THE MIGRATION FACTOR IN AMERICAN AND AFRICAN LABOUR HISTORY

Frederick J. Kaijage

Department of History, University of Dar es Salaam

INTRODUCTION

In the histories of both the United State of America and Africa, migration of labour constitutes an important chapter. It is generally associated with the processes of change that entailed economic and social transformations. These transformations were observable on the part of both the origins and the destinations of the migrants. Labour migration on a significant scale meant a far-reaching disruption of economic and social life on the part not only of the individual migrants but of whole communities. Such a phenomenon can only be explained in terms of either sudden social upheavals or, more often, fundamental structural changes in society.

America and Africa are clearly at different stages of social development, a fact that reflects the differing degrees to which their economies and societies have been transformed. This factor renders extremely difficult the task of working out a comparative analysis of the processes of historical change in the two areas. However, in both cases similar questions might be asked regarding the dynamics which engendered the movement of peoples from their original communities to take up employment elsewhere, willingly or otherwise.

I wish to propose that the crucial factor underlying the massive migrations of labour in both America and Africa was the emergence and development of capitalism as a world system. In both America and Africa capitalism has long been at work. In one it has given rise to development of the forces of production, in the other it has essentially led to their stagnation. In either case, however, labour has been a critical question. The point at issue is whether the forces which created, sustained and controlled labour, as well as the interactive social processes deriving therefrom can be examined in a comparative framework. The argument of this essay is that in studying migration of labour in America and Africa situational parallels and contrasts can be drawn. The basis of comparison is that capitalist development nationally and internationally has had a differential impact on communities and societies, simultaneously creating sources and destinations of labour. This is the point that ultimately underscores the question of labour migration.

This paper focuses on the periods of far-reaching economic and social changes in both societies. In the case of America, we shall examine the phenomenon of labour migration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries,

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

when America, after the Civil War, experienced rapid transformation from a country largely dependent on agricultural production to a truly urban-industrial society. Labour from foreign lands, in particular, played a conspicuous role in this transfonation. As we shall see, American immigration predates the Civil War but it was during the post-Civil War period that immigration took a dramatic turn in terms of numerical strength. In Africa our interest is in the forces that were set in motion by the rise of colonialism. European colonial powers perforce imposed upon the African pre-colonial socio-economic systems forms of production and exchange relations that were consonant with the needs of the metropolitan capitalist economies. The colonial introduction of the cash nexus, of which labour supply and demand were essential elements, constituted the most important agent of social transformation. For the United States of America, except for the phenomenal migrations of African-Americans from the predominantly agricultural South to the industrial cities of the North during the period between 1916 and 1923, the more substantial part of industrial migrant labour came from across the oceans, mainly in Europe and Asia. In colonial Africa, however, labour migration occurred largely within the continent. But this difference, remarkable as it may seem, does not negate the validity of a comparative analysis.

In the case of America during the period in question, market forces at home and abroad were more or less fully operational in propelling labour to the industrial centers. This does not mean, though, that there were no other pressures at work. Such other forces as may have come into play, however, were of peripheral significance in relation to market forces. On the other hand, in colonial Africa, where labour demand and supply occurred within the framework of "articulated" modes of production, market forces did not have their full sway. Extra-economic pressures had to be exerted in order to generate sufficient labour supply.[1]

Admittedly, my choice of period, especially in respect of America, is rather arbitrary. This choice omits developments during the colonial and 'middle' periods of America's history. Production in colonial America was mainly sustained through forced migrations of European indentured employees and, even more significantly, African slave labour. In this situation, extra-economic forces were probably more critical in the propelling of labour to the centres of production than in the case of colonial Africa.[2] I am therefore aware that my choice of period does not do full justice to the comparative exercise. I have only two points in my defence. The first is that I know precious little about the labour history of colonial America. Secondly, I believe that cross-cultural comparison in the context of this

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

paper would make greater sense if the phenomena under review are either contemporaneous or at least contiguous in time.

This essay first seeks to examine the dynamics of change which gave rise to labour migration in America and Africa. Secondly, the patterns of migration and employment of migrant labour in both regions will be established. And finally, we shall have a glimpse of some of the social effects of the migration factor on the respective societies. The essay is essentially interpretive, seeking to recast, within a comparative framework, important studies on the history of labour migration in the two regions. It will also substantially draw upon my own original research on the subject. Because the essay covers a wide scope in both time and space, it inevitably makes generalizations which, though valid, probably gloss over some of the fine details based on more closely focused, small-scale studies. But analyses of a generalized nature have a role to play in our quest for understanding global analytic issues and broader interrelationships in historical processes. The underlying objective of this essay is to contribute towards a greater appreciation of the significance of cross-cultural analyses.

Migration and Labour Supply in America

The image of colonial America as a land of the self-sufficient farmer, who provided for his needs by means of family labour, both on the land and in domestic production, has become almost an orthodoxy. But colonial America was not a subsistence economy. Although self-employment for most colonists outside the slave South was the mainstay of their material existence, colonial America was a market economy, structured and controlled to serve the dominant interests of the Mercantile power, namely England.[3] What in the early 18th century became 'enumerated goods' under England's Navigation laws were largely produced outside the ambit of the family economy, mainly on the plantantions. But labour for this mode of production was in extremely short supply in the domestic market. The demand for foreign labour, therefore, dates back to the early days of white settlement in America. Indentured labour was brought in from Europe and slave labour from Africa to produce such items as tobacco, rice, indigo and cotton destined for the mother country. That production was carried out by coerced, unfree labour is attributable to the fact that capitalism as a mode of production, in which free labour is untrammeled by ownership of means of production or personal ties, was not yet well established in colonial America.

