BETWEEN SHAMBA AND FACTORY

Preliminary Results from a Study of Oscillatory Labour Migration in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Oscillatory labour migration is shown to predominate the labour market in Kenya, involving the periodic physical movement by workers between town and the rural areas where their families stay and cultivate a shamba. This structure means that part of the reproduction cost of the labourer and his family is borne by non-capitalist agriculture which in actual fact thus subsidises heavily industrial wages. An attempt is made to quantify the degree of subsidisation.

Introduction

Even the causal observer of the labour scene in Kenya cannot fail to notice that the labour market in the so-called modern sector differs in important respects from that of a 'pure' capitalist economy. It exhibits special features which have been the object of surprisingly scant scientific study considering their profound impact on the worker-employer relationship.

Employees are generally not entirely divorced from the means of production and relying exclusively on wage/salary earnings for their livelihood. They tend to have access to arable land as well, thus deriving an income from two different sources. This structure is prevalent in most sectors and sub-sectors of economic activity, albeit to varying degrees. It is particularly pronounced in manufacturing. For industrial workers it entails the physical movement between shamba and factory, giving rise to a special type of labour migration which involves the periodic oscillation by workers between city and their rural homes, often lasting relatively long period of their working life. In view of the persistence and stability of this phenomenon it seems justified to conceptualise it as an oscillatory labour migration system.

This system as it evolved in Kenya has historical roots dating back to the colonial period when land was alienated by settlers from the indigenous cultivators who were relegated to the so-called reserves. The settlers not only confiscated land, they also needed labour to work the land for them. Since little spontaneous response on the part of the local population was forthcoming to satisfy the settlers' need for labour - power, direct and indirect measures of coercion were introduced, both by the barrel of the gun and by more sophisticated methods like legislation /imposing tax payable in cash on the traditional cultivators. To meet these new cash requirements a choice could be made between producing a marketable surplus of produce or selling one's labour-power on the settler farms. Due to the smallness of the shambas in the 'reserves' and the requirements of subsistence food production the former option was hardly open at all. It would have to be the latter, most often involving periodic oscillation.[1] The settlers underpaid their African agricultural workers knowing full well that the latter had at least a little land of their own on which was produced some food for own consumption.

Basically the same structure has been deliberately and skillfully designed in Southern Africa by extra-economic state intervention since the discovery of gold and diamonds on the Wit watersrand in South Africa in the latter half of the previous century. As mining activities expanded the demand for labour increased dramatically and the Chamber of Mines argued quite explicitly for the benefits to the mining houses of the migratory labour system and took action to streamline it to the needs of the mining industry. Special emphasis was put on the role of the reserves (later called bantustans) in providing part of the reproduction costs of the miners' families and thereby bringing down the wage rate.[2] Since then an elaborate system has developed with a sophisticated legal superstructure - today known as apartheid - involving periodic oscillation by workers over long distances not only internally in the Republic but often also across international borders to the mines and manufacturing industries of South Africa.

In Kenya no such oppressive racialist legal superstructure exists, but in essence the structure is economically the same and for the capitalist mode of production it serves a similar function.

Design and methodology

This study basically followed a conventional sociological survey methodology. The population to which generalisations of the results may be made was defined as oscillating labour migrants in the manufacturing sector of Nairobi.

Establishing a sample frame constituted a major problem as none was readily available. A two-stage sampling procedure was seen as most expedient. Firstly, a frame of manufacturing companies in the Nairobi area was compiled from a number of sources:

a) the 1974 and 1977 editions of the Directory of Industries compiled by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS);
b) the 1982 Masterfile of Employers of the CBS;

c) the membership register of the Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE) as at the end of November 1982;

d) the membership register of the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) as at the end of June 1981;

e) the 1982 edition of the telephone directory.

By carefully double-checking, cross-referencing and contacting a great number of companies directly by mail and telephone, a total frame of 1115 manufacturing companies in the Nairobi area was arrived at. The information acquired allowed stratification of the frame by two variables:

a) International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) as adapted to Kenya;[3]

b) size in terms of number of employees.

For the purpose of sampling, stratification of the frame resulted in four strata in terms of the former variable:

i) ISIC 3111-3240

ii) ISIC 3311-3420

iii) ISIC 3511-3699

iv) ISIC 3711-3900

Stratification by the latter variable resulted in three strata:

i) 1-49 employees

ii) 50-199 employees

iii) 200+ employees.

From this frame, as stratified, a first-stage sample of 57 companies in total was drawn at random within each stratum, but with varying sampling fractions.

Subsequently, by gaining access to the records of the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), a second-stage frame of individual workers was established on the basis of the reports of payments into the fund by the 57 companies which are required by law to submit such reports monthly. Despite some lag in reporting, the records were reasonably up to date. Care was taken to exclude management and casual labourers from the frame; only regular workers were included. In the end of this second-stage frame consisted of 2652 names from which was randomly drawn 500 potential respondents.

This sample included, however, both migrants and sedentary urbanites alike. In order to select only migrants to the exclusion of non-migrants, a filter question was introduced early in the questionnaire after some basic background data were extracted, asking whether the respondent had access to land and family remaining on the shamba. Replies in the negative led to the abortion of the interview, whereas affirmative answers resulted in the interview being continued. This means that an oscillating a labour migrant is defined in this paper as a regular industrial worker who has access to land as a means of production and his family residing on that land in his place of origin to which he oscillates periodically.

