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**MIGRANT LABOUR, THE MARRIAGE VALVE AND FERTILITY IN SOUTHERN  
AFRICA: SOME CONCEPTUAL ISSUES**

Marc Wuyts

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c/o Publications Office - Institute of Social Studies - P.O. Box 29776  
2502LT The Hague - The Netherlands

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## Abstract

The paper argues that population is an endogenous variable the dynamics of which depend on the social context in which production and reproduction is organised. Marriage and family structure play a pivotal role in this analysis if at all it is to reach down to micro level behaviour as conditioned by macro processes of development and change. Historically, in Southern Africa, the timing and incidence of marriage came to depend on the prior accumulation of savings out of migrant labour, and so did rural production. The demise in the migrant labour system in recent decades, however, severely limited this by now traditional route towards marriage and investment in household production. This has major consequences for family formation and perhaps also for fertility behaviour, as households become more matricentral out of poverty as income from migrant labour declines without newly emerging avenues of employment.



**Migrant Labour, the Marriage Valve & Fertility in Southern Africa  
Some Conceptual Issues**

by

**Marc Wuyts**

**Institute of Social Studies**

**The Hague, the Netherlands**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

This paper raises some questions on the interrelations between marriage, fertility and the character of economic development in the context of the emergence, development, and decline of the migrant labour system in Southern Africa. The paper is not concerned with empirical analysis, but rather with the *conceptualisation* of the nature of these interrelationships.<sup>1</sup> My object of inquiry in this paper is political economy, and not demography. Demographers tend to be mainly concerned with fertility decline and its causes. My purpose is to *situate fertility* (Greenhalgh, 1995: 17) within a historical and institutional perspective of development and change. This paper starts from the proposition that population dynamics cannot be properly understood without reference to the specific character of economic development. Observed quantitative correlations matter, but they are contingent and context-specific, and can only be understood in the light of the historically-specific character of socioeconomic development in which they arise. Social institutions such as marriage and family, and the fertility patterns to which they give rise, therefore, are not invariant, but part of history, and change with economic development. Population, then, is an *endogenous* variable which depends on the social context in which production and reproduction is organized (Coontz, 1957).

This paper, therefore, is not primarily concerned with fertility outcomes or an analysis of its trends in Southern Africa. On the contrary, the paper aims to look at how the migrant labour system brought about changes in the social context and mechanisms which underlie marriage and fertility patterns in the rural areas of Southern Africa, and it raises questions about the possible consequences of the demise of the migrant labour system for rural livelihoods and its population dynamics. More specifically, I shall argue that the decline in the migrant labour system coupled with rising rural (and urban) unemployment and increased vulnerability of rural livelihoods, and the way this affects men and women differently, may favour a process of fertility decline. But, if so, such fertility decline - which is so often seen as 'good' in itself - may well be the outcome of a process which effectively destroys rural livelihoods and engenders poverty, given the specific mechanisms at work. The emphasis of this paper, therefore, is on understanding these mechanisms.

To understand the dynamic features of the mechanisms at work it is necessary to abstract from the varied concrete experiences in which they are embedded with different intensities. This paper then does not aim to present a comprehensive history of the social and economic implications of the development of the migrant labour system in Southern Africa. On the contrary, my purpose is to make a rough *sketch* of some key interactions between macro processes and micro behaviour which characterize the interplay between wage labour, marriage and rural livelihood in the context of the migrant labour system. The approach used in this paper, therefore, is more akin to economic *modelling* than an historical narrative or an anthropological account, without, however, engaging in an exercise of formal modelling using a language of equations.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 briefly explores different approaches to the analysis of the interrelations between population dynamics and socioeconomic development, and situates the approach taken in this paper within this wider spectrum. Section 3 looks at how the changing macroeconomic context brought about by the development of the gold mining industry in South Africa and of the migrant labour system introduced what demographers call the *marriage valve* as a social institution in the rural communities supplying migrant labour. Section 4 then analyses the nature of the interdependence of wage labour and rural production and livelihoods. Finally, section 5 develops some tentative hypotheses on the implications of the demise of the migrant labour system for rural poverty, increased vulnerability of rural livelihoods, and the changing context of marriage patterns, and its possible consequences for fertility patterns in Southern Africa.

