

THE STATE, CHIEFS AND THE CONTROL OF
FEMALE MIGRATION IN COLONIAL SWAZILAND,
c. 1930s–1950s

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ABSTRACT: Human migration has played an important role in the construction or dissolution of states in southern Africa. With the coming of the colonial period there was an intensification of the process of migration, mainly for work. Such movements were premised on the uneven development of colonial economies in which some areas became suppliers of labour while others became labour markets. In the case of Swaziland, the migration of labour was dominated by male migrants as the existing labour markets offered more opportunities for men. This view has become a conventional interpretation of the disparity in the mobility of men and women within states or across borders. This article uses the experience of Swaziland to extend the discourse on why men dominated the migration currents in Swaziland during the colonial period. It points out that it is no longer useful to rely on purely economic explanations of why more men were migrating than women in colonial Swaziland. The argument pushes the frontier of analysis beyond economics and argues that a more significant explanation is to be found in the power relations at the homestead level, whereby men had the power to determine if and when women could migrate. The discussion shows that Swazi men, in collaboration with colonial administrators, employed different strategies to control the mobility of women. The intention of the men was to keep women in the rural areas and they used their power in the homestead and their influence on the colonial administration to create barriers against female migration to local and cross-border industrial centres.

KEY WORDS: Swaziland, gender, migration, women, chieftaincy, native policy.

INTRODUCTION

IN all historical epochs migration has played an important role in the construction and dissolution of societies. In the era of the state system, it has been one of the most fundamental processes of nation building. The movement of people from area to area within the same nation state and between nation states has been one of the major activities by which people reproduce themselves as individuals and as families. Consequently, one of the most prominent themes in the study of the movement of people has been migration for the purpose of finding jobs. This type of migration became more pronounced in Africa with the imposition of colonial rule with its attendant capitalist mode of production. While some regions became markets for labour, others became suppliers of labour because of the unevenness in the impact of capitalist development.

From the second half of the nineteenth century, southern Africa became one of the leading regions characterized by an intensive process of

labour recruitment. Countries such as Swaziland, Botswana, Lesotho and Mozambique became a labour catchment area for the recruiting efforts of the South African mining industry.¹ In this context, the history of labour migration in colonial Swaziland has received the attention of several scholars.² What has absorbed the attention of most writers has been the activities of South African recruiting agents as they employed different strategies to recruit Swazi men for the South African gold and coal mining industries.³ Swazi men began to engage in labour migration to South African mines as early as the last two decades of the nineteenth century.⁴ During this period the number of Swazi men participating in labour migration was still low, amounting to only a few hundred.⁵ Yet, by the second decade of the twentieth century Swazi men migrating to the mines began to be counted in thousands. And by the 1940s the Native Recruiting Corporation (NRC) was recruiting between 10,000 and 15,000 Swazi men for the mines.⁶

Swazi labour migration to South Africa was a product of the economic relations between the two countries. The economy of Swaziland has been, and still is, dependent on the South African economy in terms of commodity production and job opportunities.⁷ Swaziland has long been one of the largest importers of South African goods and exporters of labour to South Africa. Such a structural linkage was, in part, a product of the political economy of British colonialism in southern Africa as articulated by Lord Alfred Milner when he stated that the main objective was to create 'a self-governing white community supported by well treated and justly governed

¹ For further detail, see Jonathan Crush, Alan H. Jeeves and David Yudelman, *South Africa's Labour Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines* (Boulder, 1991); Alan H. Jeeves, *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy: The Struggle for the Gold Mines' Labour Supply* (Kingston, 1985).

² For further detail, see Jonathan S. Crush, *The Struggle for Swazi Labour, 1890–1920* (Kingston, 1987); Alan R. Booth, 'The development of the Swazi labour market, 1900–1968', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 7 (1982), 34–57; Hamilton S. Simelane, 'Labour migration and rural transformation in post-colonial Swaziland', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 13 (1995), 207–26; and *idem*, 'Labour migration, labour shortage, and employer response in Swaziland, 1935–1945', *South African Historical Journal*, 44 (2001), 163–83.

³ More information can be found in Alan R. Booth, 'Capitalism and the competition for Swazi labour, 1945–1960', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13 (1986), 125–50; and Hamilton Siphos Simelane, 'Capitalism and the development of the Swazi working class', in Nomthetho Simelane (ed.), *Social Transformation: The Case of Swaziland* (Dakar, 1995), 38–72.

⁴ For detailed information, see Jonathan S. Crush, 'The struggle for Swazi labour: 1890–1920' (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1983).

⁵ *Ibid.*
⁶ Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), DO35/1172/Y708/14, memorandum by Lord Harlech on the High Commission Territories, 1941–4. See also Recruiting Return Statistics in the Employment Bureau of Africa Office, Mbabane, Swaziland.

⁷ For further information on the dependence of Swaziland on South Africa, see Jonathan S. Crush, 'The parameters of dependence in southern Africa: a case study of Swaziland', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4 (1979), 55–66; John Daniel, 'The political economy of colonial and post colonial Swaziland', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 7 (1982), 90–113; and Jack Halpern, *South Africa's Hostages: Basutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland* (Baltimore, 1965).

Table 1. *Swazis in South Africa, 1911–85*

Year	Number
1911	21,662
1921	29,177
1936	31,092
1946	33,738
1951	42,914
1970	29,167
1980	31,981
1985	30,722

Source: South African census reports, 1911–85.

black labour from Cape to Zambezi'.⁸ The most important pull factor for Swazi labour has been the availability of comparatively better paying jobs in South Africa, while the push factors included the underdevelopment of most of the rural areas of Swaziland under the pressure of British colonial policies. From about 1911, South African census reports indicate that thousands of Swazis were to be found in South Africa (see Table 1) as a result of the process of migration.

Because the mines attracted male labourers, scholars perceived a typical migrant from Swaziland in the colonial period to be male and engaged in mine labour.⁹ This was a correct perception as men formed the majority of migrants,¹⁰ thus creating a gender imbalance in the number of people moving to different areas within and beyond national boundaries.¹¹ Sylvia Chant and Sarah Radcliffe have concluded that the gender imbalance in African migration is due to the fact that 'incentives for migration [by women] may not be particularly pronounced especially given that they usually have fewer opportunities than men in urban labour markets'.¹² From this perspective,

⁸ Cecil Headlam (ed.), *The Milner Papers, 1899–1905*, II (London, 1933), 35. For further information on Milner's ideas, see Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, 'Lord Milner and the South African state', *History Workshop*, 9 (1979), 52–78.

⁹ See Crush, *The Struggle for Swazi Labour*; Jonathan S. Crush, 'Swazi migrant workers in the Witwatersrand gold mines, 1886–1920', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 12 (1986), 28–59; Booth, 'The development of the Swazi labour market'; *idem*, 'Homestead, state, and migrant labour in colonial Swaziland', in John Daniel and Michael Stephen (eds.), *Historical Perspectives on the Political Economy of Swaziland: Selected Articles* (Kwaluseni, 1986), 17–60.