Due to the difficulties encountered in the sampling process, the resultant sample may not be entirely flawless. On the other hand, notwithstanding the uncertainties involved, no systematic bias has been detected in terms of some basic variable against which a double-check was possible through secondary data sources. Therefore, the sample was judged to be fairly representative so as not to affect generalisability adversely to any appreciable degree.

Data collection was carried out by way of personal interviews by the principal researcher and three assistants. Based on standardised questionnaires with some open-ended questions, the interviews were conducted between January and May 1984, 57.2 per cent in Kiswahili, 31.0 per cent in English and 11.7 per cent in vernacular languages. The response rate was as high as 91.2 per cent. For the purpose of data processing the SPSS computer programme package was used.

Theoretical approach

The special features of the Kenyan modern sector labour market may be placed in a wider theoretical perspective which offers a better basis for understanding the mechanisms that are operative. The most fruitful framework seems to be that of the articulation of modes of production.[4] In Kenya, as in most peripheral social formations, capitalism has not yet completely broken down and dissolved the non-capitalist modes of production by separating the direct producers (peasants) from the means of production (land) and thus creating a mass of potential labourers on a capitalist labour market. These non-capitalist modes are thus only partially dissolved, and partially preserved. In other words, the process of primitive accumulation has not been completed.[5] Capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production continue to exist side by side.

These modes are not watertight compartments in a so-called dual economy.[6] They exist, rather, in a complex symbiotic or parasitic relationship in which the smooth functioning of one depends on the other and vice versa. This articulation has far-reaching implications for the level of remuneration of labour-power and for the way in which labour is reproduced. It is the objective of this study to shed some light on this structure and the extent to which it affects industrial labour in the principal industrial centre of the country, i.e. the capital city of Nairobi where nearly 40 per cent of the country's industrial employees work. It is thus not the oscillatory labour migration system as such that is at the centre of attention, but rather its effect on the price of labour-power (i.e. wages) and on labour reproduction.

The theory of the articulation of modes of production rests, in turn, on other theoretical foundations. Principal among these is, for the purpose of this study, the labour theory of value which asserts that the value of a commodity equals the socially necessary labour time required for its production. In a capitalist labour market even labour-power takes on the commodity form. Its price (i.e. the wage rate) is the outcome of negotiations, individually or collectively, between buyers (i.e. employers) and sellers (i.e. worker of labour-power. Important factors affecting these negotiations are, inter alia, the reproduction costs of labour, the rate of unemployment, degree of unionisation, state intervention, and in general the balance of power between capital and labour in particular conjunctures.

A distinction should be made between the value of labour (i.e. the cost of its reproduction) as opposed to its price (i.e. the wage rate). In advanced capitalist economies the wage rate would, for a host of reasons, normally be maintained at levels well above the bare reproduction minimum. Trade unions may be stronger, productivity levels higher, and the historically determined normative conception of a 'fair' wage rate may be more favourable to the workers. The complex interplay of factors like these has tended to result in fairly high welfare levels for workers. Because the workers do not have access to means of production of their own, they are genuine proletarians living off their wages alone (though nowadays there is often more than one wage earner per house hold). For capital to pay wages below reproduction costs assuming that workers have supplementary incomes from own production outside the capitalist mode is, therefore, simply not possible. In a country like Kenya, on the other hand, it is possible precisely because of the posited articulation of modes of production which is specific to peripheral social formations.

The cost of reproduction of labour-power refers to the expenses incurred in order that the labourer may live and be capable of working a given number of hours per day/week over a lifetime (i.e. food, clothing, shelter, health care etc.), and have the opportunity to improve himself in terms of skills. In addition to the physiological reproduction of the labour-power of each individual worker on a day-to-day basis for a working lifetime, the concept of reproduction also includes the biological inter-generational reproduction of labour -power (i.e. new workers) through procreation. This means supporting a family with all necessities of life including requirements for child-rearing and schooling. Since labour-power is such a special kind of commodity which is itself reproducable continously over a lifetime and capable of multiplying through procreation, the cost of labour reproduction and the sources from which these costs are covered, becomes a matter of prime importance.

In the Kenyan context it may be hypothesised that, due to the posited articulation of modes of production, a substantial proportion of the reproduction costs of industrial labour is borne by non-capitalist agriculture. This means that industrial wages under capitalism are, in fact, being subsidised by agriculture outside the capitalist sector altogether. It is the main thrust of this study to determine, in quantitative terms, the magnitude of the hypothesised subsidisation, and thus to suggest the extent to which it affects wage levels in manufacturing industries by depressing and maintaining them below the value of labour (i.e. the actual reproduction costs in a 'pure' capitalist labour market).

Whereas the oscillatory labour migration system emerged in the colonial era as a result of state intervention in the interest of settler farming, the system is maintained today by other factors. Foremost among these is the increasing ratio between population and land in Kenya. With only 12-15 per cent of the country being suitable for arable agriculture and an annual population growth rate of about 4 per cent, the strain on land resources is increasing at an alarming rate.[7] Shambas are being subdivided from generation to generation due to the principles of inheritance applied.[8] As a result they are successively becoming sub-economic units unable to support an average family. Today the shortage of land experienced in Kenya is probably the most important single causal factor behind the migratory phenomenon. One may talk of a squeeze-out situation. This view contrasts with that of most economists who see urban-rural income differentials as the principal driving force behind the rural exodus.[9] The peasants are seen to migrate to urban centres in search of jobs in order to optimalise their earnings. The urban-rural income differential argument is predicated on the assumption that wage employment is available in the urban areas. That is not necessarily the case. On the contrary, rates of urban unemployment tend to be high. The uncertainties of securing urban employment is thus a disincentive to migrate. There is, of course, no denying that gross income differentials do exist, but the relative aspect may not necessarily be decisive. Rather, one should look at absolute levels of living and ask whether rural life offers opportunities for adequate subsistence for smallholders or at least a minimum standard of living. The contention is that peasant agriculture with basically a subsistence orientation is increasingly becoming a subsistence undertaking in absolute terms, given the present productivity levels on progressively smaller plots.

