming majority, the only skill acquired or 'instilled' is an ability to obey orders, as the recorded opinions of mine officials cited earlier indicates.

Repatriated earnings and deferred pay when deposited in the local peripheral economy usually go to the savings counters of Barclays and Standard Bank—the two ubiquitous relics of British colonial presence. These banks, controlled as they are from regional headquarters in Johannesburg, usually recycle these savings back to South Africa or lend to local foreign enterprises (generally South African and British) which normally remit the proceeds to South Africa or elsewhere in the form of profits, dividends, interest and royalties.

Where earnings by recruitees are spent on consumption, South African-based and other foreign retail chains, such as Edworks, O.K. Bazaar and Woolworth, are only too ready to absorb these savings. Moreover, returning miners would have acquired consumption tastes geared to South African products during their tour in the mines, so that any hopes on the part of locally-based consumer industries are similarly aborted.

It is evident that the famous linkages and spread-effects of a labour-exporting strategy are at the best minimal. Therefore labour-exporting, if it could be regarded as a 'growth pole' at all, does transmit growth, not to the peripheral economy, but to the labour-importing centre.

Concluding Remarks

While one understands the anxiety of governments in pushing to provide employment opportunities, one ought to be alert to avoiding a full-employment policy that works perversely—as the cheap-labour-export model has shown. Full employment should not be looked at abstractly, thereby ignoring important dynamic effects of the policy. After all, black slaves on the cotton and sugar fields of the southern part of the United States had full employment on the plantation. But that worked only to impoverish the slave and enrich the slave owner.

As underdevelopment effects deepen and dependency increases, humanitarian calls for better conditions (to achieve labour 'commitment'), the provision of family housing (to end the seasonality of the work force) and calls for unionization will increase, as if a fractured leg requiring surgery could be cured merely by providing better bandages. At the periphery, such policies would only improve the delivery of more and better labour services to the centre and avoid structural changes that would jeopardize continued participation in satellite status.

After almost a century of 'participation' in the prosperous South African mining economy, the rural populations of Lesotho, Mozambique and Botswana still live more or less in abject poverty. Our analysis has shown that the poverty at the periphery is not merely independently juxtaposed with the prosperity at the centre of the sub-system, but that these are interconnected in a mutually supportive manner.

Hence, any meaningful agricultural development policy for the peripheral states of southern Africa has to take as one of its bench-marks the dismantling of the migrant labour system.