## **2. MACRO PROCESS AND MICRO BEHAVIOUR: SOME THEORETICAL EXPLORATIONS**

In most demographic analyses, human reproduction is seen in biological rather than in social terms. This point can best be illustrated with the aid of Bongaarts' s model (1978) which typifies this approach. This model seeks to explain the determinants of fertility, and in particular how socioeconomic, cultural and environmental factors affect fertility outcomes. Bongaarts warns against investigating the impact of socioeconomic variables *directly* on fertility through correlation analysis because this method fails to reveal the mechanisms through which these factors operate. Instead, he argues, the appropriate method is to investigate the relation between socioeconomic and fertility *indirectly* as mediated by what he called the intermediate fertility variables, the proximate determinants of fertility, the primary characteristic of which is that they exert a direct influence on

fertility. That is, if an intermediate fertility variable changes, other things being equal, fertility must necessarily change as well. Using a decomposition analysis, fertility (as measured by the total fertility rate) is broken down into a small number of multiplicative components, each of which measures the influence on fertility exerted by an intermediate fertility variable such as nuptiality, contraception, lactation, voluntary abstinence, or induced abortion.

A handful of *biological* variables (the intermediate fertility variables), therefore, play a key role in this analysis. At first sight, nuptiality (the percentage of women of reproductive age who are unmarried) may not appear to be a biological variable. But, for demographers, what this variable effectively aims to measure is the risk of exposure to conception by women of childbearing age. This explains why demographers pay great attention to age of marriage but hardly any to marriage as a social institution (Goody, 1996: 1).<sup>2</sup> In similar vein, marital fertility is broken down into *natural* marital fertility and the effect of contraception. The implied argument is that without the 'innovation' of *modern* contraceptive techniques, fertility within marriage is essentially biologically given, and hence supply-determined.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the social character of fertility control practiced over the ages in many societies is ignored in favour of a biological explanation.

The method then consists of investigating *observed regularities* between socioeconomic, cultural and environmental variables and the intermediate fertility variables using multivariate analysis. The aim of this exercise is to identify 'the specific mechanisms through which these factors operate' on fertility (Bongaarts, 1978:105). The presumption is that such observed regularities can be generalized across different societies since they reveal specific mechanisms through which socioeconomic variables influence the key biological variables which determine fertility outcomes. Each socioeconomic variable is thus seen to have its own separate effects on one or more intermediate fertility variables, and hence the object of the analysis is to single out those socioeconomic variables which yield most mileage in terms of influencing fertility.

This approach to the analysis of the socioeconomic determinants of fertility has several further drawbacks apart from its biological reductionism. Three of these drawbacks are of particular importance to the argument in this paper. First, the analysis is pitched solely at the macro level by investigating correlations between macro aggregates (or averages). Second, and related to the first point, it confounds observed regularities with their underlying mechanisms. Third, it ignores that such mechanisms are essentially contextual and systemic in nature. Instead, this paper argues that a credible analysis of the socioeconomic determinants of fertility will have to come to terms with the relation

between macro process and micro behaviour in shaping specific outcomes. To unravel the mechanisms which can explain the observed macro phenomena involves coming to grips with the working of social institutions in shaping population dynamics. Marriage and family as social institutions play a pivotal role here if the analysis is at all to reach down to micro level behaviour. In fact, the observed variations in the so-called intermediate fertility variables can only be understood if they are situated within their specific institutional settings which can neither be ignored nor taken for granted since they depend upon the nature of society, its economic character, its class and gender dimensions, and its dynamics of social change.

The point of this critique of Bongaarts's model which typifies a dominant tradition in demographic practice, is not to dismiss it as irrelevant altogether. On the contrary, this type of decomposition analysis coupled with the search for contextual macro regularities can be very fruitful in delineating the key empirical features of a historically specific conjuncture which demand an explanation as to the specific mechanisms at work underlying population dynamics. But the fact that a particular macro regularity is observed in a specific context does not mean that it also arises in other contexts. Nor does it explain how such regularity came about as a result of a multitude of micro level decisions and actions embedded within social settings which shape the way agency and structure interact within society.