¹⁰ This observation has been made by scholars such as Hilda Kuper, *Sobhuza II: Ngwenyama and King of Swaziland* (London, 1978); and T. J. D. Fair, G. Murdock and D. Jones, *Development in Swaziland: A Regional Analysis* (Johannesburg, 1969). For more information on a similar conclusion but with a general African perspective, see Sylvia Chant, 'Households, gender and rural–urban migration: reflections on linkages and considerations for policy', *Environment and Urbanization*, 10 (1998), 5–21.

¹¹ A reflection on the imbalance is found in Booth, 'Homestead, state, and migrant labour'. For a more general conclusion, see Sylvia Chant and Sarah A. Radcliffe, 'Migration and development: the importance of gender', in Sylvia Chant (ed.), *Gender and Migration in Developing Countries* (London, 1992), 1–29.

¹² Chant and Radcliffe, 'Migration and development', 10.

the decision to migrate is seen as being made at the individual level in response to existing and emerging labour markets.¹³

Yet, the study of Swazi labour migration at present suffers from several limitations. One of these has been the failure to integrate female experiences into the general migration discourse. In the majority of studies, Swazi women have been cited as victims of male absence and its impact on the rural economy.¹⁴ It was only in the 1990s that a study dedicated to the migration of Swazi women to South Africa first emerged.¹⁵ Arising from a general lack of interest in women and migration, the study of labour migration in colonial Swaziland is still limited in explanations of why Swazi women were migrating in lesser numbers compared to men. There has been no exploration of the extent to which male dominance and authority over women, which operated with the assistance of the colonial administration, may have been extended to the control of female mobility in colonial Swaziland. Probing such issues would be interesting in view of the fact that in some areas in southern Africa it has been shown that indigenous chiefs were keen to control female mobility.¹⁶ Nonetheless, no attempt has been made to uncover the underlying factors behind the limited number of women engaged in labour migration across the border to South Africa or within the Swazi state itself. While there has been some reflection on the unattractiveness of job opportunities to female migrants, no effort has been made to push the frontier of analyses and interpretation beyond economic determinism into the sphere of socio-cultural variables.

The main aim of this discussion is to try to illuminate the historic Swaziland experience of the ways in which the colonial state, men and the indigenous leadership attempted to control the mobility of women. The article argues that female decisions to migrate or not to migrate were not purely economic impulses made at the individual level but were influenced by, and were at times dependent on, prevailing patriarchal attitudes. In order to understand why Swazi men dominated internal and cross-border migration, we need to go beyond the economics of labour markets and the decisions of individual free will to explore family power dynamics, specifically power relations between men and women, and their relevance to gender-selective migration. The article argues that because Swazi society has long been predominantly patriarchal, men exploited their dominance and authority, with the assistance of the colonial administration, to control the mobility of Swazi women during the colonial period. For present purposes, no attempt will be made to assess the different responsibilities of the colonial administration. Analysis will be restricted to the role of the colonial administration in the control of the mobility of indigenous women and girls. This is an important dimension because in some southern African regions colonial

¹³ For more information on the neo-classical explanation of migration, see Caroline Wright, 'Gender awareness in migration theory: synthesizing actor and structure in southern Africa', *Development and Change*, 26 (1995), 772–91.

¹⁴ For further detail on this issue, see Simelane, 'Labour migration and rural transformation' and Booth, 'Homestead, state, and migrant labour'.

¹⁵ For this new direction, see Miranda C. Miles, 'Missing women: a study of female migration to the Witwatersrand, 1920–1970' (M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1991).

¹⁶ For more information, see William Beinart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland, 1860–1930* (Johannesburg, 1982).

administrations, chiefs and male elders conspired to keep women in the rural areas.¹⁷

The study of female migration in colonial Swaziland is made difficult by the fact that female migrants have been 'invisible' for the larger part of the period. Colonial records dealt only fleetingly with female migrants, and when something was said about them, it was in the context of women being appendages of male migrants. Because of this limitation, it is difficult to estimate with precision the number of women who were migrating from Swaziland between 1900 and the 1950s. It is partly the absence of such statistical information that has made female migration receive less academic attention.

FEMALE MIGRATION IN COLONIAL SWAZILAND

Contrary to conventional wisdom, Swazi women participated in migration to South Africa as early as the second decade of the twentieth century.¹⁸ A large number constituted those who were migrating from rural areas to growing urban centres. Undoubtedly, a problem in the study of female migration is that there are no systematic annual statistics to demonstrate the long-term intensity of their migration. The limited statistics that are available are to be found in South African census reports which begin to reflect the number of Swazi women in South Africa from the 1960s. For instance, such reports reveal that the number of Swazi women who migrated to South Africa between 1960 and 1985 fluctuated, but not below 7,000 (see Table 2). As far as cross-border migration is concerned, women migrated to the industrial centres of Witbank, Piet Retief, Nelspruit, Paul Pietersburg and the Witwatersrand.¹⁹ The majority were employed as domestic servants while others were employed in different factories in South Africa. In some industrial centres, women took advantage of the concentration of male workers to produce traditional beer for sale in the male compounds.²⁰ From the late 1930s, others went to work in the sugar plantations of Pongola in South Africa.

By the 1940s it was being estimated that close to 100 Swazi women were leaving the country for South Africa every year.²¹ It appears that more were moving from the rural economy to the urban economy within the country, constituting a current of internal migration. This process made it possible for Swaziland to have more than 12,877 women in wage employment

¹⁷ For more information, see C. Walker (ed.), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town, 1981); C. Cockerton, 'Running away from the land of the desert: women's migration from colonial Botswana to South Africa, c. 1895-1966' (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1995); and Jonathan Crush, 'Migrations past: an historical overview of cross-border movement in southern Africa', in David A. McDonald (ed.), *On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa* (New York, 2000), 12-24.

¹⁸ See Miles, 'Missing women'.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ For regional details and country specific information, see Jonathan Crush and Charles Ambler (eds.), *Liquor and Labour in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, 1992); and Hamilton Siphon Simelane, 'Labour, beer, and strike action in Swaziland: the case of the Havelock mine, 1939-1944', *Uniswa Research Journal*, 16 (2002), 5-18.

²¹ Hilda Kuper, *The Uniform of Colour: A Study of White-Black Relationships in Swaziland* (Johannesburg, 1947), 19.

Table 2. *Swazi women in South Africa between 1960 and 1985*

Year	Number
1960	7,646
1970	10,834
1980	10,423
1985	9,405

Source: South African census reports, 1911–85.

towards the end of the 1960s.²² It is, therefore, not convincing to assert that ‘a Swazi woman, like most women, values her family life more than economic independence or equality before the law’.²³ Cross-border migration was facilitated by the fact that wages for women inside Swaziland were very low even by the standards of the time. For instance, women were paid five to ten shillings per month,²⁴ while men were paid between twenty and forty shillings per month.²⁵

The reason we know so little about female migration is that colonial administrators and indigenous chiefs took very little interest in recording their movements. But we do have some fleeting glimpses in the records. For instance, some of the reasons behind female migration in colonial Swaziland were indicated by an African missionary, Reverend Nkomo:

We feel that there might be reasons for this migration of Native women to industrial centres in the Union, but that the Government should have investigated the real cause of the migrations. Many women suffer from negligence and go out for work. Girls are forced into marriage and Natives have more needs these days and economic pressure is greater.²⁶

The movement of women from the rural economy was strongly associated with the impact of colonial policy on the indigenous Swazi.²⁷ British colonial rule ushered in a process of land dispossession which produced imbalances in the rural economy and had negative effects on the processes of family reproduction.²⁸ The colonial state also imposed onerous taxes, further intensifying

²² For more information, see Patricia McFadden, ‘Women in wage employment in Swaziland: a focus on agriculture’, *South African Labour Bulletin*, 6 (1982), 140–66.

