

# Cultural explanations for the persistence of migrant labour in Southern Africa: A critique

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## INTRODUCTION

During 1986 the South African government announced that it was going to relax<sup>1</sup> the system of influx control with which it tried to control the mobility of black people in South Africa. With the relaxation of influx control many of the legal obstacles to the permanent settlement of black migrants in South African cities were taken away. While it is clear that influx control has kept many black people from settling permanently in the urban areas of South Africa and in this way forced them into a pattern of oscillating labour migration (migrant labour), it is also clear that for some people migrant labour is a "voluntary" act, i.e. they would continue to be migrant labourers even if there were no laws that enforce it. The scrapping of influx control would therefore not necessarily lead to the end of migrant labour.

There are various explanations as to why some people continue to be migrant labourers in the absence of legal restrictions. One school of thought would blame the persistence of migrant labour on the alleged conservatism of rural people. They would argue that migrant labourers cling to their rural base because the latter allows them to live a rural, traditional lifestyle when they return during holidays or retirement. The preference for a traditional lifestyle, it is argued, is due to the values of migrant labourers.

This article is devoted to a critique of arguments that base their explanation for migrant labour on the value system or culture of migrant labourers.

## MODERNIZATION, MOBILITY AND MIGRANT LABOUR

Most cultural arguments make use, either implicitly or explicitly, of a framework that derives from modernization theory. The latter describes how a traditional tribal society changes during the process of modernization to become a modern society.

People who live in traditional societies enjoy only a limited degree of spatial mobility<sup>2</sup>, according to modernization theory (see e.g. Zelinsky 1971). This is because their mobility is constrained by the structure of traditional society (Moore 1965:31). When a modern industrial society starts developing next to the traditional society during the process of modernization, the former will need labourers from the latter to work in its mines and factories. These may not be forthcoming, due to the immobilizing effect of traditional society. In cases where the modern society is also the base of a colonial power and where the traditional societies were previously subjugated by the colonial power, the colonial state may use various means to force labourers to leave the traditional society to take up employment in the modern society. An example is nineteenth century South Africa where various measures such as taxes and land confiscation had the (intended or unintended) effect of forcing rural black people to seek work in the modern sector.

Under these circumstances migrant labour will often occur. According to modernization theorists, people will return to the traditional society as soon as they have earned enough money to pay their taxes or to buy food. The constant return to the traditional society after every sojourn in the modern society is due to the immobilizing pressures of the former. It will continue like this until the structure of the traditional society has been eroded by modernization. Modernization will free people from their bonds to the land and the traditional extended family and allow them to settle wherever they want.

Sometimes however the traditional society will prove particularly resistant to modernization due to the conservatism of its members. In cases such as this, migrant labour may survive for a very long time, as in present-day South Africa.

There are various parts of the traditional society that contribute to its immobilizing effect. It is possible to identify three elements of traditional society that is of particular importance in this respect: (1) institutions; (2) motivation and (3) values.

### Institutions

According to modernization theory the traditional society is characterized by the absence of institutional differentiation and functional specialization. There is only one institution, the extended family, and it performs a variety of functions. Production is organized on a kinship basis and as a result the extended family is the primary economic unit. It is not only production that is organized on this basis, but also political control, socialization of children and religious ceremonies.

Within the traditional extended family the various functions are not clearly separated and well defined. Production, for example, is imbued with social and symbolic significance that connects it to other aspects of life in the family. Because production is embedded in the extended family in this way the outward mobility of labourers from the extended family is severely restricted. During modernization production becomes stripped of these interconnections and crystallize out as a separate activity (Moore 1965:30). Labour thus becomes freed from the restrictions that binds it to and bottles it up within the extended family. As this process advances, labourers will start to leak from the extended family and eventually the family will lose its economic function altogether. The latter will be taken over by an autonomous economic system, one of the institutional spheres that develop during modernization.

The process whereby the extended family sheds its economic function is accompanied by changes in its structure. What happens is that it breaks up into its constituent parts: nuclear families. Nuclear families are not tied to a specific place to the same extent as extended families. People can respond more quickly to new job opportunities if they do not have cousins or uncles or other family to consider in their decision to move. This is another way in which institutional transformation leads to higher mobility.