Although, for more than half a century after America's Independence, there was, in the North, a preponderance of self-employed producers in

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

both rural and urban economies, capitalist relations of production, whereby such producers were imperceptibly and progressively thrown onto the labour market, increasingly ate their way into Middle Period America. There was an enlargement of scale in both agriculture and industry. The craft shop progressively gave way to mill and factory production controlled by large employers. Wage labour expanded slowly but steadily before the mid-century, and by leaps and bounds thereafter.[4] But owing to the availability of abundant land, the process of economic transformation did not generate sufficient labour supply internally. To many foreign producers, particularly in Europe, who were displaced by the disintegration of the feudal order or, especially in the case of England, by the vicissitudes of the economic process under industrial capitalism, America appeared to present unlimited opportunities.

A rapid increase in immigration took place after the Napoleonic Wars as a result of the "pull" forces in America and the "push" forces in Europe. The main source of American immigration was Western Europe, especially Ireland, England, Scotland, Germany and France. The main "pull" forces in America were: availability of land, prospects for employment in an expanding industrial sector and, for those running away from political or religious persecution, hopes of a more secure and more free life. In Europe the impersonal economic changes constituted the major "push" force. But there were also other developments relating to human agency which aroused the hopes, fears and dreams of individual migrants.

The factory system in England which destroyed the crafts, the trade cycle under competitive capitalism which gave rise to mass unemployment, and the reorganization of the rural economies, which displaced and impoverished the European peasantry, all served to increase the exodus to America. There were also other contributory factors, especially the 1848 European Revolution, removal of restriction on immigration, and the development of cheap ocean transport.

The most remarkeable immigration in the Middle Period came from Ireland. An iniquitous land system characterized by absentee landlordism, rack-renting and insecurity of tenure kept the mass of Irish peasants on the margin of subsistence, forcing many to leave. But the real flood-gates were opened by the Great Famine brought on by the potato blight of 1845–49.

The only major non-European source of American immigration in this period was China. In the period from 1850 to 1882, the year when Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, 3 million Chinese went to America, settling mainly on the Pacific Coast. Most were running away from economic catastrophe. The great Taiping Rebellion, beginning in 1848, paralyzed

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

trade and industry in Southern China and brought famine and ruin to millions.[5] In the immediate period after the Civil War, Chinese workers played a significant role in the constuction of the Pacific Railroad.[6]

It would not be correct to suggest, of course, that all migrants came to America out of desperation. There were those were relatively well off, and migrated in order to widen their economic horizons. With some capital at their disposal, they went into independent farming. A free plot of land on American soil was an ambition cherished by many an immigrant. With no resources on hand many could not fulfill this ambition. They had to be content with selling their labour power to the mill and factory masters, concentrated mainly on the east coast. The most prominent among such immigrants were the Irish who swelled the ranks of the mill hands in the New England textile industry. These and the French Canadians, desperate for a living, offered their own and their children's labour at rates of pay which were unacceptable to the Yankees. The Yankee girls in the paternalist Waltham system gave way to Irish wives and children, as the manufacturers strove for higher profits, cashing in on the plight of the Irish.[7]

The course of immigration of labour into America took a new turn after the American Civil War. Although there is no unanimity among historians on the causes of the War, few would deny that the obstructive conduct of Southern plantocracy towards Northern efforts to promote industrial expansion contributed in no small measure to the tension between the two sides. The Southerners, for example, refused to support increase of the protective tariffs and measures to promote immigration of much needed skilled labour.[8]

In 1864, when the War was on its last legs, Congress, under the control of the triumphant Northerners, passed an Act which bestowed official sanction on importation of immigrant contract labour and gave an active role to government in encouraging immigration mainly through the Federal Immigration Bureau. State governments also joined the campaign. What happened under this legislation bore striking parallels with the situation in colonial Africa. The Immigration Act authorized employers to pay the passage and bind services of prospective migrant workers. It also provided for the creation of private agencies which would promote immigrant labour. Money was poured into such agencies, the most oustanding of which was the American Emigrant Company. The agencies earned fees charged on employers for supplying them with mainly skilled labour. New York became the main centre of recruitment agencies. After 1866 steamship companies had an edge over other agencies which had no free passage to offer.[9] Originally agencies brought in mainly skilled labour, but, with increasing indust-

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

rial strife in the days of the Knights of Labour, unskilled immigrant contract labour, recruited mainly internally, was supplied to employers to break strikes.

One interesting variant of labour importation was the *Padrone* system. The system first developed in connnection with the movement of labour from Southern Italy. A *padrone,* or labour boss, recruited labour with the aid of an Italian "bank" (which combined banking with sale of passage tickets and also acted as employment agency). The *padrone* recruited unskilled labour on a pre-negotiated package of passage, wages, commission, duration and conditions of employment. On arrival in the United States the recruits were supplied in gangs to employers at rates which gave the *padrone* substantial profit.