²³ Kuper, *The Uniform of Colour*, 152.

²⁴ Jonathan S. Crush, ‘The colour of civilization: white farming in colonial Swaziland, 1910–1940’, in Alan H. Jeeves and Jonathan Crush (eds.), *White Farms, Black Labour: The State and Agrarian Change in Southern Africa, 1910–1950* (Oxford, 1997), 226.

²⁵ PRO, DO67/15, Swaziland Blue Books of Statistics, 1940.

²⁶ Swaziland National Archives (hereafter SNA), File 1470, extract from notes of a meeting of a Missionary Association with his honour the acting resident commissioner, Bremersdorp, 16 Oct. 1931.

²⁷ For more information, see Hamilton S. Simelane, ‘Landlords, the state, and child labour in colonial Swaziland, 1914–1947’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 31 (1998), 571–93.

²⁸ The study of land dispossession in Swaziland has been a subject of several studies and need not be repeated here. For more information on the subject, see A. N. Boyce, ‘The Swaziland concessions and their political consequences, 1876–1908’ (M.A. thesis,

the burden of poverty in the reserves.²⁹ By the early 1930s, the rural economy was crumbling under the stress of underdevelopment and increasing numbers of the Swazi were forced to leave the rural economy in search of wage employment.³⁰ Although evidence shows that it was mostly men who left the rural economy there is evidence that women and children were also forced out of the rural economy in a struggle for family reproduction.³¹

As the Reverend Nkomo hinted in 1931, younger women were leaving the rural economy because the colonial environment with its distinct internal and external economic growth points offered an escape route from some cultural practices which women felt were unfair or oppressive. Here, as elsewhere, colonialism was shaped by contradictions. While it was generally a subjugative condition, at the same time it offered a liberating impetus for groups such as women. For instance, it gave women an opportunity to run away from forced marriages. These were relationships engineered by fathers who saw an opportunity of accumulating cattle through marrying their daughters to favoured men. Women were expected to agree to these marriages because they were culturally obliged to obey the wishes of their fathers and elders in general. According to Khosi Dlomo, a victim of a forced marriage:

When I was growing up in my area, forced marriage was still very common. My family also believed in it especially my father. Maybe this was because my father had no cattle and through a forced marriage he saw an opportunity of accumulating cattle. My family told me to be wife to a Mr. Ndlangamandla who was prepared to pay fifteen herd of cattle for me. The man had never proposed to me and I could not see myself being his wife. The only alternative for me was to leave Swaziland for Piet Retief. In fact I walked to Piet Retief where I found a job as a domestic servant.³²

Another woman who migrated to avoid a forced marriage was Gelane Malambe. Relating her experience, she recalled:

The forced marriage I had to run away from was rather a tricky one. My elder sister was married to a Sihlongonyane man in my area. After some years it was discovered that my sister could not bear children. In accordance to Swazi custom

University of South Africa, 1947); Francis J. Mashasha, 'The road to colonialism: concessions and collapse of Swazi independence, 1875–1926' (Ph.D. thesis, Oxford University, 1977); Jonathan S. Crush, 'The colonial division of space: the significance of the Swaziland land partition', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 3 (1980), 71–86; C. P. Youe, 'Imperial land policy in Swaziland and the African response', in Daniel and Stephen (eds.), *Historical Perspectives on the Political Economy of Swaziland*, 64–78; and Hamilton S. Simelane, 'Landlessness and imperial response in Swaziland, 1938–1950', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 17 (1991), 718–41.

²⁹ For detail on the taxes imposed on the Swazi at the beginning of British colonial rule, see Jonathan S. Crush, 'Colonial coercion and the Swazi tax revolt of 1903–1907', in Daniel and Stephen (eds.), *Historical Perspectives on the Political Economy of Swaziland*, 64–78.

³⁰ For more information, see Great Britain, *Financial and Economic Situation of Swaziland: Report of the Commission Appointed by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs* (London, 1932).

³¹ There is very little research that has been done on the migration of women in Swaziland. For some information, see Miles, 'Missing women'.

³² Interview with Khosi Dlomo, Makhosini, 23 May 2002. Khosi migrated to Piet Retief in the late 1940s but returned to Swaziland after 15 years.

my family was obliged to give Sihlongonyane a younger girl who could hopefully give him children and it was me that was chosen. This was difficult for me because I felt Sihlongonyane was too old for me. Instead of getting into such a relationship I decided to escape to Nelspruit in South Africa. I went to stay with my friend's sister there and after some time I was employed as a shop assistant. Surprisingly, it was my mother who helped me to escape but this was kept as a secret.³³

Some women engaged in cross-border migration because they were trying to escape from the levirate practice. According to Swazi custom, a woman who had lost a husband through death was expected to marry a brother of the deceased man. Lomasontfo Shabangu related such an experience:

When my husband died I was about thirty-one years of age. The feeling of my family and my in-law was that I was still too young to be without a husband. My in-laws then concluded that the elder brother of my husband should take over and be my husband. I was really against this and my in-laws insisted that I was still a wife to the family and should follow their instructions. My family was also in agreement and I felt closed in. I felt that the only way out was to leave Swaziland. Fortunately for me there were some ladies from our area who were working in Benoni, South Africa. I made contact with them and I left to stay with them while looking for a job.³⁴

The opinion of a woman was not sought and her feelings about the proposed marriage were not considered. Customary law as constructed by the indigenous patriarchy and later consolidated under British colonial rule did not offer women an outlet from such practices.

There is strong evidence that many Swazi men have in both the colonial and precolonial periods physically abused their wives and women in general.³⁵ Such systematic violence against women by husbands forced some women to flee their homes. As Mandisa Dlamini related:

My experience was in many ways similar to what happened to other women in the country. My husband was a heavy drinker who seemed to enjoy beating me up each time he came home late. For years I endured his abuse because my family kept on telling me that he paid *emalobolo* for me. At one time I reported him to the traditional court but at the end of the case it was as if I was the one on trial. I was told to respect my husband and that his beating was his way of expressing his deep love for me. What became clear to me was that one day the man would either maim or kill me. I then decided to leave him but I felt the best would be to leave Swaziland to work in South Africa.³⁶

³³ Interview with Gelane Malambe, Makhosini, 24 May 2002. Gelane left Swaziland in 1948 and got married to a Swazi man of her choice some years later.

³⁴ Interview with Lomasontfo Shabangu, Ndubazi, 16 May 2002. Shabangu pointed out that she left Swaziland in about 1954 and migrated to South Africa where she eventually worked in a textile factory.