"The principal cause of the breaking of large kinship organizations is the extensive mobility required by industrialization. This mobility is geographical, involving a concomitant physical separation of kinsmen" (Moore 1965:86).

The mobility that is involved in industrialization is not only geographical, it is also social.

The two aspects of mobility, geographical and social, are closely linked. Very often geographical mobility is a precondition for social mobility, and vice versa. If a person is bounded by custom to farm a piece of land belonging to his/her extended family, he or she cannot move away to take up new employment opportunities offering, for instance, a higher status.

Conversely, if there are, for example limitations to the statuses that a female member of the family may occupy, the new employment opportunities may not be open to her and this will place restrictions on her geographical mobility.

### Motivation

The circumstances under which people work, change dramatically during the process of economic modernization. Smelser (1976:146) summarizes these changes as follows: "Labor must be brought into a new reward system (wage payments), under a new form of authority (supervision on factory premises) and into a more impersonal market setting." In situations where people are not used to modern economic institutions, such as these, potential workers may not be willing to work in the modern sector. This unwillingness is another dimension of the immobilization of labourers within the extended family.

The explanation offered by modernization theorists for the peasants' unwillingness to work in the modern sector is "lack of motivation" (Moore 1965:38-39).

One aspect of the problem is their low level of demand for consumer products. If people do not desire these products, they would not be motivated to earn money in order to buy them.

Another aspect of the motivational problem is the security provided by the extended family. The relations of reciprocity embedded in the extended family provide economic security, while the importance of tradition and the immutability this confers on the traditional society provide emotional security. Potential workers may not be willing to forego this security and risk employment in the modern sector.

The motivational aspect of immobilization is ultimately due to the fact that a traditional society produces people with a motivational structure that fits in with the traditional society and a modern society produces people who are motivated in a way that is appropriate to a modern society. Motivational patterns appropriate to a traditional society will not be compatible with a modern industrial setting and as a result traditional people will not be willing to work in the modern sector. They will therefore stay locked up within the traditional extended family, unless they are forced by government measures such as land confiscation, forced labour and taxes to earn money.

The motivational structure of traditional people will have to change before they will be willing to work in the modern sector. But motivation is the result of socialization and socialization is the internalization of values. Ultimately, therefore, modernization theorists will argue that an externally induced value change is a precondition for adequate motivation in the new industrial setting and, as a result, labour mobility.

### Values

The most important part of the traditional society that has to change for mobility to develop, is its value system. Modernization theorists impute a strong determining influence to values in a society. The work of Talcott Parsons was a major

source of inspiration for modernization theorists and for him the role of values in a society is very similar to the function of the DNA-molecules in an organism. If the genetic message encoded in the molecule changes, the organism itself will change. Similarly, values provide a blueprint for society and if this blueprint changes, the society will change.

In practice the determining role of values mean that they provide the goals to which individuals must strive in their interaction with others. As a result of this there will eventually be a "fit" between the normative patterns (values) and interaction patterns of a society, i.e. they will tend to look the same.

Given the fit between the two, a prior change in the values of a traditional society is a precondition for changes in institutions and motivation. Modernization theorists will therefore trace resistance to modernization and with it, resistance to permanent settlement in urban areas, to the value system of traditional society. It is due to this stress on values that arguments that derive from modernization theory can be labelled "cultural". One of the changes that have to take place in the value system is that a commitment must develop to treat resources such as labour in an economically rational way. This means that efficiency must become the primary consideration in the utilization of labour rather than tradition. Mobility is obviously a precondition for the most efficient use of labourers.

It is also necessary for the passivity and fatalism that supposedly characterize traditional value systems (see e.g. Steyn 1972) to change and to be replaced by the action orientation of modern value systems. This will motivate people to take up the opportunities offered by the modern economy and will also contribute to higher mobility.