By 1890 there was no need for importing unskilled labour as voluntary immigration reached immense proportions. The *padrone* systems then became, for Italian immigrants, a special kind of employment agency. Ignorant of employment opportunities, newly arrived Italian immigrants placed themselves in the hands of *padrone* who found them employment, charging them a commission for the employment thus obtained. Orders were supplied mainly to railroad and construction companies, as well as city departments. The *padrone* system also featured, through to a lesser extent, among Greek and Syrian immigrants.[10]

In the post-bellum period the pattern of immigration changed considerably. From the early 1880s the "old" immigration from Western Europe declined while the "new" immigration from eastern and Southern Europe increased, until it outstripped the former around the mid-1890s. In 1880, 80% of the foreign-born in the United States had come from England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Holland and France. Those originating from Russia, Austria-Hungary, Bohemia, Poland and Italy constituted only 4%. By 1910 the foreign-born from northern and western Europe had dwindled to only 48%, while the proportion of those from southern and eastern Europe had risen to 38% of the total.[11] In 1880, 12,354 immigrants from Italy entered the United States. In the same year immigrants from England totalled 59,454. By 1900 the proportions had been completely reversed. Italian immigrants that year amounted to 100,135 while England sent a mere trickle of 9,951.[12]

Another new source of American immigration at this time, especially after 1890, was Japan. The Japanese arriving on the Pacific coast were received with joy by California business and farm employers, though they incurred the fury of the racists who cried wolf about the "yellow peril."[13]

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

The employment agencies, steamship companies and the *padroni* facilitated but did not induce immigration. Their efforts were subordinate to the essential social and economic forces inherent in the societies from which the immigrants originated. As feudal ties loosened in late 19th century eastern and southern Europe, official restraints against immigration were removed. The old agrarian economies broke up, marginalizing millions of peasants. Traditional industries faced destruction. Similar developments were taking place in Japan. On the other hand, industry at the time was expanding by leaps and bounds in Western Europe, thereby creating considerable employment opportunities, and thus obviating the need for mass immigration to America from that source.

In Austria-Hungary peasants and agricultural labourers got displaced as a result of splitting the land into tiny holdings, incapable of supporting those who lived on them. In southern Italy absentee landlords imposed extortionate rents and did not reinvest in the land to make it more productive. Owner-cultivated estates were so fragmented that they could not yield enough to sustain their cultivators.[14] In Japan the Meiji Restoration of 1868 was followed by the emancipation from feudalism of the peasantry which became nominally free-holders. This opened the way for the dispossession of the peasantry, since removal of the ban on sale and subdivision of land legalized the various mechanisms for the unlimited acquisition of land by forced sale, mortgage and the like. The land tax revision of 1873 led the small landowners along the path to forceclosure.[15] These then were the economic and social forces behind the "new" immigration of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Political and religious pressures also came into play. The situation of Jewish immigration from Tsarist Russia is a classic example. The 1882 May Laws debarred Jews from agriculture, industry and the professions, excluded them from public office, and denied them educational opportunities. The pogroms of 1881-82, 1891 and 1905-6 exacerbated the situation.[16]

After the Civil War, America entered the age of a real industrial revolution. The older cities, centers of light industry like Boston, Baltimore or New Orleans lost out to the burgeoning newer cities farther west and north: Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis and St. Louis. This is where the basic components of the revolution in heavy industry were centered, and where most of the new immigrants gravitated, helped by relatives or scouts for large employers. The expansion in anthracite mining, steel and iron works, tanning, lumbering, breweries, cigar making, and meat packing required more manpower than was available among the

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

native-born. Work could be found that required neither skills nor knowledge of English.[17]

The east coast and, to a much lesser extent, the new south got their share of the new immigration too. New York became the centre of Italian and Jewish immigrants. The Italian peasant exchanged the stagnation of the feudal society for the bondage of the New York and Boston sweatshop system. He was also dominant in rail building, construction, street cleaning and the public utilities. The Jewish immigrants poured into the New York garment trade.[18]

The Southern capitalists and planters also encouraged new immigration. The capitalists hoped that southern industrialization would follow labour. The planters were anxious to replace the increasingly recalcitrant African-Americans who were leaving for a freer life of the mills, mines, railroads and road construction. The Louisiana sugarcane fields managed to recruit thousands of Italian labourers, but mainly as a migratory or temporary element. On the whole the South attracted little immigrant labour.[19]

Not all who migrated to America had an intention of settling permanently. Some saw their sojourn in the States as an opportunity to accumulate resources for a better life back home. The southern Italian *contadini* peasants in a number of cases went to America in order to acquire capital with which to purchase land, provide dowries for their daughters and assist their sons to enter business or the professions.[20] There was considerable European seasonal labour in America which shuttled back and forth.[21] The 'birds of passage" label associated with the new immigrants was therefore not without some basis.[22] But the predominant majority of the immigrants never returned home. As we shall see below, African migrant labourers, on the other hand, were birds of passage par excellance.