The man/land ratio problem is further aggravated by the continuing concentration of land ownership. This process was founded on the ownership structure inherited from the colonial epoch. It was carried over into independent Kenya when settler farms changed hands largely intact, despite some redistribution through settlement schemes and land-buying companies, informal subdivision and more recently even subdivision of cooperative and large farms. Furthermore in the wake of the privatisation drive of the Swynnerton Plan land consolidation and registration have proceeded unabatedly. Land was turned into an exchangeable commodity enabling peasants to put up their shambas as collateral when seeking credit. The ensuing trade in land and forced sale of land in cases of defaulting have led to further concentration and, as a corollary, landlessness.

The sub-subsistence nature of much of Kenya's small peasant agriculture is not only attributable to the subdivision of plots and concentration of land ownership, but perhaps equally much due to the deteriorating domestic terms of trade since independence from the point of view of agriculture. Admittedly, estimates of such trends are often made at highly aggregate levels and tend, therefore, to disguise wide variations in effects at the household level if broken down by crop, agro-climatic zone and holding size. Nonetheless, it is most probably safe to say that the overall movement of domestic terms of trade against agriculture has taken place from independence the present, despite fluctuations.[10] Thus, even if shambas had been somewhat larger, small peasant plots would still have been rendered sub-subsistence enterprises. They are caught in a price squeeze. For them out-migration is the only option as a result of structural compulsion.

Furthermore, size of holding is not the sole variable explaining the sub-subsistence nature of smallholdings. Constraints in terms of agricultural inputs, soil suitability and agro-climatic conditions, given the current rate of population growth, indicate, again in aggregate terms, that Kenya will be in a critical situation in terms of food self-sufficiency by the year 2000. Only a high level of agricultural inputs will prevent population growth outstripping food production, i.e. complete mechanisation, full use of optimal genetic material, necessary farm chemicals and soil conservation measures, and cultivation of only the most calorie (protein) productive crop on all potentially cultivable rainfed lands.[11]

The effects of such a scenario on peasant household economies, to say nothing of the national economy, are difficult to discern from these aggregate data, but they are likely to be profound. The trends thus extrapolated already exist and operate to reinforce the propensity to migrate, particularly in areas where the above-mentioned constraints are most pronounced today.

Some economic considerations and cultural factors, however, militate against a definitive break with agriculture and rural life altogether. Peasants are attached to the land and to the peasant culture associated with it. It provides a source of identity and self-esteem. All familial ties are rural as well. There would have to be compelling economic reasons if peasants were to abandon the rural existence to which they are accustomed in exchange for the alienation of urban life. One such compelling reason would be landlessness, but as long as peasants have a piece of land, however small, they are reluctant to give up the security it provides.

On the economic level two factors enter the decision-making process of households on whether to migrate once and for all, or to do so only partially by letting only one (or more) member(s) of the household leave for town temporarily or periodically. First, there is the obvious fact that even if the shamba is too small to support the family adequately, it does nevertheless normally provide a not negligible harvest which goes some way to meet the requirements. Second, the shamba provides social security in the economic sense. In Kenya, only rudimentary social security services exist, such as the NSSF, the National Hospital Fund, various provident funds etc. They ar not generally applicable, however, and grossly inadequate. The shamba is particularly important as old age security if investment in education for one's children does not pay off. Social security is still largely based on extended family cohesion and the rural network.

Notwithstanding the factors militating against migration, peasants do in fact migrate out of structural compulsion. Their shambas have become too small to support their families and a supplementary income is needed. On the other hand, the urban wage is also too low to provide an adequate livelihood which would allow the migrant to give up agriculture altogether, should he want to do so, and move to town with the entire family to settle down there and become an urbanised, full-fledged proletarian. It is necessary, therefore, to maintain a linkage to the rural place of origin. As a result the household is split up with only its head generally migrating. It becomes an economic necessity to oscillate between shamba and factory as a quasi-proletarian. In theoretical terms this oscillation is a manifestation of the articulation of modes of production.

A profile of the respondents

Below a profile of the respondents is provided in terms of some key background variables. Absolute and relative distributions are given for all respondents as well as breakdowns for non-migrants and migrants respectively.

Table 1:

Provenance by province and district (in absolute numbers and per cent).