Migrant labour is a way of earning money in the modern sector at a stage when the migrant has not yet accepted the values and behaviour patterns of the modern sector and in this way it provides a bridge between traditional society and modern society. It is therefore a transitional phase in the process of the development of mobility. As the values of the traditional society are transformed and as its institutions adapt, migrants lose the motivational structure that corresponded with the traditional society and develop one that fits in with the modern society. Eventually they lose their desire for a traditional way of life and emerge as a mobile labour force freed from any ties to traditional society.

It can happen, however, that the modern and traditional sector co-exist for much longer than has been expected. When this happens a form of structural duality results. In cases such as this, migrant labourers resist the modernizing influences of the city, due to the extraordinary hold that the traditional values have over them. The development of the institutional requirements for mobility become arrested, as migrant labourers are only partially divorced from the extended family and continue to oscillate between town and country.

## MODERNIZATION THEORY AND MIGRANT LABOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA

Modernization theory is often used to explain the persistence of migrant labour in Southern Africa (Houghton 1967; Leistner 1964; Sadie 1966). Modernization arguments were particularly popular during the sixties but they have by no means died out (Thorington-Smith, Rosenberg, McCrystal 1978).

According to the authors cited above the main reason why some blacks resist permanent settlement in town, is their conservatism. They cling tenaciously to the tribal customs which can only be practised in the rural areas and this is why they insist on retaining access to land. Economic pressures force them to work in the towns but the migrant labour system allows them to do this without disrupting their traditional lifestyle. As long as the traditional culture in the form of traditional values, beliefs and customs has people in its grip in



this way they will continue to return to the rural areas after every period of employment in town.

A similar, albeit more sophisticated explanation for migrant labour was advanced by Mayer in his earlier work on the Red and School Xhosa<sup>3</sup> in East London. Mayer's earlier (1961) work was rooted in the Manchester school of social anthropology and was influenced in particular by Mitchell's (1956) work on urbanization and migrant labour.

Mayer makes use of the latter's distinction between stabilization and urbanization. Stabilization is a purely quantitative measure of permanency of residence in a town as opposed to oscillation between town and country. But being stabilized in an urban area is not equivalent to being urbanized. "Urbanization", as defined by Mayer, only occurs if a qualitative change takes place in the individual and the way he or she relates to the city. There are two dimensions to urbanization according to Mayer. The first dimension, the structural, refers to the network of social relations an individual has built up in town. The second dimension, the cultural, refers to the behaviour pattern and values of an individual. It is especially the values of an individual that is important in this respect, because in many cases an individual "might conform outwardly, but still remain inwardly determined to revert to pre-urban patterns when opportunity arises" (Mayer 1961:6). There are therefore two questions that must be asked to determine the extent of urbanization.

(a) "What evidence do we find for their becoming tied to the urban community by basic social ties?", and

(b) "What evidence do we find for their adopting typically urban behaviour patterns, attitudes and values?" (Mayer 1961:6)

According to Mayer, we can expect that people who are urbanized would also be stabilized, as the former is an indication that a person is committed to an urban way of life. This was the case with most of the School migrants studied by him. Some of those who were urbanized were not completely stabilized, however, and retained access to land and other links in the rural areas. For Mayer this is a result of state-induced insecurity in urban areas. Factors like the intensification of influx control, urban relocation and the loss of property rights made life difficult for the community he studied in the sixties. In fact the whole community was under threat of removal to Mdantsane and this threat was carried out by the time the second edition of his book appeared in 1970.

In contrast to School migrants, most Red migrants resisted urbanization and as a result of that they seldom stabilized either. Economic necessity was the major motivation for their continued stay in town: "... providing for the needs of the homestead is the only justification of town work in Red eyes. Money earned in town ultimately stands for 'independence' in the country" (Mayer 1961:136). Concomitant with their utilitarian evaluation of life in town, a lot of stress was placed on acquiring and improving a homestead in the rural areas as well as keeping up social ties with their areas of origin. Red migrants deliberately resisted the urbanizing influences of the town through a strategy of incapsulation. Incapsulation implied that they only mixed socially with people from their own area of origin and avoided social contacts with town-rooted people.