Immigration into post-bellum America provided much needed industrial labour but also generated a greater deal of social conflict. Nativist feelings against the immigrants emanated from all layers of American society. The middle class intellectuals lamented the dilution of Anglo-Saxon, Protestant America by the ingress of "the weak, the broken, and the mentally crippled of all races drawn from the lowest stratum of the Mediterranean basin and the Balkans, together with hordes of the wretched, submerged populations of the Polish ghettos".[23] Many industrialists attributed much of the industrial strife to the new immigrants.[24] The loudest outcry against immigration, however, came from the working class who charged the immigrants with causing unemployment by inundating the labour market, weakening the unions through scabbing, and pulling down the workers' standards of living by accepting starvation wages.[25] These protests forced the state to

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

institute successive immigration control measures, the most stringent of which was the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act which placed quotas on immigration from southern and eastern Europe and virtually prohibited immigration from the Orient. With this legislation, the long transition from immigration promotion to immigration control was complete.

Generally speaking, therefore, labour migration in respect of the United States of America during the period under review was almost synonymous with immigration of foreign labour. Internal migrations there were but they were, to all intents and purposes, of negligible proportions. The single most important exception were the controversial massive migrations of African-Americans from the South to the industrial cities of the North, especially between 1916 and 1923 when more than a million southern blacks went north.

The First World War created a huge demand for America's industrial products, especially those directly related to the war effort and to post-war reconstruction. The industrial expansion that ensued, however, was constrained by a critical labour shortage. Wartime conditions rendered further European and Asian immigration into the United States an impossible proposition. At home, the labour supply situation was aggravated by the drafting of many young men into the army. This yawning gap in the labour supply of northern industries was filled by African-Americans most of whom were working under semi-servile conditions on the post-slavery southern plantations. The economic opportunities presented to them by the prospects of lucrative industrial employment in the North contrasted with the adverse conditions of the South in the form of Jim Crow laws, the inordinately exploitative share-cropping and peonage systems, racial discrimination in industrial employment (especially in the cotton mills), the cotton boll weevil disaster after 1910, and the catastrophic Alabama and Mississipi floods of 1915. It is no wonder therefore that a state like Georgia lost about two-thirds of its black labour force between 1920 and 1923.[26]

Not withstanding the presence of the foregoing malevolent forces in respect of the African-American experience in the South, northern employers were not prepared to take chances by leaving the situation to the spontaneous pressures of the market-place. In order to attract sufficient southern black labour, they launched a recruitment drive by establishing employment agencies in the region and waging a relentless advertising campaign in the southern press. In the process, they incurred the fury of the southern 'plantocracy' and their allies on the one hand and aroused the fears of the psychologically insecure northern white working class on the other.[27] Such aggressive recruiting was a common feature of the labour

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

market in most of colonial Africa. The only difference, as we shall note below, is that the African labour scene was characterized more by coercion than by persuasion of the prospective labour recruits.

AFRICAN PARALLELS AND CONTRASTS

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while the feudal order in eastern and southern Europe was disintegrating, displacing in the process peasants and craftsmen and sending many to America, western Europe, like the United States, had embarked upon a "second industrial revolution" spearheaded by heavy industry. But western Europe's second industrial revolution brought in its train a crisis of markets, raw materials and investment outlets. This is the crisis that, arguably, underlay the partition of Africa. If Africa was to successfully respond to Europe's needs, its traditional 'subsistence' economies and societies had to be transformed by introducing in their midst commodity relations.

Subsistence cultivators were transformed into peasants, producing, largely within the framework of the traditional pre-capitalist life-work patterns, surplus crops for sale in exchange for cash income. Alternatively, or usually additionally, capitalist plantations, settler farms, and mines might be set up where labour was engaged for money wages. The labour of the peasants and wage labourers would produce industrial raw materials for Europe and generate handsome profits for the colonial capitalists; their cash income would, among other things, lend them a semblance of purchasing power which would enable them to import Europe's manufactured goods.

The creation of wage labour, whereby independent producers become increasingly dependent on the sale of their labour power for satisfying their day to day requirements, entails a creation of radically new forms of economic and social relationships. The economic power of the employer, the 'master' over the wage earning 'servant' enables the former to impose upon the later stringent modes of work and social discipline within the framework of a capitalist work culture. Social and cultural interactions within communities and work groups also become radically transformed.

This process of proletarianization is not a painless one. In Europe its triumph was only ensured through economic compulsion brought on the peasants and craftsmen by loss of their ownership and control of their principal means of livelihood – land, shop and tools. The process was, however, a protracted one, allowing commodity relations to gradually eat their way into pre-capitalist social relations. The colonized African rural producers, unlike their 18th and 19th century European counterparts, had access to means of livelihood in the form mainly of land and/or livestock. Economic compulsion for undertaking wage employment was therefore, in most cases,

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

and recruitment by the Rhodesian Native Labour Bureau of unskilled labour from Arabia.[27]

Recruitment efforts outside the realm of the state involved individual employing firms, private recruitment agencies, charging capitation fees for their services, and consortia of different employing houses exercising monosponic powers in matters pertaining to labour recruitment and rumuneration.