Provenance	Non-migrants Nos.	Non-migrants Percent	Migrants Nos.	Migrants Percent	All respondents Nos.	All respondents Per cent
CENTRAL	26	46.4	87	21.7	113	24.8
Kiambu	11	19.6	19	4.7	30	6.6
Murang'a	7	12.5	47	11.7	54	11.8
Nyeri	5	8.9	16	4.0	21	4.6
Nyandarua	-	-	2	0.5	2	0.4
Kirinyaga	3	5.4	3	0.8	6	1.3
RIFT VALLEY	2	3.6	8	2.0	10	2.2
Trans Nzoia	1	1.8	1	0.3	2	0.4
Kericho	-	-	2	0.5	2	0.4
Nakuru	-	-	3	0.8	3	0.7
Narok	-	-	1	0.3	1	0.2
Kajiado	1	1.8	1	0.3	2	0.4
EASTERN	6	10.7	101	25.3	107	23.5
Meru	1	1.8	3	0.8	4	0.9
Embu	1	1.8	5	1.2	6	1.3
Kitui	1	1.8	22	5.5	23	5.0
Machakos	3	5.4	71	17.8	74	16.2
WESTERN	10	17.9	91	22.7	101	22.1
Bungoma	-	-	4	1.0	4	0.9
Busia	1	1.8	16	4.0	17	3.7
Kakamega	9	16.1	71	17.8	80	17.5
NYANZA	7	12.5	106	26.5	113	24.8
Siaya	3	5.4	59	14.8	62	13.6
Kisumu	1	1.8	24	6.0	25	5.5
South Nyanza	2	3.6	20	5.0	22	4.8
Kisii	1	1.8	3	0.8	4	0.9
NAIROBI	3	5.4	1	0.3	4	0.9
COAST	2	3.6	6	1.5	8	1.8
Taita	1	1.8	5	1.2	6	1.3
Kilifi	-	-	1	0.3	1	0.2
Mombasa	1	1.8	-	-	1	0.2
TOTAL	56	100.0	400	100.0	456	100.0

The table shows that the respondents came primarily from four provinces - Central, Nyanza, Eastern and Western - in that order or importance, accounting for 95.2 per cent of all respondents. After having asked the filter question, the drop-out rate (i.e. non-migrants) was higher for Central

Province workers than for those originating in the other three principal provinces. As a result the representation of workers from the Central Province among the migrants (i.e. those workers with access to land and their families residing in the countryside) drops to 21.8 per cent from 24.8 per cent of all respondents.

Table 2:

Distribution by sex (in absolute numbers and per cent).

Sex	Non-migrants		Migrants		All respondents	
	Nos.	Per cent	Nos.	Per cent	Nos.	Per cent
Male	39	69.6	380	95.0	419	91.9
Female	17	30.4	20	5.0	37	8.1
Total	56	100.0	400	100.0	456	100.0

It is evident from the above table that the industrial workforce of Nairobi is predominantly male. Of all respondents only 8.1 per cent were women. This proportion was brought further down to 5 per cent among the migrants as the drop-out rate was significantly higher for women than for men, which is easily explainable in view of the inheritance rights to land as applied in Kenya.

Table 3:

Distribution by age (in absolute numbers and per cent).

Age Category	Non-migrants		Migrants		All respondents	
	Nos.	Per cent	Nos.	Per cent	Nos.	Per cent
24 years or younger	14	25.0	39	9.8	53	11.6
25 - 29 years	10	17.9	100	25.0	110	24.1
30 - 34 years	14	25.0	91	22.7	105	23.0
35 - 39 years	7	12.5	70	17.5	77	16.9
40 - 44 years	4	7.1	40	10.0	44	9.6
45 - 49 years	3	5.4	31	7.7	34	7.5
50 - 54 years	2	3.6	20	5.0	22	4.8
55 years or older	2	3.6	9	2.2	11	2.4
Total	56	100.0	400	100.0	456	100.0

It appears from the above age distribution that the industrial workforce in general is relatively young. More than two-thirds of all respondents were below 40 years old. The same figure applies to the migrants. The non-migrants were even younger. As many as 80.4 per cent of them were below the age of 40, which is only natural because young people are less likely to have established a family and acquired a shamba of their own.

Table 4:

Distribution by marital status (in absolute numbers and per cent).

Marital status	Non-migrants		Migrants		All respondents	
	Nos.	Per cent	Nos.	Per cent	Nos.	Per cent
Single	19	33.9	33	8.3	52	11.4
Married-monogamous	30	53.6	334	83.5	364	79.8
Married-polygamous	-	-	24	6.0	24	5.3
Divorced	2	3.6	-	-	2	0.4
Divorced & remarried	1	1.8	6	1.5	7	1.5
Widowed	4	7.1	3	0.8	7	1.5
Total	56	100.0	400	100.0	456	100.0

Out of all the respondents 85.1 per cent were married, whether monogamous or polygamous. Among the migrants the percentage figure was even higher, 89.5 per cent, resulting from a higher drop-out rate of singles after the filter question. The high proportion of singles among non-migrants tallies well with the age distribution for non-migrants in table 3. Youth and marital status as single tend to correlate, and these categories are predictably more strongly represented among the non-migrants than among the migrants. It is noteworthy that 6.0 per cent of the migrants live in polygamous matrimony.

Table 5:

Distribution by ethnic affiliation (in absolute numbers and per cent).

Ethnic affiliation	Non-migrants Nos.	Non-migrants Per cent	Migrants Nos.	Migrants Per cent	All respondents Nos.	All respondents Per cent
Kikuyu	30	53.6	92	23.0	122	26.8
Embu	-	-	4	1.0	4	0.9
Meru	1	1.8	3	0.8	4	0.9
Luo	6	10.7	104	26.0	110	24.1
Luhya	10	17.9	86	21.5	96	21.1
Kamba	4	7.1	93	23.2	97	21.3
Taita	1	1.8	5	1.2	6	1.3
Kalenjin	-	-	2	0.5	2	0.4
Other	4	7.1	11	2.8	15	3.3
Total	56	100.0	400	100.0	456	100.0

As a whole four ethnic groups predominate - Kikuyu, Luo, Kamba and Luhya - in that order of importance, accounting for 93.3 per cent. As the drop-out rate for Kikuyus after the filter question was higher than for the other ethnic categories, the Kikuyu proportion among the migrants only was reduced to 23.0 per cent. This distribution by ethnic affiliation more or less coincides with that of table 1 regarding provenance. The four dominant ethnic groups to a large extent inhabit the four most important provinces in terms of migrants' origin.