Both Red and School migrants may therefore continue oscillating between town and country, but the proportion of each group who do it and their reasons for doing it, differ. "Thus the School migrant, like the Red migrant, may stay in town for long periods being 'in' it but never wholly 'of' it, only for quite different reasons. The Red man, having been shielded from town influences is tied to his country home by moral and emotional considerations above all where the School man — in many cases — may be tied by nothing more than stark practical necessity" (Mayer 1961:225).

The arguments of Mayer are broadly similar to those of the modernization theorists. Both would say that migrant labour will continue as long as traditional values survive.

## GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN MIGRANT LABOUR

From the discussion of migrant labour presented above, it is clear that "conservatism" and "resistance to change" are key concepts in the explanations of modernization theory. This conservatism derives from the restrictive hold that traditional culture exercises over rural black people. The desire for a traditional way of life is regarded as the explanation why people do not want to embrace the new opportunities offered by urban life completely and settle there permanently and as the explanation why they do not want to modernize their agriculture. The two explanations are of course related: if the traditional mode of agricultural production is modernized, it would mean that many people would lose their land and cattle and this will make it impossible for them to continue their traditional way of life. At the same time, a change in traditional values is in itself a precondition for a change in agriculture.

For modernization theorists the cultural differences between rural and urban areas are very important. They assert that there are distinctive urban and rural ways of life and this plays an important role in their explanations. According to them migrant labourers return to the rural areas because they desire a traditional rural lifestyle. It is therefore worthwhile to pay some attention to this question in the South African context.

It seems clear that the "traditional" lifestyle of rural people have in fact undergone major changes. This is firstly connected with the impact of population relocation, both in terms of relocation from the urban areas and farms in "white" South Africa into the homelands and in terms of relocation within the homelands as a result of betterment planning.<sup>4</sup>

Sharp and Spiegel (1984) have demonstrated how the reciprocal relationships embedded in kinship and neighbourhood links start to deteriorate in a relocation area in QwaQwa where there is an almost total absence of income sources other than the earnings of migrant labourers and commuters. The impact of betterment relocation has been discussed by McAllister (1985), amongst others. In the cases cited by him, betterment relocation destroyed the reciprocal neighbourhood links that existed before and the circumstances surrounding betterment were such that it is unlikely that new links will form. It also affects forms of economic co-operation such as ploughing companies and arrangements for the lending and borrowing of cattle. He identifies two other likely effects of betterment: "Firstly, the authority of elders over juniors is likely to be further undermined and secondly, the relationship between the sexes may undergo radical changes as a result of the concentrated settlement pattern and of the demise of the youth organizations.<sup>5</sup> With regard to both the elder/junior relationship and the youth organizations, betterment represents the death knell for institutions already under considerable pressure from factors like migration and education."

It is often pointed out that migrant labour itself undermines the status of the elders in rural societies. This is because the earnings of juniors through migrant labour make them less dependent on the elders as far as, amongst other things, bridewealth is concerned. Another aspect where the effects<sup>6</sup> of the migrant labour system can be seen is in the relationship between men and women. Several writers (e.g. Murray 1981; Brown 1983) have noted the prevalence of female-headed households in the rural areas of Southern Africa. Female-headed households come about as a result of husbands dying in industrial and mining accidents, husbands absconding or divorcing their wives, the birth of illegitimate children, etc. Most of these occurrences can be linked to the system of migrant labour. The participation of women<sup>7</sup> in

the migrant labour system and the earnings they derive from that can also increase their bargaining power relative to that of men, leading to greater independence on their part, just as in the case of juniors.

Even in cases where it seems as if certain "traditional" customs are still practiced, it often becomes clear on closer inspection that they have in fact undergone a change in content. When a certain job needs to be done, e.g. the building of a homestead, it is customary to call a work-party consisting of other men in the neighbourhood to provide assistance with the job. According to Spiegel (1980:123), although work-parties are still called in his study area in Lesotho, they have undergone a change in content:

"The calling of such work-parties is phrased in the idiom of reciprocity in so far as one might expect to be called by a few of those who have attended one's own work-party. But many regular participants at work-parties do not have the resources to call work-parties of their own, and a few rely on work-parties to provide them with an occasional source of sustenance. Moreover, the households which do call work-parties often do so soon after either receiving a remittance or having a wage earner return home for a visit."