Many American industrial firms commanded enough resources to sink into recruitment of immigrant labour, or to afford the services of private recruiting agencies. Moreover because the predominant majority of the immigrants would have arrived in America on their own account, they were recruited at the ports of entry or at given assembly points at relatively modest cost. Few employers in Africa, however, could afford to engage directly in vigorous recruitment on account of the costs involved. There was considerable outlays on transportation, feeding, transit care and running of recruitment offices. Most colonial firms were too small and undercapitalized. Nor could the smaller employers afford the capitation fees charged by private recruitment agencies. They tended to look to the state for help, or took in such voluntary labour as cared to turn up, whatever its quality. The one employer who successfully recruited on a large scale was Union Meniere du Haut Katanga (UMHK) whose subsdiary, Robert Williams and Company, recruited from far afield not only in the Congo bu also in Angola, Zambia, Mozambique and Malawi.[38] In Tanzania, Williamson Diamonds and Geita Goldmines were two employers whose recruitment efforts were successful.[39]

The most remarkable recruitment organizations in Africa were consortia formed by different employers within territorial boundaries to harmonize their interests, eliminate cut-throat competition for labour, ensure a regular labour supply, and enforce a standard maximum wage to minimize their production costs.[40] According to the literature available, we do not have the like of this in the history of immigrant labour recruitment in the United States. Monopsonic labour recruitment arrangements may have proved difficult to work out in the case of American industries because of great diversity among them. Alternatively they may have been rendered unnecessary by the relatively more favourable labour supply situation.

The Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) was constituted in 1900 by the South African Chamber of Mines for the purpose of recruiting and distributing African labour among the different mining firms which constituted the Chamber of Mines. Over the decades it has carried out massive labour recruitment in southern, central and eastern Africa. In

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

fact; because of competition from highly paying manufacturing firms within South Africa, WENELA predominantly relied on ex-territorial labour. Between 1900 and 1910, for example, Mozambique supplied nearly two-thirds of its total recruits.[41] In 1912 the Chamber of Mines formed the Native Recruiting Corporation for internal recruitment within the S.A. Republic.

The Rhodesian mines followed in the footsteps of the South Africans by organizing the Rhodesian Native Labour Bureau (RNLB) in 1903. Outcompeted by the Rand, the RNLB unsuccessfully tried to turn Rhodesia into its recruitment preserve. The Bureau even resorted to such crude methods as way laying migrants headed for the Rand. Like WENELA, the RNLB also recruited ex-territorially, although not with equal success.[42]

Two other recruiting consortia are worthy of note. Because the Katanga mine owners were drawing their labour supplies from basically the same catchment area as WENELA and RNLB, they faced stiff competition. They also formed a consortium in 1910, the Borse du Travail du Katanga (BTK).[43] In Tanganyika the sisal companies faced serious labour crisis as the state would not accede to their demands for conscripted labour during and after World War II. In 1944 they formed the Sisal Labour Bureau (SILABU) which operated on the same basis as other labour consortia in southern and central Africa. SILABU recruited labour from many parts of the territory as well as from such neighbouring territories as Ruanda-Urundi, Mozambique and Malawi.[44] Charecteristic of all the monopsonic labour recruiting organizations was the invariable use of coercive methods, ranging from crude force to decoying and deception.

The competition for labour among American employers came nowhere near that which obtained in Africa. In America competition was mainly over skilled labour. Unskilled labour, especially during the new immigration, could hardly be wholly absorbed. In colonial Africa, where market forces were either absent or weak, even unskilled labour was in acute short supply. The excessive demand for unskilled African labour was intensified by the primitive technology used in many centers of colonial production and by the racial division of labour whereby, as in the case of Kimberley, the Rand, or (though to a lesser extent) the central African Copperbelt, skilled jobs were largely reserved for whites.

Labour contracts in America were of course binding but they were never enforced with as much crudity as was the case in Africa. The impoverished immigrant Polish peasant in a highly competitive America labour market, so far away from his homeland, was more likely than not to stick to his employer. The forcibly recruited African labourer, on the other hand, with access to a generous plot of land in his accessible homeland, was prone to absconding from the harsh and regimented mine of plantation. The

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

history of migrant labour recruitment and engagement in Africa is replete with stories of violent coercion, deception and crude exploitation, against which phenomena the African labour migrant often 'voted with his feet' Deserters were either flogged or imprisoned; payment of wages were often deferred to keep workers on the job; and other forms of 'despotic relations' of production were imposed to keep the African worker in a state of bondage.[45] The American *padroni* had versions of labour exploitation and deception, but, compared to African experience, theirs was like child's play.[45]

We have seen how some European migrants, for example the Italian *contadini,* worked only temporarily in the United States, returning home to invest their earnings in improving or expanding their land holdings, educating their children, or augmenting their personal and household effects. But the American 'birds of passage' were the exception rather than the rule. Most immigrants had been permanently displaced; they could not but settle permanently in industrial America. The umbilical cord that connected American immigrants to their European homelands was effectively severed partly by the long distance, between America and Europe. The prohibitive cost of sea passage, combined with the abject poverty in the villages and towns of origin constituted another disincentive to the immigrants' return to their homes.