³⁵ This may sound like a very strong assertion but recent research has revealed this to be factual. For detailed discussion of such issues, see Hamilton Siphosimelane, 'Husbands, wives, and domestic violence in post-colonial Swaziland' (forthcoming); *idem*, 'Women and the law in southern Africa', in *idem*, *Family in Transition: The Experience of Swaziland* (Manzini, 1998); *idem*, 'Women and the law in southern Africa', in *idem*, *Chatting the Maze: Women in Pursuit of Justice in Swaziland* (Mbabane, 2000).

³⁶ Interview with Mandisa Dlamini, Nyamane, 14 May 2002. Mandisa was not sure of the exact year she left Swaziland, but she remembers that the country was still under British colonial rule.

Indigenous conflict resolution structures such as the family and indigenous legal systems generally failed to redeem women from violent husbands.³⁷ In turn, women resorted to varying strategies to counter marital violence but with very little success.³⁸ For many, the best option was to resort to escape from their family homes to take up wage labour with local employers or in South Africa. Among Swazi men and colonial officials, these individuals were characterized as women of bad character whose mobility had to be controlled. As it will be demonstrated later, they were accused of being immoral and even church organizations characterized them as being of loose morals. Their situation was not helped by officials at their destinations in South Africa who accused them of having no intention of earning a living through 'decent' means but through prostitution in industrial centres.

THE STATE, CHIEFS AND CONTROL OF FEMALE MIGRATION

Through most known historical periods, most Swazi men have persistently controlled the functioning of women at both macro and micro economic levels. For instance, men have prevented women from gaining access to resources such as land and cattle for the purpose of subordinating them as dependants whose productive and reproductive labour can easily be expropriated.³⁹ Historically, they have also preferred to confine Swazi women to rural areas, partly for male accumulation through bridewealth.⁴⁰ Such a position became more pronounced and consolidated in the colonial period. It was more pronounced because colonial economic conditions tended to push women from the rural areas and beyond male control. It was consolidated because colonial administrators supported indigenous chiefs and men in general in their attempt to keep women in the rural economy.

The male interest in keeping women in the rural areas coincided with those of the colonial state and white settler agricultural producers. The colonial state opposed permanent Swazi urbanization because it would undermine the availability of cheap labour for an agrarian economy centred on commercial settler production. Thus, from the beginning of the colonial period, there was general agreement between Swazi men, indigenous chiefs and colonial administrators about controlling female mobility. In effect, they formed a kind of patriarchal tripartite alliance, based on the assumption that power over women should be maintained and consolidated. This was, however, an uneasy alliance for, as scholars have shown, the colonial state always

³⁷ See Simelane, 'Husbands, wives'. ³⁸ For more information, see *ibid.*

³⁹ For comparative experiences see E. A. Eldredge, 'Women in production: the economic role of women in nineteenth century Lesotho', *Signs*, 16 (1991), 17–29.

⁴⁰ This is not unique to Swaziland as it has been observed in most southern African countries. For further comparative information, see Beinart, *Political Economy of Pondoland*; L. Cliffe, 'Labour migration and peasant differentiation: Zambian experiences', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 5 (1978), 326–46; and P. Harries, 'Kinship, ideology and nature of pre-colonial migration: labour migration from the Delagoa Bay hinterland to South Africa, up to 1895', in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (London, 1982), 142–66.

straddled contradictions.⁴¹ Its views on the colonial labour question tended to shift with a changing configuration of interests, especially within the employer settler community. For instance, while colonial administrators were eager to keep women from industrial centres, they were also conscious of the fact that the services of African women to male workers boosted profits, especially in the mines, and it was feared that expelling women could cause men to desert.⁴²

In some Swazi enterprises, the colonial state attempted to harmonize the contradiction by permitting the wives of some African workers to join their husbands.⁴³ At the same time, there was a continued clampdown on the migration of unmarried women.⁴⁴ The alliance was also uneasy because some colonial administrators assisted some Swazi women to liberate themselves from male control.⁴⁵ Such an attitude was more pronounced among those administrators with a strong missionary zeal. The same was true of some missionaries who were bold enough to accommodate in mission stations married women and girls who had run away from their homes.⁴⁶

On the other hand, colonial administrators were willing to look favourably on customary law as a means of consolidating the power of chiefs because they could be relied upon to assist in keeping farm labour available through blocking female migration. For most of the colonial period, administrators tended to rely on Swazi elders' interpretation of what customary law has had to say on the position of women in Swazi society.⁴⁷ Men tended to emphasize the importance of maintaining women in the homestead to ensure that they fulfilled their role as agricultural producers and reproducers of the homestead, whether as wives or as daughters. The colonial administration even went to the extent of popularizing the view that *lobola* was

⁴¹ For more information on how the role of the colonial state was attended by contradictions, see Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, 'Crises of accumulation, coercion, and the colonial state: the development of the labour control system in Kenya, 1919–1929', *Canadian Journal of African Historical Studies*, 14 (1980), 55–79.

⁴² For more detail on this, see S. Moroney, 'Mine married quarters: the differentiation of the Witwatersrand workforce', in Marks and Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change*, 259–69.

⁴³ For more information see Hamilton S. Simelane, *The Plantation Economy and the Socio-Economic Transformation in Swaziland* (Manzini, 1998); and *idem*, 'Capitalism and the development of the Swazi working class, 1947–62', in Simelane (ed.), *Social Transformation*, 38–72.

⁴⁴ The same kind of contradictory behaviour has been observed in other African countries. For comparison, see J. L. Parpart, 'The household and the mine shaft: gender and class struggles on the Zambian copperbelt, 1926–1964', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13 (1986), 36–56.

⁴⁵ This is another development which has been observed in most African regions. For more information, see C. Walker, 'Gender and the development of the migrant labour system c. 1850–1930', in Walker (ed.), *Women and Gender*, 1–32.

⁴⁶ This has been observed in several southern African countries. For a country comparison of such a development, see D. Gaitskell, 'Waiting for purity: prayer unions, African mothers and adolescent daughters, 1912–1940', in Marks and Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change*, 338–57; H. Hughes, 'A lighthouse for African womanhood: Inanda Seminary, 1869–1945', in Walker (ed.), *Women and Gender*, 197–220.

⁴⁷ For information on customary law and the subordination of women in Swazi society, see Hilda Kuper, *An African Aristocracy: Rank among the Swazi* (London, 1947).

a form of sale.⁴⁸ This enabled Swazi men to view women as property whose mobility should be under their control. Customary law and its interpretation began to be used to confirm the minority status of women and male control over their mobility and enjoyment of certain rights.⁴⁹

In spite of the fact that female migration was an obvious reality in colonial Swaziland, throughout this period Swazi men and colonial administrators continued to attempt to control the mobility of women.⁵⁰ The main concern of colonial administrators was a perception that the movement of women to find work in areas such as Johannesburg was accelerating rapidly and depriving local farmers of their main source of labour. This concern was deepened by settlers who accused the administration of failing to enact appropriate legislation to force indigenous Swazi to take up employment on white farms.⁵¹

Practical attempts by Swazi men and colonial administrators to control cross-border female migration began in the early 1930s. They were spurred into action by a complaint from a South African official:

I have the honour to inform you that it has been brought to the notice of this Department that there is a steady migration of unattached Native women from Swaziland to Witbank, Breyten, and other industrial centres in the Transvaal where they form a most undesirable class which make a living by smuggling liquor into the locations and compounds and by immorality. It has been represented that large numbers of cases of disturbances and crimes of violence are due to the presence of these women. This Department will be glad to learn whether anything can be done to prevent the influx of women to the Union.⁵²

This provoked a swift reaction from the Swaziland colonial administration which felt that steps should be taken to prevent the migration of local women to South Africa. In its response, it provided reassurance that ‘instructions have been given to the officers of the administration, to take all steps possible to prevent Native women leaving the Territory. The Paramount Chief has been directed to order all his chiefs to cooperate and assist in the matter’.⁵³ All regional officials and indigenous chiefs were given instructions

⁴⁸ The different attitudes towards *emalobolo* have been indicated by several scholars dealing with Swazi historical issues. For more information, see Alan R. Booth, *Swaziland: Tradition and Change in a Southern African Kingdom* (Boulder, 1983); and Kuper, *An African Aristocracy*. The tendency for colonial officials to popularize *emalobolo* as a form of sale has also been observed in other African societies. For more detail, see Jeff Guy, ‘The destruction and reconstruction of Zulu society’, in Marks and Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change*, 167–94.