He then concludes that although "work-parties retain an idiom of reciprocity they have effectively become a disguised form of wage-labour".

Due to these changes it is quite clear that a pristine "traditional" culture has long ceased to exist in the "homelands" of South Africa and that it would be wrong to view urban and rural ways of life as two mutually exclusive categories. (See Uzzell 1979 for a discussion of the weaknesses of the rural-urban cultural dichotomy.) This is not to deny that some remnants of it still persist, however.

It would be wrong to assume that the changes that take place in the rural areas of South Africa must necessarily result in the "modernization" of rural culture, on the other hand. This is one of the weaknesses of modernization theory with its polarized conception of culture and its conception of an inevitable move from one pole (tradition) to another (modernity). The people in the rural areas of South Africa are subject to a particular set of experiences such as relocation, influx control and unemployment and it may be possible that they develop new (non-traditional, in the terminology of modernization theory) cultural forms to cope with this that do not bear any relationship to modern culture.

Another problem with cultural explanations for migrant labour in South Africa is that they remove values from their position in the conduct of everyday life and place them in an abstract sphere where they are protected from any determining influences from outside. In this way values determine action in a unidirectional way, but are themselves regarded as exempt from any determining influences. The result of this is that the processes through which values arise and change are left unexplained (Joubert 1986).

For modernization theorists a change in values is a precondition for the end of the migrant labour system. People who have changed their values will be more inclined to stabilize. But why do people change their values in some cases and not in others? And where did these values come from in the first place? Cultural explanations cannot come up with answers to these questions.

To arrive at a more adequate explanation it must be recognized that values are never divorced from specific interests and that they very often function as rationalizations for these interests. Once the influence of specific interests is recognized, it becomes clear that one cannot talk about the effect of traditional culture in an undifferentiated way. Specific groups in a society may, due to their interests, be more amenable to the preservation of traditional culture than others. It must also be remembered that the dominant groups in a society very often have control over the agents of socialization, with

the result that they can ensure that their values are far more wide-spread in that society than would otherwise have been the case.

## THE ROLE OF SPECIFIC INTEREST GROUPS IN THE PRESERVATION OF RURAL SOCIAL RELATIONS AND MIGRANT LABOUR

The argument presented above can be operationalized in the following way: One should look at the interest that both the chiefs and the commoners have in the preservation of indigenous social structure as well as in the institution of migrancy and then find out to what extent their interests coincide or not.

The first point that can be made is that the chiefs have an interest in the retention of communal land tenure as their control over land allocation is an important basis of their authority as chiefs. It is also a source of income. Although access to land is, theoretically speaking, free in the black rural areas, gifts and bribes are not unimportant as a way of ingratiating chiefs to have land allocated (Quinlan 1983).

In the past it was in the interests of chiefs to admit as many immigrants as possible and this is probably still the case. Speaking of Pondoland at the beginning of this century, Beinart (1982:129) comments as follows:

"As they received a once-off payment from immigrants, it was in their interest to admit as many as possible; similarly there was advantage in meeting popular pressure for allotment of plots. A larger population in their location broadened the base of people from whom they could collect dues. The pre-colonial forms of tributary rights had only been modified and not totally transformed after annexation. There were contradictions in their position, but chiefs and headmen increasingly became the agents of the state in its attempts to squeeze as many people as possible on to the land in the African reserves and thereby limit outright urbanisation and proletarianisation. The entrenchment of chiefs and headmen in the administrative and political structure of Pondoland and the dynamic of local political processes therefore helped to perpetuate migrancy as a specific form of proletarianisation."

As more and more of the income in the rural areas was derived from the wages of migrant workers, it became more important for the chiefs to ensure that migrants' wages came back to the rural areas.