African migrant labour, however, was characteristically transient, reflecting as it did the transitional and contradictory nature of 'colonial capitalism'. The so-called oscillation model characterized colonial African wage labour for a complicated set of reasons. Indeed, there is no monolithic explanation behind the proverbial quest for seasonal wage employment in colonial Africa. The forces at work were diverse and complex, depending on time and place. Some are attributable to objective reality obtaining in the African economies and societies in question, while others pertained to human agency in the forms of conscious decisions on the part of the migrants themselves, their traditional rulers, their employers as well as the colonial state. A considerable number of people in many colonial situations sought wage employment to fulfill their tax and/or tribute obligations to their colonial masters and traditional rulers. Others, like the nineteenth century Tsonga of Mozambique, whose material base in the homestead economies had been impoverished by warfare and ecological upsets, resorted to labour migration in order to meet some of their consumer needs, including bride price. Also in the nineteenth century, the Pedi of Southern Africa went to the Kimberley diamond field and the eastern Cape mainly to earn money as a means of ecquiring guns with which to defend themselves against the

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

territorial ambitions of the Zulu, Swazi, and Voortrekkers. Over the decades, maybe close to a century, there have been many African labour migrants who, like some Italian *contadini* who sojourned to Chicago at the turn of the century, have engaged in wage employment in order to consolidate their position in agricultural commodity production, mainly for export. In such cases, money thus earned has been invested in the purchase of land, agricultural implements and farm inputs.[47] The African labourer, with access to land and a network of 'centripetal' kinship relations back in his home village could, in the majority of cases, be employed only temporarily. Most labour was available in the agricultural off-season.

There were other forces which contributed towards the institutionalization of migrant labour in Africa. To many an employer, the transient labourer, who left his family to fend for himself on the land, was cheap to engage as, firstly, the costs of his family's reproduction were externalized and, secondly, his own maintenance in old age was his own affair. But the most ardent supporter of the migrant labour model in Africa was the colonial state. The latter trembled at the spectre of the 'detribalized,' fully proletarianized 'native.' Freed from 'traditional restraints,' he (the African labourer) would no longer be subservient to colonial authority, civil and industrial. In periods of unemployment, or indeed in old-age retirement, he might become a costly public charge. Except in the case of decasualization of port labour, colonial governments discouraged the full proletarianization of African workers, especially before 1945.[48]

But colonial capitalism, given its transitional character, was full of contradictions. Some employers, especially those who employed advanced technology, pursued a policy of labour stabilization. This development was dictated by one or both of two factors. The first was the need for middle-level artisanal, supervisory, and clerical staff. The mining industry where many operations below and above the ground required considerable skill or at least experience is a case in point, except for lands of white settlement, notably South Africa, where skilled jobs were the preserve of the white race. The second factor was the acute competition for labour which rendered recruitment a costly exercise. By instituting labour stablization measures, the Katanga and Zambian copperfield employers hoped to effectively compete with their South African and Rhodesian counterparts, who paid high wages but allowed no wives on compounds. The copperfield employers improved housing standards, provided married accommodation, cultivation plots, schools, training facilities, and generous pension schemes. These inducements would erode the oscillation model and draw not only workers but also their families to employment centres on a permanent basis.[49]

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

The oscillation pattern of labour in Africa was not, and could not remain, an immutable phenomenon. Slowly but surely the market forces that drove impoverished Europeans permanently to America have been taking their hold on Africa. The once novel imported manufactures have become in most cases basic necessities of life; such traditional transactions as bride price have acquired a cash value; many locally produced goods have entered the market place; and new needs such as education for children, hospital treatment for common ailments, and rare items of western material culture can only be satisfied by means of a cash income. At the same time the rural economy's capacity for satisfying cash needs has been on the decline, what with population pressure on the land, ecological crises, and the declining terms of trade for rural producers. In the same way as the American Emigrant Company or the *padrone* system ceased to exist, the Rhodesian Native Labour Bureau and the Tanganyika Sisal Labour Bureau have had to wind up their operations. Except in the peculiar case of South Africa, organized recruitment has been rendered superfluous by the historical march of the process of proletarianization. The forces of economic compulsion have, slowly but surely been increasingly exerting their impact on the Africa labour market.

Migration of labour brings together into one place people of diverse cultures and outlooks, with all the dangers of social conflict which such a situation may engender. Immigration of labour into America not only gave rise to native American outcry against the 'foreign peril' but was also characterized by community and inter-ethnic conflicts among the immigrants themselves. Similarly, the African migrant labour camps constituted scenes of much communal strife in which so-called tribal and territorial divisions came into play. Such were the centrifugal forces that kept the workers divided, lending greater strength and power to their employers. No wonder, therefore, that migrant labour everywhere, including Africa and America, has always been a highly exploitable source of labour power.

CONCLUSION

There seems to be a compelling case for a comparative examination of the process of proletarianization in America and Africa, with reference to the migration of labour. In both cases, it has been pointed out, the main force at work was the development of capitalism. In Europe capitalism for most of the nineteenth century was destabilizing and displacing producers, sending a good number of them to capitalism's growth point: the United States of America, which was industrializing rapidly. Recruitment there was, especially in the case of skilled labour and in times of economic boom, but, in the main, migration to America was spontaneously propelled by

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

economic and social forces in the countries of origin. In Africa, where Europe's monopoly capitalism was in pressing need of her resources, markets, and profits, market forces were, however, largely absent and so 'despotic relations of production' had to be instituted.[50] In the end, of course, market forces have been catching up with Africa but, given their imperialist context, they have not been given full play.