⁴⁹ For further detail, see Alan R. Booth, ‘“European courts protect women and witches”: colonial law courts as redistributors of power in Swaziland, 1920–1950’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), 253–75. For the same issues at a more general level, see Kristin Mann and Richard Roberts (eds.), *Law in Colonial Africa* (Portsmouth NH, 1991).

⁵⁰ For further information see Kuper, *The Uniform of Colour*, 19.

⁵¹ SNA, RCS 93/40, meeting between the Swaziland Farmers Association and the resident commissioner, 16 Oct. 1940.

⁵² SNA, File 1470, letter from acting secretary for native affairs to the government secretary, Swaziland, 30 Oct. 1930.

⁵³ SNA, File 1470, letter from B. Nicholson, government secretary, Mbabane, to acting secretary for native affairs, Pretoria, 15 Dec. 1930.

to concentrate their effort on preventing the migration of women. The specific instruction was to 'prevent Native women leaving the Territory except on legitimate business'.⁵⁴

Equally, while instructions were clear, it was not clear as to how prevention was to be achieved. In an attempt to fashion a clear strategy the administration referred the matter to the colonial police force. In response, the Staff Officer for Police recommended that Swazi police officers should be sent out to South Africa to collect and escort women back to Swaziland each time they had been identified.⁵⁵ But this suggestion was not considered feasible by the colonial administration, first because the police department was short of manpower, and secondly, because of cost.

A second suggestion came from the assistant resident commissioner:

As a remedy I would suggest the issue of Travelling Passes to all females leaving the Territory, the passes be issued for a limited period only. Say fourteen to twenty one days at the most, and the actual business the woman goes on to be stated on the pass, and if found not being on such business or elsewhere than stated on the pass, the person to be suitably dealt with. I will bring this matter as instructed to the notice of chiefs, and will use my best endeavours to prevent the migration of such women as referred to.⁵⁶

The main problem with this suggestion was that the Swaziland authorities had no law requiring Swazi women to carry travelling passes. When the Union Department of Native Affairs was called upon to assist, it argued that it could not involve itself as the issue involved African women in Swaziland not in South Africa. The matter was further complicated by the fact that the identification of women without passes from Swaziland had to be done in South Africa. Again, South African officials declined to take such responsibility.

While the colonial administration was still struggling to prevent the migration of Swazi women to South Africa, the situation was made more urgent in the 1930s by complaints from King Sobhuza II and other regional chiefs expressing unhappiness that a number of Swazi women were migrating to South Africa. Voicing the aspirations of Swazi men and chiefs, Sobhuza declared, 'the Nation is strongly opposed of its women folk leaving the country and would be pleased if the Government would arrange the matter with the railway people to see that no woman is allowed to go beyond the border unattached'.⁵⁷ This complaint offered an avenue to the colonial administration, for here was a possible control strategy. The new direction became even clearer when Sobhuza and some regional chiefs recommended that the colonial authorities communicate with the South African Motor Service not to carry Swazi women passengers to South African destinations.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ SNA, File 1470, letter from B. Nicholson, government secretary to all assistant commissioners, deputy assistant commissioners and staff officer for police, 15 Dec. 1930.

⁵⁵ SNA, File 1470, letter from staff officer for police to the government secretary, Mbabane, 19 Dec. 1930.

⁵⁶ SNA, File 1470, letter from assistant commissioner to resident commissioner, 6 Jan. 1931.

⁵⁷ SNA, File 1470, letter from Sobhuza II to the resident commissioner, 27 Dec. 1930.

⁵⁸ SNA, File 1470, extracts from minutes of meeting of paramount chief with his honour the resident commissioner, 15 Jan. 1931.

The management of the South African Motor Service was asked to deny Swazi women bus travel before satisfying certain conditions. In the words of the government secretary, 'I am directed to enquire whether you would be able to issue orders to your motor drivers that no Native women should be allowed to leave this Territory for destinations in the Union, unless in possession of a certificate from an Assistant Commissioner or Deputy Assistant Commissioner stating that there was no problem'.⁵⁹ The Motor Services agreed to this procedure.⁶⁰ In a 1945 letter restating the original position, the agreement was that, 'no woman or girl should be permitted to travel on a bus to a destination outside the Territory without the written permission of the District Commissioner issued after consultation with the woman's father, guardian or husband as the case may be'.⁶¹ As from 1931, all African woman leaving Swaziland for South Africa was supposed to have a certificate proving that they had been granted permission by their fathers, guardians or husbands to do so.

The effectiveness of this strategy cannot easily be assessed because of the paucity of statistical information. From 1931, South African Motor Services reported that there were few Swazi women using their buses. At the same time, it was reported that there were few cases of Swazi women who were refused travel permits. For example, in 1931 it was reported that three Swazi women were refused permission to travel.⁶² In all reports, the number of women reported to have been refused permission to travel were not more than three per month. Using such statistics, colonial administrators concluded that the strategy of passes for women was working well. Yet, as later evidence revealed, much as the strategy had interrupted the flow of female migrants, the low numbers did not mean that Swazi women were no longer migrating to different destinations in South Africa.

The small number of migrants reflected in reports was partly due to the fact that some women were finding new ways to get around the regulations. For the main response of women was to use different modes of travelling to South Africa. For instance, the favoured tactic was to leave Swaziland on foot and only to use bus transport on the South African side of the border. This kind of response was revealed by Logi Dlamini:

When the colonial administration in collaboration with the indigenous chiefs made it difficult for women to use buses of the South African Motor Services I found it easy to find an alternative way to South Africa. My home was next to the border with South Africa and very close to us but on the South African side is a public road with plenty buses moving along it to as far as Paulpietersburg. I simply got to the South African side and took a bus to Pongola where I got a job in the sugar plantations. In that way I avoided all the inhibiting procedures set up by the colonial administration. This was important for me

⁵⁹ SNA, File 1470, letter from B. Nicholson, government secretary, Mbabane, to J. D. White, 22 Jan. 1931.

⁶⁰ SNA, File 1470, letter from B. Nicholson, government secretary, to all assistant commissioners and deputy assistant commissioners, 2 Mar. 1931.