"Though evidence is lacking, it seems that some headmen attempted to take a direct levy on migrant wages. Their continued ability to levy dues, their charges for plots of land usually from men who were engaged in setting up homesteads, now depended increasingly on income from wages rather than on production on the land alone. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, chiefs and headmen advocated tighter controls over migrants and their wages; they suggested unsuccessfully that it should be made compulsory for every migrant to inform the headmen when leaving and returning and that deferred pay be made compulsory. In general, they recognised the importance of pass laws as a means of control over the labour force. Their complaints about migration of youths to the sugar fields reflected a similar concern about the loss of control over migrants and wages. And some even proposed that pass laws be extended to women in order to prevent uncontrolled movement to town for the loss of daughters implied not only a reduction of family labour but of a source of bridewealth" (Beinart 1982:156-157).

Various measures were taken to stop women from migrating. Women were for example prevented by the chiefs from buying bus or train tickets or travelling alone (Bozzoli 1983:151).

Another reason why women were prevented from migrating, was perhaps the fear that if a married woman left, her migrant husband would not come back at all and permanent



urbanization would take place. Modernization theorists who would ascribe the role played by chiefs in resisting permanent migration to the effect of a fixation with traditional culture are therefore mistaken if they divorce the value system from specific interests.

An alternative source of income for chiefs would be to use their privileged access to land to become largescale commercial farmers. In the past, this was not easy, as various constraints were put by the state on the development of black farming (Lipton 1977, Van der Horst 1971:311). These restrictions are not so much in evidence any more, and it would be interesting to see if the ruling groups in the "homelands" would come to see this as an alternative or not. Three factors seem to be relevant to this question. It firstly depends on how the chiefs view their own position. It seems that at some stage in the future the chiefs will have to make a choice between being commercial farmers or being chiefs as the two are not compatible in the long run. The expropriations that would follow as a result of the consolidation of individual plots into big farms would destroy the communal land tenure system and would weaken the basis of chiefly authority. Besides, being a successful farmer is a full-time job and it is doubtful if chiefs would have time for a political office. The future of the communal land tenure system and with it the migrant labour system (the ability to acquire land via the communal tenure system is one of the major attractions of keeping a rural base) would thus depend partly on whether the chiefs would value the political position offered by chieftdom higher than the rewards offered by commercial farming. It would also depend on two other factors: the resistance of commoners to losing access to land and the actions of the state.

If we look at the issue of resistance to permanent migration from the point of view of the commoners, it is also possible to discover a certain rationality in resistance.

Although influx control has been relaxed, restrictions on squatting still act as a disincentive to permanent settlement in the urban areas. The reason for this is that these restrictions make inexpensive housing quite difficult to obtain in the urban areas of South Africa. Other factors that make the urban areas relatively unattractive are the lack of old age homes in urban areas as well as the relatively low level of old age pensions for blacks.

The vision of modernization theory of boundless new opportunities that arise during modernization and are not taken up by rural people, due to their "conservatism" and love of traditional culture, should certainly be re-examined. In a racially stratified society such as South Africa, being black imposes special disadvantages in the "modern" sector of society. The disadvantages are not restricted to deficient social security benefits and insecurity of urban residence but also apply in the labour market, where the threat of unemployment looms particularly large for black people.

In this context, agricultural land takes on importance in the form of insurance against old age and unemployment, as it allows rural households to produce at least part of their food needs themselves. Access to land is also important in another respect: in the case of old people who can no longer work as migrant labourers, land can be used as a bargaining chip to gain access to the migrant earnings of their children when the latter establish their own homesteads and are no longer as willing to support their parents as before. The rationale behind this is that if children do not support their parents, they are less likely to "inherit" the fields that are farmed by them (Spiegel 1980:117).

Under the communal land tenure system, land cannot be sold. Once it is acquired, there is no sense in relinquishing access to land as there would be no economic reward for doing so (Low 1982). This should be an especially strong argument

for people on the verge of starvation, certainly the position of many rural black people in South Africa.