Table 6:

Distribution by skill level (in absolute numbers and per cent).

Skill level	Non-migrants Nos.	Non-migrants Per cent	Migrants Nos.	Migrants Per cent	All respondents Nos.	All respondents Per cent
Unskilled	16	28.6	63	15.8	79	17.3
Semi-skilled	18	32.1	198	49.5	216	47.4
Skilled	13	23.2	96	24.0	109	23.9
Clerical	9	16.1	43	10.7	52	11.4
Total	56	100.0	400	100.0	456	100.0

The decidedly largest skill category of all the respondents is the semi-skilled one (largely machine operators), and slightly more so among the migrants, nearly one-quarter of them, which is somewhat larger than would have been expected. It is also worth noting that the clerical category accounts for more than 10 per cent of the migrants.

Table 7:
Distribution by educational level (in absolute numbers and per cent).

Educational level	Non-migrants Nos.	Non-migrants Per cent	Migrants Nos.	Migrants Per cent	All respondents Nos.	All respondents Per cent
No formal education	5	8.9	18	4.5	23	5.0
Std 1-4	3	5.4	50	12.5	53	11.6
Std 5-8	18	32.1	185	46.2	203	44.5
Form I-II	8	14.3	66	16.5	74	16.2
Form III-IV	19	33.9	72	18.0	91	20.0
Form V-VI	3	5.4	8	2.0	11	2.4
Polytechnic	-	-	1	0.3	1	0.2
Total	56	100.0	400	100.0	456	100.0

More than six-tenths of all respondents as a group had only primary education or less. Considerable proportions had, however, some secondary schooling, 20 per cent even O-levels. The corresponding figures for the migrants only as a group were slightly higher for those at primary levels, and somewhat lower for those with some secondary training, in particular the O-level category.

Extent and stability of oscillatory labour migration

One indication as to the extent of the oscillatory labour migration system is provided by the proportion of the respondents who said they have access to land and their families staying in the countryside while themselves working in town. As many as 87.7 per cent fitted this category. Such a high percentage suggests that this stype of labour migration predominates the industrial labour market. This fact may, accordingly, be assumed to have a profound effect, perhaps a decisive one, on the operation of this market.

Furthermore, it means that the industrial labour force may justifiably be characterised as quasi-proletarianised, i.e. wage earnings are not the sole source of income for the household.

The stability over time of the oscillatory migration system is indicated by the duration of employment with the one and same employer at the time of the interview. The average length of service was slightly more than 8 years, which attests to a remarkable stability. Strictly speaking, duration of employment with the same employer does not necessarily mean that the respondent has been an oscillating migrant for the same period of time, but there is no reason to believe otherwise.

Table 8
Periodicity of oscillations by distance to home area (in per cent).

	Distance to home area in kilometers						
Periodicity	0-19	20-49	50-199	200-299	300-399	400+	Total
Daily	1.3	1.0	-	-	-	-	2.3
Weekly	0.5	1.3	2.5	-	-	-	4.3
Fortnightly	-	0.8	6.8	0.5	0.3	-	8.3
Monthly	-	1.3	14.5	0.8	0.8	1.0	18.3
Bi-monthly	-	0.3	11.8	0.3	3.8	4.8	20.8
Quarterly	-	-	1.3	-	2.8	3.3	7.3
Thrice a year	-	-	0.8	0.5	3.0	5.5	9.8
Semi-annually	-	-	1.3	-	4.5	8.5	14.3
Annually	-	-	0.3	0.8	3.5	10.5	15.0
Total							100.0

Expectedly, the periodicity of oscillations varies with distance to home area as shown in the table above.

Long distances home tend to mean less frequent visits mainly due to the increasing return fares incurred and the time it takes to travel regardless of cost. Only 2.3 per cent were day commuters, i.e. staying at home and commuting to work on a daily basis. Otherwise the distribution is bi-modal with peaks around monthly/bimonthly and semi-annually/annually, accounting for 39.1 per cent and 29.3 per cent respectively, and 68.4 per cent combined.

Inter-sectoral transfers

From the theoretical departure point of this study it follows that the resource flows between modes of production (or sectors) are of particular interest. The much studied cash remittance of a part of one's wage/salary to family in the home area, immediately comes to mind as an obvious factor to consider.[12] Nearly all migrants, excluding the day commuters to whom the question does not apply, do in fact remit some cash money home, viz. 99 per cent. The monthly average amount was Kshs 262. As a proportion of the gross wage (including the obligatory house allowance) the average remittance rate was 23.1 per cent. Relative to net emoluments (i.e. after tax, NSSF and various other deductions) the corresponding percentage figure was 24.9 per cent. This accords well with a recent study of migrants in Kisumu and Nairobi which reported on average 27 per cent of wage earnings were remitted.[13]

Additionally, there are some urban-rural transfers in kind such as gifts, tools/implements, utensils etc. They are highly irregular, however, and virtually impossible to quantify.

On the other hand, resource flows are not uni-directional. When migrants visit their rural families, they are inclined to bring certain amounts of foodstuffs (e.g. maize, beans, fruits) back to town for their own consumption. Also, whenever family members visit them in town they tend to do the same. Excluding day commuters, 51.9 per cent of the migrants did themselves bring foodstuffs back to Nairobi after visiting their homes. Correspondingly, 54.5 per cent had family members doing the same. However, the volume of this flow was rather limited, when compared to urban-rural remittances. When converted to Nairobi retail prices at the time of interviewing, the monthly average amounted to no more than Kshs 41 for those migrants who did bring food. The corresponding figure for migrants whose family brought food was Kshs 18. The two amounts combine to a total of Kshs 59 which is a mere 22.5 per cent of ruralward remittances.