⁶¹ SNA, File 1470, letter from district commissioner, Southern District, to the government secretary, 16 Mar. 1945.

⁶² SNA, File 1470, letter from J. R. More, general manager Motor Service to the government secretary, 10 Apr. 1931.

because there was no way my father was going to allow me to go and work in South Africa.⁶³

While it may have been easy for Logi to use this alternative, the same cannot be said of the fate of other women. This was especially the case with those who were further away from the border and had to go through regions with very poor transportation networks. Lonkhokhelo Gule highlighted some of the difficulties:

The decision to prevent women from using the South African Motor Services on the way to South Africa put some of us in a very difficult situation. For me the situation was made worse by the fact that I had to leave my home because my father had arranged a marriage with a man I really did not like. Furthermore, the South African Motor Services was the only means of transport going through my area, Engololweni. When we arranged with my mother that I should run away from home I had to walk a long distance but I could not reach the South African side in a day. In the evening of the first day I was forced to seek accommodation in a homestead and the people were kind enough to allow me to spend the night there and continue with my journey in the morning. The following day I was on my way and by this time my feet were painful but I eventually reached the South African side where I got a bus to Newcastle where I eventually got a job in a textile factory.⁶⁴

Some women resorted to walking long distances on foot to their destinations in South Africa. The testimony of some of these women demonstrates the desperation at, and mistrust of, the actions of the colonial administration and indigenous leadership. Some individuals walked very long distances, such as from the southern part of the country to as far as Piet Retief where, in the 1940s, the presence of Swazi women was reported to be very conspicuous. In the testimony of Nomathemba Hlophe:

What forced me to leave Swaziland was just general family problems and I felt it was no longer safe for me to continue staying with my husband. Under such circumstances there was no way I could have received permission either from my in-laws or my family. When the day of my departure arrived I decided to walk all the way to Piet Retief and I did not attempt to take a bus even on the South African side. I was so determined to reach my destination that I wanted to avoid all possible hindrances. The main reason why I did not take a bus on the South African side was that I was not sure of the extent to which the colonial administration and indigenous chiefs would go to prevent women from leaving the country. I had the feeling that even buses on the South African side would follow the instructions of the colonial administration and force me to return to Swaziland. It was only later that I learnt that it was safe to use vehicles on the South African side.⁶⁵

Another problem for the authorities and indigenous chiefs was that Swazi women opted to use vehicles other than those of the South African Motor Service. This compelled its management to complain that their action was not yielding the desired results as vehicles belonging to other companies were not part to the agreement. It suggested further that all vehicle services should be bound by the agreement on the non-transportation of Swazi

⁶³ Interview with Logi Dlamini, Makholweni, 10 Jan. 2003

⁶⁴ Interview with Lonkhokhelo Gule, Ngololweni, 9 Jan. 2003.

⁶⁵ Interview with Nomathemba Hlophe, Ndubazi, 10 Jan. 2003.

women without the necessary authorization. There were even complaints that buses transporting Swazi men to South African coal and gold mines were transporting Swazi women to different destinations in South Africa.

The tendency for Swazi women to avoid the South African buses explains the low numbers of those who were refused permission. Far more women were finding alternative means of reaching their destinations. This is indicated by the fact that in subsequent years officials in South Africa and indigenous chiefs in different regions of Swaziland, especially in the south, were still complaining about the influx of Swazi women in South African industrial centres and in other areas.

The decision to force Swazi women to produce migration certificates was very unpopular among some groups in colonial Swaziland. Inevitably, the colonial administration was soon faced with protests from different sections of Swazi society. The first voices of protest came from the Swaziland Bantu Teachers Association. This association was formed to look after the interests of African teachers throughout Swaziland. Its leaders argued that female teachers were inconvenienced by the need to get travelling certificates and the consent of their guardians, husbands and fathers.⁶⁶ From the available evidence, it is not clear as to how much weight the opinion of the association had, but presumably it counted for something as the administration responded to the concern by taking up the matter with Sobhuza and his Council, 'we have received complaints from the more educated class of Natives asking to have the practice stopped'.⁶⁷ The authorities were inclined towards stopping the practice rather than face growing opposition. In a meeting with Sobhuza, administrators emphasized that the practice was started as an experiment and not as legislation. However, Sobhuza and the Swazi National Council were unrelenting in arguing that control over the migration of women should continue and in fact be undertaken more effectively. He argued that Swazi women were always under a certain guardianship and the women who were migrating across the border needed this because they 'did not know why they were migrating'.⁶⁸

Some officials at regional level played down the emerging protest, but there was evidence that resistance was mounting in the 1930s. They argued that educated Swazi women were less inconvenienced by the practice because they were able to make the application in writing, by comparison with uneducated women who had to make several trips to make the application in person.⁶⁹ They also argued that educated Swazi women were complaining because they had been 'spoilt' through education. There was also a view that protest was instigated by South African teachers working in Swaziland.

Protest was not confined to the so-called 'more educated class of Natives'. Some missionary groups also began to voice complaints about controlling female movement. The first missionary group to join the protest was the

⁶⁶ SNA, File 1470, letter from assistant commissioner, Bremersdorp, to the government secretary, 18 Jan. 1931.

⁶⁷ SNA, File 1470, extract from minutes of meeting of the paramount chief with his honour the acting resident commissioner, 10 Aug. 1931. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ SNA, File 1470, letter from assistant commissioner, Ubombo, to the government secretary, 11 Sept. 1931.

Wesleyan Church which held a protest meeting in Mahamba in 1931 and passed a resolution directed at officials:

This meeting begs to protest against the regulation imposed without warning making it compulsory for women and girls travelling by bus to places outside Swaziland to obtain a pass. This meeting cannot see the necessity of such a regulation and which seems to be the first step toward passes for women in Swaziland. This meeting points out that the pass system has been many times condemned as it operates in the Union, and voices its wonder that as the Native population in the Union are struggling to free themselves from its incidence, Swaziland should now begin to impose new regulations.⁷⁰

The missionary protest soon spread to other parts of the country but remained very mild. Church groups continued to appeal to the conscience of the colonial authorities by sending deputations to the administration to express concern. Interestingly, the attitude of the missionary groups was not wholly dissimilar from that of administrators and chiefs. In their presentations they continued to talk in terms of how 'many well-behaved women' were being inconvenienced by the regulation.⁷¹ This can be seen as a continuing criminalization of female migration because to church leaders migration not associated with the church was associated with women of bad character. This fed into the general view that African women in town were moral polluters.⁷² So, even the church was not completely against the restriction of female mobility across borders and between rural and urban sectors.

Because church leaders themselves believed in male control over women they soon participated in the continuing control of female migration across borders. Church authorities began to shift towards arguing that control of female mobility should continue, but stressed that the church should also be given a role to determine which women were eligible to migrate. In the revealing view of the Reverend Robinson, 'we want to find a way out for law abiding girls and women who have to go out. It does seem unreasonable. If the system is continued can you not give missionaries and Native ministers the power to give Native women a guarantee of character and a statement of the purpose for which they were going'.⁷³ The colonial authorities and indigenous Swazi leadership finally agreed that while the restrictions on the mobility of women should continue, missionaries should also act as a certifying authority. The missionary protest which had so much promise when it started in reality did very little to diminish the control over the migration of women and girls from Swaziland.