The comparative framework in this paper has been located in the basic structural changes in the two societies. This has been our main area of concentration. We could still benefit from more penetrating work on the sociology of labour migration. In particular, it may be rewarding to examine how the divisive attributes of ethnicity, nationality and "tribe" impinged upon the development of working-class consciousness or the lack of it. This would be an interesting study in its own right, worthy of a place on a research agenda.

One hopes that the comparison in this essay has not been overstretched. The paper will have achieved its purpose it it has succeeds to demonstrate that historians of labour in either region might gain deeper insights into their subject by peeping beyond the geographical boundaries of their region of specialization.

Notes

1. See, for example, Dan O'Meara "The 1946 African Mine Workers' strike and the Political Economy of South Africa," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics,* XII, 2 (July 1975), 148f. Also my "Peasant Resistance to Proletarianization in Colonial Tanzania" *Working Papers in African Studies,* Boston University, No. 81 (1982), pp. 1–4 & John Higginson: *A Working Class in the Making: Belgian Colonial Labour Policy, Private Enterprise and the African Mineworker,* (Madison, 1989), Part 1.
2. See, for example, Peter Colchin: *Unfree Labour: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom,* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987); Vincent Bakpetu Thompson: *The Making of the African Diaspora in the Americas,* London, 1987; Patrick Manning: *Slavery and African Life,* Cambridge, U.K., 1990.
3. Louis M. Hacker *The Triumph of American Capitalism* (New York, 1965), Part II.
4. Ibid., Chapter XXVI.
5. Maldwin A. Jones, *American Immigration* (Chicago, 1960), p. 204.
6. Isabella Black, "American Labour and Chinese Immigration," *Past and Present,* No. 25, (July 1963), pp. 59-76.
7. Howard M. Gitelman, "The Waltham System and the coming of the Irish," *Labour History,* Vol. VIII, 3 (Fall 1967), pp. 227–253; Iris Saun-

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

ders Podea, "French Canadians," in Leonard Dinnerstein & Frederic C. Jaher *The Aliens: A History of Ethnic Minorities in America,* (New York, 1970).

8. Hacker, op. cit., Chapter XXIII; Charles and Mary Beard. *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York, 1962), Chapter XVII.
9. Gerd Korman, *Industrialization Immigrants and Americanizers* (Madison, 1967), Chapter 1; Charlotte Erickson, *American Industry and the European Immigrant* (New York, 1957), Chapters 1-5.
10. Erickson, *Ibid,* pp. 72, 85–86; Jones, op. cit., p. 191; Huber S. Nelli, "The Italian Padrone system in the United States," *Labour History* (Spring 1964), pp. 153-167.
11. *U.S. Report of the Industrial Commission on Immigration and Education,* Vol. XV (Washington Government Printing Office, 1901), p. 263; E.P. Hutchinson *Immigrants and their Children 1850–1950* (London, 1956), Appendix Table A-1, pp. 333-334.
12. *U.S. Annual Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration* (Washington, 1905), pp. 40-41.
13. Jones, op. cit., p. 204; Fred Matthews "White Community and 'Yellow Peril'," *Mississipi Valley Historical Review,* L, 4 (March 1964), pp. 612-633; Spencer C. Olin, Jr., "European Immigrants and Oriental Aliens: Acceptance and Rejection by the California Legislature of 1913," *Pacific Historical Review,* Vol. 35 (1966); Yamato Ichihashi, *Japanese in the United States* (Stanford, 1969 repr.).
14. Jones, op. cit., pp. 198-201.
15. E.H. Norman, *Origin of the Modern Japanese State* (New YOrk, 1940) Chapter V.
16. Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870–1914,* (Cambridge, Mass. 1967); Jones, op. cit., p. 201.
17. Korman, op. cit.; David Brody, *Steel Workers in America* (New York, 1960), chapter 5; Victor R. Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike: Immigrant Labour in Pennsylvania Anthracite* (Notre Dame, 1968) chapter 1; Dinnerstein & Jaher, op. cit., introduction.
18. Rischin, *op. cit.;* Melvyn Dubofsky, *When Workers Organize: New York City in the Progressive Era* (Amherst, 1968); idem, "Organized labour and the immigrant in New York City, 1900-1918," *Labour History* (Spring 1961), pp. 182-210.
19. Robert L. Brandfon, "End of Immigration to the Cotton Fields," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* L, 4 (March 1964), pp. 591-611; Jean Ann Searpaci, "Immigrants in the New South: Italians in Louisiana's

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

sugar Parishes. 1880-1910," *Labour History*, XVI, 2 (Spring 1975), pp. 165-183; John E. Bodnar. "The Impact of the 'New Immigration' on the Black Worker," *Labour History*, XVII, 2 (Spring 1976), pp. 214-229.