The rural-urban subsidisation rate

Far more important than the actual resource flows estimated above are, from the point of view of labour reproduction, the 'disguised' urbanward transfers which are quantitatively substantial. Migrants are relieved of a considerable proportion of the household's reproduction costs by having their families staying in the rural areas and to a large extent growing their own food, largely not paying house rent, and generally being catered for outside the capitalist mode of production. Had the quasi-proletarian been fully proletarianised, he would have had to bear these reproduction costs himself on the basis of his wage earnings alone. This relief from having to cover all reproductions costs constitutes, in reality, a transfer of resources from non-capitalist modes of production to the capitalist mode, even though they do not appear in the form of transfers (i.e. not as visible physical transfers). That is why they are termed 'disguised'. In an overall situation of resource flows this type of transfer is quantitatively more significant than both cash remittances and rural-urban food flows. In this sense non-capitalist agricultural reproduction subsidises wages in capitalist manufacturing.

An assessment of the hypothetical magnitude of subsidisation was arrived at through the following procedure:

1) The assumption was made that each household has only one income earner and that the entire reproduction costs of the household are to be borne by the income of that one earner. It may be questioned whether this assumption is reasonable on grounds that households may have more than one income earner. The 1977 urban food purchasing survey found that poor urban households had 1.173 income earners on average.[14] The survey, however, excluded all one-person households at the sampling stage, and included all categories of households, not only those of workers in manufacturing industries. Consequently, there is all reason to expect that the average number of income earners per household in that survey would be higher than in the present sample. In actual fact the results of the present study show that only 5 per cent of the households had a second income earner, but yielding only erratic incomes. Taking this into account would mean 1.05 income earners per household. However, in view of the erratic nature of these additional earnings and the fact that only rudimentary social security services exist to contribute to reproduction costs, the assumption made about one sole income earner per household seems justified.

2) A nuclear household food requirement rate was calculated in terms of adult equivalents. Children of different ages do not have the same requirements as adults. Therefore, the WHO/FAO standard for daily calorific intake for children of various age groups was taken as a measure of total food requirements relative to those of an adult.[15] The average rate for the sample was 4.9 adult equivalents per household.

3) From this was derived a household food requirement rate in monetary terms as per March 1984 (the time of interviewing) by taking the figures of the 1982 IDS Consultancy Report on minimum wages and employment as a basis.[16] It calculates a monetised cost-optimal food requirement rate per adult of Kshs 195 based on Nairobi retail prices as per December 1981. Adjusted upward according to the movement of the Nairobi lower income consumer price index for the food group by March 1984, the average rate for the households of migrants in the sample turned out to be Kshs 1,190 at that point in time.[17]

4) This rate was subsequently taken further to calculate a basic needs requirement rate simply as a percentage function of the food requirement rate. It proved to be Kshs 2,114 on average for the households of migrants in the sample. Note should be taken of the fact that the weights assigned to the food and beverages (incl. tobacco) groups in the lower income index, are taken together only 45.4 per cent derived from the Nairobi expenditure survey undertaken as far back as 1974.[18] The 1977 urban food purchasing survey and the IDS study referred to above, on the other hand, use the figure of 56.3 per cent for the food share in total household expenditure.[19] Annual inflation rates have been fluctuating between 9 and 25 per cent in the 1976-82 period but tapering off in recent years.[20] Wages have not kept pace and as a result of which real wages declined on average by 10 per cent between 1972 and 1980.[21] In such a trend poor households tend to spend progressively more on food relative to other items. The share of food in total household expenditure is likely, therefore, to be greater now than the figure indicated by the 1977 urban food purchasing survey. Unfortunately, the 1982 CBS household budget survey is not yet available to give exact and recent information on this point. All the same, it seems reasonable to claim that the household basic needs requirement rate calculated here is thus a conservative estimate.

5) If the basic needs requirement and wage rates are compared, a discrepancy appears, which expresses the rural-to-urban subsidisation rate in monetary terms. A more graphic expression of the same is achieved by converting it to percentages. The average rural-to-urban (or non-capitalist to capitalist mode of production) subsidisation rate for the households of the migrants in the sample turned out to be 97.6 per cent.

Even if one allows for a certain margin of error, which is only reasonable, and regards the percentage figure as merely an order of magnitude, it is nonetheless astounding that wages in capitalist manufacturing in Nairobi are subsidised by nearly one hundred per cent by non-capitalist agriculture. Or put differently: that wage levels in manufacturing should have been double the present level had this subsidisation not taken place, i.e. had the proletarianisation process been complete and the industrial workers had to live with their families in Nairobi and living off their wage earnings only.

Overexpenditure and indebtedness

It transpires that despite the high degree of subsidisation of industrial wages by non-capitalist agriculture, oscillating migrants still tend to spend more in cash than their cash earnings.

Table 9
Underexpenditure and overexpenditure relative to cash earnings (in per cent).