One of the major missing links in the analysis of protests against regulations on controlling female migration in colonial Swaziland is the lack of information on how affected women participated in the different forms of protest. There is no indication of how they demonstrated their rejection

⁷⁰ SNA, File 1470, attachment to a letter from Herbert Robinson to the government secretary, 21 Sept. 1931.

⁷¹ SNA, File 1470, extract from notes of a meeting of Missionary Association with his honour the acting resident commissioner, Bremersdorp, 16 Oct. 1931.

⁷² For further information, see C. Eales, 'Gender politics and the administration of African women in Johannesburg, 1903–1939' (M.A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1991).

⁷³ *Ibid.*

of the regulations meant to control their mobility. The only known form of response was finding means to avoid the regulations. There is, therefore, a need for a specific study of female participation in protests against the regulations. It is only after these hidden voices of protest have been heard that we can have a better understanding of female responses.

The control of female migration through transport continued throughout the 1930s. With the outbreak of hostilities in Europe in 1939, and with colonial officials being called upon to intensify the mobilization of Swazi resources to aid the British war effort, there was little time to monitor the restrictions on female migration as colonial officials were forced to concentrate on efforts to assist Britain in the war.⁷⁴

The decline in monitoring was much to the annoyance of indigenous leadership and Swazi men in general, who accused colonial authority of deliberately relaxing restrictions.⁷⁵ Regional chiefs and Sobhuza once more complained that their womenfolk were migrating to the Union without male permission and were often not being traced.⁷⁶ Partly reflecting their failure to control migration, some administrators began to argue that if families were incapable of looking after their womenfolk there was no reason for the colonial authority to be involved.⁷⁷ Sobhuza and the Swazi National Council did not take kindly to such views, and continued to argue strongly that officials were not strict enough in controlling the movement of women outside Swaziland.⁷⁸

Accusations from Sobhuza and regional chiefs were based on the fact that by the 1940s there was increasing evidence that the number of migrant Swazi women was increasing. For instance, it was reported in 1941, 'there are more girls [Swazi] than ever before in Piet Retief'.⁷⁹ Influenced by their religious sensibility, some church leaders argued that these girls were finding their way to Piet Retief for immoral purposes. This was a time when a military camp had been set up in Piet Retief and the prevalent view was that Swazi

⁷⁴ One of the most important effects of the Second World War on the operations of the colonial administration in Swaziland was that it forced the abandonment of most programmes as most personnel and resources were channelled toward serving the war effort. Much as the restrictions on the migration of women were kept in place the process of monitoring was relaxed. For more detailed information on such effects of the war on colonial administration, see Hamilton Siphon Simelane, 'War, economy, and society in colonial Swaziland, 1939–1945' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1991).

⁷⁵ A discussion of the power relations between the traditional leadership and the colonial administration is beyond the scope of this paper. It is, however, worth noting that when British colonialism was imposed the traditional system of government was not destroyed but allowed to operate side by side with the colonial administration, concentrating on the affairs of the indigenous Swazi as governed by Swazi law and custom. The limitations of this dual form of administration are quite obvious, but for more detailed information, see Lord Hailey, *Native Administration in the British African Territories: The High Commission Territories, Basutoland, the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and Swaziland* (London, 1953).

⁷⁶ SNA, File 1470, letter from district commissioner, Southern District, to the government secretary, 16 Mar. 1945.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ SNA, File 1470, letter from acting government secretary, to the general manager, South African Railways and Harbours, 30 June 1948.

⁷⁹ RCS 282/1/1941, letter from A. Walshaw, Methodist Church of South Africa, to district commissioner, Southern District, 30 Oct. 1941.

women were crossing the border for prostitution in the camp. The women were declared to be dangerous because, 'on return they aggravate the menace of venereal disease among the Swazi'.⁸⁰

Feeling betrayed by the actions of officials, Sobhuza, under the influence of Swazi men whose concerns were being articulated by regional chiefs, suggested that administrators, missionaries, settlers, traders and indigenous leaders should come together to find solutions to the 'decline of discipline' in Swazi society.⁸¹ What was meant by the 'decline of discipline' was largely the increasing migration of women and children, especially girls, to South Africa or to urban and industrial centres within the country. Such migration was also viewed as being symptomatic of the disintegration of rural society. It was resolved that a standing committee should be established to prevent women and girls from migrating from rural areas without the permission of their fathers, husbands or chiefs. A committee was eventually formed in the late 1940s, called the Tribal and Parental Control Committee.⁸² Its membership was dominated by princes, chiefs and some settlers whose views on women complemented those of Swazi men.

When Sobhuza first addressed members of the Committee he argued that the migrant movement of women and girls should be blamed on the colonial administration and white settlers:

It is the Europeans that have done us harm either unintentionally or otherwise. The economic conditions of the day are such that it has become necessary for many of our children and girls to be working in towns, but here I would like to explain that it is the girl who should respect herself and her parents if she comes from any home at all. She should be ashamed to do wrong if she has had worthy parents.⁸³

'Doing wrong' on the part of the girl child was the very act of migrating from home to work in industrial or urban centres. Explaining why migration by girls was undesirable, Sobhuza noted:

The sex relations of our youth [girls] are no longer such as were known to Swazis. I gather from Mr. Coates that there were such practices as using a goat skin to prevent pregnancy. The result is that the young people fall in love privately and because no one definitely knows with whom she is in love she may have two or three lovers and yet our custom made it such that a girl had to declare her love in public and as such she would be ashamed to fall in love with another person at the same time.⁸⁴

Although culprits were mostly portrayed as girls, evidence indicates that the largest number of young migrants were boys.⁸⁵ Moreover, some Swazi men were being disingenuous as some of the children engaged in internal migration work were in fact being sent out and were at times accompanied by their fathers.⁸⁶ It is true that many girls left their homes without the permission of their fathers and this was particularly worrisome to fathers. In most of their arguments, fathers expressed concern about the sexuality and

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ SNA, File 1444, extract from minutes of meeting of acting government secretary with Native Authority at Lobamba, 21 May 1948.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ SNA, File 1444, meeting of the Decline of Tribal and Parental Control Committee at Lozithehlezi, 16 June 1948.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ For more information see Simelane, 'Landlords, the state'. ⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 586.

morality of their daughters. The general belief was that industrial centres or cities were characterized by immorality against which women and girls had to be protected. Such a view was based on a comparison of the behaviour of city and rural dwellers. City dwellers tended not to conform to traditional modes of behaviour and this was interpreted as a 'decline of discipline'. The conflict between urban and rural life was at the base of views that female migration should be discouraged. Many Swazi men appear to have believed that migrating women were bound to become prostitutes.⁸⁷

The view of Swazi men was that free migration of women was undesirable because each time they were 'chastised' by their husbands they would run away to town to work. The Swazi National Council argued that no child or woman should be employed without the permission of parents, husbands or fathers.⁸⁸ Swazi chiefs were also trying to press the government to decree that employers should not engage women who could not prove that they had permission from their fathers or husbands.⁸⁹ Invariably, the main concern of Swazi men was that the ability of women to migrate was undermining male control over them. As a member of the Swazi National Council, S. T. Sukati declared at the end of the 1940s, 'after the woman had gone into employment, even if she had run away from her kraal or her husband and her husband followed her, he was not able to get his wife or daughter from the employer because of the Master and Servants Law which requires that she must give a month's notice'.⁹⁰ Members of the Swazi National Council also continued to argue that men should be given the power to withdraw their wives or daughters from employment without any restrictions. Colonial administrators were not against this suggestion, accepting that as married women and children who were employed without the permission of their husbands, fathers or guardians were not contractually bound to remain in that employment, they could leave without giving notice. At the same time colonial officials were not willing to oblige employers not to engage women unable to produce evidence of permission from their male guardians.