Houghton (1967:94) regards the desire for owning cattle as one of the reasons why people do not settle permanently in the urban areas. As was explained above, for modernization theorists a traditional society is characterized by the absence of differentiation of its economic, social and cultural aspects. As a result of this, cattle are not only viewed as economic assets that can be used to make a profit, but are imbued with social and religious significance. It is the latter aspects that predominate in a traditional society and cause migrant labourers to resist permanent urbanization.

The attachment to cattle can be explained without having recourse to cultural arguments however. Rutman and Werner (1973) have demonstrated that investment in cattle is the best means of saving open for black peasants. It fulfills very much the same function for rural black people that investment in property fulfills for whites: it is a way of providing for old age and a hedge against inflation. Investments in cattle and farming implements can also be seen as a form of insurance: during spells of unemployment or during old age these can be used to plough the fields of others and in this way additional income may be raised (Spiegel 1980:118).

The work of Spiegel (1979; 1980) and Murray (1981) on the developmental cycle of households in Lesotho provide an illustration of the importance that many rural households in Southern Africa attach to access to land. It is a characteristic of the land tenure system in Lesotho that, once a field has been allocated, the right to use that field can be forfeited if no attempt is made to cultivate it. This can lead to a situation where migrant labourers invest some of their migrant income to work their fields, not so much with the intention of deriving a harvest but rather to hold them for the sake of future security. In the earlier stages of the developmental cycle of households, "it is fairly common that cash inputs into agricultural production exceed the value of yields. But for the sake of later security, which is seen to lie in access to arable land, such losses are an accepted risk" (Spiegel 1980:135).

Due to the interests that attach commoners to the land, it can be expected that they would resist attempts to divorce them from it.

The last factor that must be taken into account is the state. The state has historically played a significant role in the preservation of rural social relations and the communal tenure system. The Tomlinson-commission advised in 1955 that the communal tenure system should be transformed into one based on private property, but this recommendation was not accepted, probably because it was in conflict with the state's intention of accommodating as many people as possible in the "homelands". Another reason may have been the effect this would have had on the institution of chieftancy. The state certainly tried to entrench the position of the chiefs: the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 was an example of this. The chiefs were probably viewed as an important ingredient in the future success of the homeland policy. At the moment it is unclear what role the homeland policy plays in the state's strategies, but whatever actions the state takes will certainly influence the future of the communal tenure system and migrant labour.

## CONCLUSION

For modernization theorists, the persistence of migrant labour is due to the traditional value system. It was argued in this article that it is not the case. The argument against cultural explanations can be summarized as follows:

(a) Due to the changes that have taken place in the rural areas of South Africa, an unblemished "traditional" culture cannot be said to exist anymore; and

(b) it is wrong to view the effect of values in isolation of other factors, such as interests.

#### NOTES

1. Influx control has only been relaxed and not scrapped altogether. Citizens of the four "states" (i.e. Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei; they are also known as the TBVC-states) that received nominal independence as a result of the government's Apartheid-policies are still subject to influx control as they are regarded as foreigners. The changes in influx control were accompanied by a tightening of the restrictions on squatting and this will act as a deterrent to permanent settlement in urban areas.
2. There are two kinds of mobility, spatial and social. Unless otherwise indicated, in this article "mobility" refers to spatial mobility.
3. Mayer divides rural Xhosas into two categories, Red and School, depending on their attitude towards Western culture. The Red people resist western influences while the School are more open to it.
4. Betterment planning in the rural areas involve the division of land into three categories, viz. residential sites, arable land and grazing areas. One of its effects is the concentration of dispersed homesteads into rural villages.
5. Youth organizations fulfilled a similar function to that of schools in Western society for the "traditional" Xhosa society which is McAllister's object of study. They functioned to socialize young people into their roles as defined by the traditional culture. They are based on specific neighbourhoods and this is why they are disrupted by relocation.
6. The effects of migrant labour must of course be separated from its causes. In fact, what is argued here is that the effects of migrant labour undermines its alleged causes — as seen by modernization theorists — i.e. the cultural distinctiveness of urban and rural areas.
7. In 1980, 16 % of the migrant labourers absent from the rural areas of South Africa were in fact women (Natrass 1981:41).

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