Expenditure category	Relative frequency	Cumulative frequency
Underexpenditure by 10 per cent or more	15.0	15.0
Underexpenditure by less than 10 per cent	9.3	24.2
Overexpenditure from 0 to 10 per cent	10.3	34.5
Overexpenditure by more than 10 but less than 25 per cent	18.0	52.5
Overexpenditure by 25 per cent or more	47.5	100.0
Total	100.0	

Even when taking account of all possible non-wage cash earnings in addition to wage incomes, only 24.2 per cent of the migrants spend within their means. A further 10.3 per cent overspend by only 10 per cent or less, whereas 18 per cent overspend by between 10 and 25 per cent. As high a proportion as 47.4 per cent overspend by 25 per cent or more. How is that possible? Logically it should not be possible, in the short run it seems to be possible, but in the long run it will not be possible.

In the short run it seems possible for a number of conceivable reasons, the most important ones are being accounted for below:

Data on earnings and expenditure acquired through surveys tend to be unreliable. It might easily be the case in this study as well. The high proportion of grossly overspending migrants may simply be due to either understatement of earnings or overstatement of expenditures by the respondents, or a combination of both. As far as earnings are concerned the likelihood of understatement is slim. During the interviews the respondents generally gave an impression of having a good grasp of their earnings. In a number of cases pay slips were checked without revealing discrepancies and in a few instances double-checks were also made with the company accountant. It seems safe, therefore, to say that the recorded earnings reflect the real situation. On the expenditure side the probability of overstatement is much greater. A fair number of respondents had problems remembering exactly their expenses and may have exaggerated them. This may be a partial explanation, but hardly the full one. Consequently, on balance the extensive overexpenditure phenomenon found does seem to exist, albeit perhaps not quite as seriously as suggested by the naked figures of table 9 above.

Since the extended family is still a living reality in Kenya many oscillating migrants will have urban or rural relatives to lean on for support in desperate situations. There is all reason to assume that extended family ties function as some sort of social security network. Relations of this nature are, however, generally based on the principle of reciprocity meaning that the migrant will, by making frequent use of this network because his desperate situation tend to be quasi-permanent, accumulate affinal obligations which may be hard to fulfill later. He is unlikely, therefore, to rely excessively on family support in order not to strain relations unduly. This source of support is more likely to be tapped in extraordinary situations such as funerals, weddings etc. in which case the migrant may even succeed in mobilising ethnic associations for a harambee collection.

Some migrants will seek supplementary sources of cash income but only 11.5 per cent of them stated that they had alternative sources of cash income in addition to proceeds from sale of agricultural and animal products.

Table 10

Alternative sources of cash income (in per cent).

Source	Relative frequency
Kiosk	2.2
Money-lending	2.2
Duka	10.9
Hawking	2.2
Tailoring	10.9
Spouse earning an income	43.5
Other	28.3
Total	100.0 (N=46)

As evidenced from the table above, of those who did have a supplementary source of cash income, 43.5 per cent stated that the source was their spouse earning an income, however erratic and small it might be. Others operated dukas, did tailoring, carted milk, engaged in hawking, sold charcoal and the like. However, these earnings were included in the total cash income (along with agricultural proceeds) relative to which expenditure was calculated in the first place.

The most common method of 'solving' the problem of overexpenditure is to ask one's employer for a wage advance. It is not unusual that workers are given such advances several times a month, the frequency tending to increase as real wages fall.

Getting wage advances is most often not an 'adequate' measure. Loans are also taken up from various sources. As many as 59.3 per cent of the migrants stated that they had taken up loans.

Table 11

Source of loan (in per cent)

Source	Relative frequency
Bank	0.9
Cooperative	64.1
Employer	16.0
Private lender	1.3
Fellow worker	6.3
Cooperative and fellow worker	7.2
Cooperative and employer	4.2
Total	100.0 (N=237)

A cooperative savings and credit union was the source of loan for 64.1 per cent of the borrowers.[22] The second most important source was the employer with 16 per cent, not counting wage advances as loans. Banks were infrequently approached for loans by these migrant workers, and a few more had taken up loans from fellow workers or combinations of two sources. Although not included in the questionnaire it surfaced in the course of the interviews that the purpose of most of these loans was more often than not to cover recurrent expenditure items of some magnitude, rather than for productive investment of some sort. Not infrequently was the borrowed sum spent on weddings, funeral costs, medical treatment, school fees and the like. In a limited number of cases it was also used for productive investment, e.g. buying additional land, acquiring livestock, building a house or purchasing tools and implements. It should be inserted here that credit from kiosk and shop owners for food and other household goods was also common, although not considered loans in a formal sense by the respondents.

As house rent is a major expense item in poor household budgets, migrants tend to post pone payment of their rent in financially tight situations. For a few this had become an acute problem in that they had been served with eviction notices if the required amount was not paid within a certain date. Apparently there are other irregular methods of avoiding to pay the house rent. Depending on the amicability of relationships to landlords or their proxy rent collectors, poor tenants are sometimes granted a respite in paying the rent, in most cases no more than one month but even up to three months in rare cases. When payment is due and the tenant is still unable to raise the amount, he has no choice but simply to abscond. As a result there appears to be a substantial rate of tenant turnover in low-income housing areas of Nairobi. The landlords, unable to trace the absconders, most probably try to recover their losses by raising the rents charged.

It appears that oscillating migrants, in desperate attempts to 'solve' their expenditure problem, are progressively being caught in a vicious circle of continuously falling real wages, rising cost of living and spiralling indebtedness from which it seems impossible to escape without recource criminal activities. At some future point in time, however, a limit will be reached beyond which short-term pseudo-solutions will no longer be feasible. Precisely when that limit will be reached is debatable, but as things are going at the moment it is likely to spell the immiseration of large segments of the incipient working class.