Colonial administrators argued further that Sobhuza and his chiefs were in a better position to stop the migration of women to towns and across the border. They warned, however, that any regulation drawn by indigenous leaders restricting the employment of women would not be binding on European employers.⁹¹ It was also suggested that all workers be registered and that registration be denied to all girls and married women who were employed without the permission of their parents, husbands or fathers. This suggestion was not implemented, however, because officials feared that it would negatively affect the supply of labour for local employment. In the 1940s, this concern was made more emphatic by the fact that the administration had been subjected to very harsh criticism from the white settler community for failing to guarantee the availability of labour for local employment. Faced with failure to provide a solution acceptable to the

⁸⁷ Kuper, *The Uniform of Colour*, 20.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 587.

⁸⁹ PRO, DO35/14/Y180/1/A, Native Labour: Registration of Contracts of Employment of Indigenous Workers in Swaziland.

⁹⁰ SNA, File 1444, meeting of his honour the resident commissioner accompanied by the government secretary, district officers and head of departments with the Swazi National Council at Lobamba, 28 June 1949.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

chiefs and Swazi men to control female mobility, the colonial administration resolved:

Government is unable to make a suggestion as to suitable methods of preventing women and children from leaving their homes. It will be appreciated that employers of labour have, in most cases, no easy means of ascertaining whether the necessary permission has been obtained and insistence that an applicant for employment should produce some documentary proof of permission may have the undesirable effect of driving the women and children to seek employment in the Union.⁹²

Swazi chiefs under Sobhuza still proceeded to push for the control of female migration. In the 1950s, they suggested to the authorities that some arrangement be made whereby people seeking employment be examined by the institutional *Ndabazabantu*.⁹³ The main responsibility of the *Ndabazabantu* as far as women were concerned was to ensure that no female who had not received male authorization to seek employment should be employed within the country. This was an attempt by the indigenous leadership to indigenize labour recruitment and employment. Following on this suggestion, the authorities asked the Urban Areas Advisory Committee to persuade all employers to agree to take any prospective employees to *Ndabazabantu* to check on whether they had been granted permission to take wage employment.⁹⁴ What was problematic was that there was no legislation to back this kind of arrangement. This troubled colonial officials because it could not be defended if raised by superiors in London. It was from this realization that administrators suggested that the New Native Administration Proclamation proposed for 1950 should issue orders that when females went to town for work they would have to obtain a permit from their chiefs. If this was done, then the colonial authorities would be able to introduce some legislation affecting the employers.

Even with all these attempts, by the end of the 1950s the colonial administration, Swazi chiefs and men were still not able to record complete success in their attempts to control female mobility. This was partly because the various strategies adopted were not very practicable, but also because they were beaten by women at their own game. Each time official procedures were put in place, women were able to find alternative ways to avoid them. Because of the changing political economy of the region, especially the opening up of job opportunities inside and outside the country, female migration was an integral part of development and could not easily be

⁹² SNA, File 1444, letter from the government secretary to the paramount chief, 15 Aug. 1949.

⁹³ With the imposition of colonial rule in Swaziland there was a tendency to deal with the affairs of the African people through different structures from those of immigrant whites. The general feeling was that the indigenous Swazi should be allowed to operate within structures they best understood. In the study of African history such views have been subjected to considerable criticism but that is not very pertinent to our present analysis. *Ndabazabantu* was an institutional structure dealing with matters affecting the indigenous Swazi. It was an institution that attempted to enforce the traditional ways of doing things, reinforcing Swazi law and custom in all its variations.

⁹⁴ SNA, File 1444, minutes of the meeting of the Swazi National Council at Lobamba, 15 June 1950.

curbed. Furthermore, the continuation of certain traditional practices which were viewed by women to be against their interests at the homestead level and the desire by women to liberate themselves from them only helped to intensify the level of persistent female migration.

CONCLUSION

While the study of male labour migration from Swaziland has developed to an appreciable level the same cannot be said of the study of female migration. The migration of women was a reality in colonial Swaziland and it remains a reality even today. This essay has used the experience of Swaziland to stimulate contributions to the discourse on why male migrants have tended to dominate studies of migration currents in southern Africa. While the analysis recognizes the value of conventional explanations, it probes the issue further by examining power dynamics at the homestead level and their relevancy to female migration.

Male antagonism to female migration in colonial Swaziland was not an accident but was based on a specific ideology which was shared by colonial administrators, chiefs and other men. This was the ideology of male appropriation of the labour of women. From the point of view of Swazi men, female migration had to be stopped or at best controlled to ensure homestead reproduction in the rural sector. Men were willing to go to great lengths and employed varied strategies to maintain women in the rural economy. They used cultural and customary elements to justify their authority over women and their mobility.

Collaboration between colonial officials and chiefs to control female migration was not easy. While they were mostly agreed that female movement should be controlled, they were not always agreed as to how that was to be done. This was because the interests they served often conflicted and also because the colonial administration had to avoid provoking any section of the Swazi population into rebellion. Equally, as the conflicts existed, both sides continued to try to assist each other in curbing female migration.

Colonial and indigenous patriarchies both attempted to control female cross-border migration by introducing a Swazi version of the South African pass law system. This was done in spite of the fact that there was no legislation in the country at the time which forced women to have passes of any kind. Administrators and Swazi leaders were so keen to curtail female movement across the border that they were willing to use authoritarian measures. Yet, the implementation of this strategy did not ensure complete success.

The illegal introduction of passes for Swazi women was not uncontested. Religious groups attempted to check the pass system, yet were too conservative to bring about the desired result. Nor should it be assumed that women themselves did not resist the new system. Although there is no evidence of specific overt resistance, there is evidence of women deciding to use other means of getting to South Africa.

In the late 1940s, the Swazi National Council under the leadership of Sobhuza began to spearhead attempts to control female migration. Sobhuza felt that if there was an established body to control female migration, few women would cross the border to South Africa or move from the rural areas

to urban centres within Swaziland. But this failed to take account of the fact that indigenous leadership was structurally incapable of implementing procedures that would be binding on everybody in the country. Even attempts to deal with female migration within the context of indigenous structures were not successful because colonialism had created other structures which gave some freedom to women to determine their own movements.

Nonetheless, as female migration was continuously frustrated by the actions of administrators and indigenous chiefs, women did not enjoy the same degree of movement as men. The strategies employed by men to control female movements, although not completely effective, clearly had a negative effect on the number of women leaving the rural areas. Accordingly, any analysis of why women were fewer in number than men in migration movements should take into account the manner in which Swazi men have long attempted to control and impede the mobility of women.