20. Rudolph J. Vejcoli, "Italians: Contadini in Chicago," in Dinnerstein & Jaher, op. cit.
21. Scarpaci, loc. cit.
22. *U.S. Report of the Industrial Commission on Immigration and Education*, Vol. XV, (Washington, 1901), pp. 161-164.
23. Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, cited in Oscar Handlin, *Race and Nationality in America Life* (Boston, 1957) p. 97. See also John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: the pattern of American nativism, 1860-1925* (New York, 1963); Edward A. Ross, *The Old World in the New* (London, 1914).
24. Greene, op. cit., chapter 5; Morrell Heald, "Business Attitudes Towards European Immigration, 1880-1900," *Journal of Economic History*, XIII, 3 (Summer, 1953), pp. 292-304.
25. Higham, op. cit.; Richard Ehrlich, "Immigrant Strike-breaking Activity: A Sampling of Opinion Expressed in *National Labour Tribune*," *Labour History*, XVI, 2 (Spring, 1975), pp. 165-183; F.J. Kaijage, "The Attitudes of the American Labour Movement Towards Immigration, 1890-1910," M.A. dissertation, University of Warwick, 1972; See also the columns of the contemporary labour press, especially, *The Federationist, Journal of the Knights of Labour, United Mine Workers' Journal, Labour Leader*, and *Labour Advocate*.
26. James S. Allen: *The Negro Question in the United States*, (New York, 1936), Ch. VII; Carter G. Woodson: *A Century of Negro Migration*, (New York, 1969), Ch. IX; Allan Spear: "The Origins of the Urban Ghetto, 1870-1915," in Nathan I. Huggins, Martin Kilson & Daniel M. Fox (eds.), *Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience*, Vol II, (New York, 1971), pp. 153–166.
27. Ibid.
28. Walter Rodney, "Migrant Labour and the colonial Economy," in Walter Rodney, Kapepwa Tambila and Laurent Sago, *Migrant Labour in Tanzania during the Colonial Period*, (Hamburg, 1983), p. 21, et passim; Giovanni Arrighi, "Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: A Study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia," in Giovanni Arrighi & John Saul, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa*, (London, 1973), p. 194; Dennis Cordell & Joel W. Gregory, "Labour Reservoirs and Population: French Colonial Strategies in

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

Koudougou, Upper Volta, 1914-1939," *Journal of African History*, XXIII, 2 (1982), pp. 213-217.

29. Arrighi, op. cit., p. 195; O'Meara, op. cit., pp. 148-9; John Illife, *Tanganyika Under German Rule* (Nairobi, 1973), p. 127f.
30. Rodney, op. cit., p. 20; Laurent Sago, "A Labour Reservoir: the Kigoma Case," in Rodney et al, *idem*, pp. 59-62; Arrighi, op. cit., p. 194; Bill Freund, *Capital and Labour in the Nigerian Tin Mines*, (Atlantic Highlands, N.J. 1981), p. 51.
31. Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1990-1993* (London, 1976), p. 119; Charles Perrings, *Black Mine Workers in Central Africa*, (London, 1979), p. 158; F.C. Saunders, "The Development of Labour Migration from Nyasaland, 1891–1914," *Journal of African History*, II, 2 (1961), pp. 259-271.
32. Onselen, *Ibidi*, p. 78.
33. *Ibid,;* Rodney, op. cit., *passim;* F.J. Kaijage, "Peasant Resistance," op. cit., p. 7.
34. Rodney et al, op. cit., pp. 18f, 58-78.
35. B.J. Berman & J.M. Lonsdate, "Crises of Accumulation: The Development of the Labour Control System in Kenya, 1919–1929, *Canadian Journal of Africa Studies*, 14, 1 (1980), esp. pp. 55-60.
36. Roger G. Thomas, "Forced Labour in British West Africa: the Case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, 1906-1927," *Journal of African History*, XIV, 1 (1973), p. 85f; Kaijage, "Peasant Resistance, p. 6f.
37. Sheila T. Van der Horst, *Native Labour in South Africa*, London, 1942), p. 168; Onselen, op. cit., p. 81.
38. Perrings, op. cit., p. 14ff.; Higginson loc. cit.
39. A.B.C. Ofunguo, "History of Labour on the Mwadui Diamond Mine," M.A. dissertation, University of Dar es Salaam, 1977), chapter 2; Gullaka Geita Interviews (1977), in my possession.
40. See Patrick Harries, "Kinship, ideology and the nature of pre-colonial labour migration," in Shula Marks & Richard Rathbone (eds), *Industrialization and Social Change in South Africa (London, 1982), p. 142f.*
41. Van der Horst, *op. cit., p. 163ff;* Francis Wilson *Labour in the South African Gold Mines* (Cambridge, 1972).
42. Onselen, op. cit., chapter 3.
43. Perrings, op. cit., p. 55. *et. seq.*
44. Rodney et al, *passim.*

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)

45. See Kaijage, "Peasant Resistance."
46. Vecoli, loc. cit.
47. See Robert V. Turrell, *Capital and Labour on the Kimberly Diamond Fields, 1871-1890* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 22-25; Judy Kimble, "Labour Migration in Bosutoland, c. 1870-1885," in Shula Marks & Richard Rathbone, op. cit., p. 121.
48. See Fred Cooper, *On the African Waterfront,* (New Haven, 1987), esp. chapters 2 and 4.
49. Wilson, op. cit., pp. 123-127; George Chaucey, Jr., "The Locus of Reproduction; Women's Labour in the Zambian Copperbelt, 1927-1953," *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 7, 2 (April 1981), pp. 135-164.
50. For this concept see Michaela von Freyhold, "On Colonial Modes of Production," (Dar es Salaam, mimeo, 1977), p. 3.

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2012)