The oscillatory labour migration system may have been brought about historically by deliberate colonial state intervention. But it is not necessarily being reproduced by design today. It may rather be the net outcome of an interplay of socio-economic forces in a certain conjuncture. The strains on the system seem to be mounting, however. How long it may continue to be maintained and reproduced is a moot point.

Future research

Questions about the future cannot be answered by a synchronic study like the present one. Its data will not, with legitimate claims to being scientific, support extrapolations into the future. A reliable assessment of trends over time would require at least a diachronic research design or a panel study. Ideally a longitudinal investigation would be preferable to yield time series of data. Any prediction of future developments are, therefore, nothing but theoretical arguments about which trajectory is more likely than another. Such theoretical reasoning is not, however, merely futile conjecture, but rather a useful precursor to more empirical research on the matter. It is hoped that theoretical excercises of such nature will stimulate concrete studies which will, in turn, allow empirical testing of theoretical propositions.

In addition to further investigation over time of the economic parameters of oscillatory labour migration, it would be extremely interesting to conduct research into the effects of the migratory system on workers' consciousness. Are they inclined to become more militant trade unionists because they have after all, as a safety valve, their shamba, however small, to fall back upon if they are dismissed? Or is the opposite the case: do they accept low wages and poor working conditions because they see their wage earnings as supplementary income only?

These and related issues would be important to study if insights were to be gained about the trade unionist and political potency of these quasi-proletarians. Studies of that nature would, however, require an altogether different methodology from that used in the present project.

NOTES

1. Sharon Stichter, Migrant Labour in Kenya: Capitalism and African Response 1895-1975, (London: Longman, 1982).

2. Norman Levy, The Foundations of the South African Cheap Labour System, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), in particular chapter 1.

3. Kenya Statisitcal Digest, Vol. XVI, no.1, March 1978, pp.5-13.

4. A collection of articles from the so-called articulation debate is found in Harold Wolpe (ed.), The Articulation of Modes of Production,(London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

5. Karl Marx, Capital, Vol.1, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954), Chapter XXVI, pp.667-670.

6. See for example, Arthur Lewis, Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour, The Manchester School, May 1954; Ann Seidman, Comparative Development Strategies in East Africa, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972), in particular chapter 2; and Archie Mafeje's critique, The Fallacy of Dual Economies, East Africa Journal, Vol.9, no.2, February 1972, pp.30-34.

7. Recent studies of this acute problem include Diana Hunt, The Impending Crisis in Kenya: The Case for Land Reform, (Aldershot: Gower, 1984); Richard Anker & James C. Knowles, Population Growth, Employment and Economic-Demographic Interaction in Kenya: Bachue-Kenya, (Aldershot: Gower, 1983), and Christopher Leo, Land and Class in Kenya, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), chapter 8. Reference to the problem was also made in Economist Intelligence Unit, Quarterly Economic Review of Kenya, No.2, 1985, p.11.

8. For an account of different principles of land inheritance see Eric R. Wolf, Peasants, (Englewood-Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp.73-77.

9. See Michael P. Todaro's influential initial formulation in his A Model of Labor Migration and Urban Unemployment in Less Developed Countries, The American Economic Review, vol.LIX, March 1969, pp.138-148; and his more recent book Internal Migration in Developing Countries, (Geneva: ILO, 1976).

10. Jennifer Sharpley, Resource Transfers Between the Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Sectors 1964-1977, in Tony Killick (ed.), Papers on the Kenyan Economy: Performance, Problems and Policies, (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1981), pp.311-319.

11. FAO, Potential Population Supporting Capacities of Lands in the Developing World, (Rome: FAO, 1982), pp.41 and 134.

12. See G. E. Johnson & W. E. Whitelaw, Urban-Rural Transfers in Kenya: An Estimated-Remittances Function, Economic Development and Cultural Change, vol.22, no.3, 1974, pp.473-478; and John O. Oucho & M. S. Mukras, Migration Transfers and Rural Development: A Case Study fof Kenya, (Nairobi: University of Nairobi, 1983), mimeo.

13. Oucho & Mukras, op.cit., p.65.

14. J. Vandemoortele & S. M. Ngola, The Setting of a Minimum Wage and its Consequences on Employment and Earnings in the Modern Sector in Kenya, (Nairobi: Institute for Development Studies, 1982), IDS Consultancy Report no.6·,p.4.

15. World Health Organisation, Handbook on Human Nutritional Requirements, (Geneva: WHO, 1974), WHO Monograph Series no.61.

16. Vandemoortele & Ngola, op.cit., p.2

17. Index points extracted from Republic of Kenya, Economic Survey 1984, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1984), p.57.

18. Republic of Kenya, Statistical Abstracts 1983, (Nairobi: CBS, 1984), pp.264 and 269.

19. Vandermoortele & Ngola, op.cit., p.3, and Central Bureau of Statistics, Urban Food Purchasing Survey 1977, part 1, (Nairobi: CBS, not dated). Note that Vandemoortele & Ngola had access to the raw data of the urban food purchasing survey from which are derived some figures which do not appear in the survey publication itself.

20. International Monetary Fund, Kenya: Recent Economic Developments, (Washington D.C.: IMF, 1983), mimeo, pp.22-25; and Republic of Kenya, Economic Survey, various years.

21. World Bank, Kenya: Growth and Structural Change, Vol.1, (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1983), p.22.

22. For an account of the growth and operation of credits unions in Kenya see Jack Dublin and Selma Dublin, Credit Unions in a Changing World: The Tanzania-Kenya Experience, (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1983), in particular Part II, pp.80-84, and Part IV, pp.161-224.