An example based on Wrigley's (1987: 197-124) analysis of population dynamics of pre-industrial England may clarify this point. The fact that population growth in pre-industrial England during the period 1550 to about 1820 varied mainly (but not exclusively) on account of changes in fertility rather than mortality directs the attention towards the determinants of such changes in fertility. The further observation that changes in fertility were mainly the result of variations in nuptiality (reflected in changes in the average age at marriage and in the percentage of women never married), and not in marital fertility, directs the focus of analysis towards the prevailing marriage system at the time. Finally, the fact that variations in nuptiality went hand in hand (with a certain time lag) with changes in the standard of living (measured by an index of real wages), suggest that the timing and incidence of marriage acted as a *filter* which adjusted fertility to economic circumstances. These observed regularities about population dynamics in pre-industrial England in themselves do not explain anything, but instead cry out for an explanation which accounts for the way the micro behaviour of domestic groups were conditioned by, and interacted with the overall macro context of economic development.



This brings me back to the question of the relation between macro process and micro behaviour in the analysis of population dynamics. The question of the relation between macro and micro economics is quite familiar to economists, but subject to considerable debate. The same is true in the analysis of population dynamics. One way to address this question is from the perspective of the *micro foundations* of macro phenomena within the context of neoclassical economics. This approach builds upon the foundation laid by Becker (1960) in his analysis of household economics which locates the demand for children as a special application of neoclassical consumer theory. I shall not adopt this approach in this paper (for more recent developments of this approach, see Grabowski and Shields, 1996: 121-168; Willis, 1994), because, with Greenhalgh (1995: 9), I would argue that this approach remains stuck at the micro-level, focusing exclusively on the individual couple, while the connection between micro decisions (which, moreover, often go beyond a couple and involve families, kinship relations and personal networks) and the macro structure of social life largely remain *terra incognita*.

An alternative approach, however, is to look at the micro foundations of macro structures within an *evolutionary institutional* perspective. This approach is undoubtedly much richer if the objective is to understand historically specific processes of development and related population dynamics. This approach for example, underlies Wrigley's (1987: 197-199) concept of *unconscious rationality*. Wrigley developed this concept by applying Darwin's principle of selection to societies rather than species. That is, selection is supposed to operate on institutional arrangements in society in a context of trial and error 'by conferring advantages upon individuals or groups who lighted on good solutions, initially perhaps by chance' (*Ibid*, 197), and, as a result, patterns and structures take hold which bring benefits to society of which individual members are unaware. Obviously, 'though the benefit derived from unconscious rationality is usually analysed in terms of the group, it is clear that it must influence individual behaviour if it is to operate at all (*Ibid*, 198).

To illustrate this point, consider once more Wrigley's analysis of population dynamics in pre-industrial England. In this case, Wrigley argued, 'whereas elsewhere marriage normally meant joining an existing household, in most of Western Europe it meant establishing a new one' (1996: 8-9). Marriage, therefore, implied the *prior* accumulation of resources, either obtained through savings or through transfer, to establish a new household. But, as Wrigley put it, 'the household was commonly more than a simple dwelling place: it was also a workshop or the center of a farming unit, and commensurately expensive' (*Ibid*). Consequently, since the establishment of a household involved considerable expense, marriage was triggered, delayed, or made impossible by economic circumstances (*Ibid*: 9). In England, where the *life-cycle servant* (Burguiere and

Lebrun, 1996: 49) was a general phenomenon, marriage was regulated by the labour market and the variations in real wages. <sup>4</sup> In England, therefore, population adjusted endogenously to economic circumstances through the operation of the effects of (what demographers call) the '*marriage valve*' on fertility.

Wrigley's notion of unconscious rationality implies an underlying theory of *long run demographic and economic equilibrium* based upon one or another 'invisible hand' mechanism which secures the *functional adaptation* of population to economic and environmental circumstances (Lesthaege, 1989: 52).<sup>5</sup> In fact, this theory also draws upon a biological metaphor by applying the notion of natural selection of species to the workings of society. <sup>6</sup> The attractiveness of Wrigley's approach is that it allows for historical and institutional specificity as well as for path dependency in processes of development and change. The notion, however, that some sort of demographic and economic equilibrium comes about through the functional adaptation of population to economic and environmental circumstances based upon the workings of one or another mechanism of selection (akin to natural selection) is questionable. Indeed, the point that population dynamics are endogenous to the character of economic development does not imply that some sort of equilibrium between population and development necessarily results.

A different approach, taken up in this paper, to the analysis of the interplay between population dynamics and economic development starts from the proposition that this question can best be addressed by looking at the *macro foundations of micro behaviour* <sup>7</sup>. The earliest (and perhaps most powerful) exponent of this view can be found in Marx's famous statement that 'every particular historical mode of production has its own special laws of population, which are historically valid within that specific sphere ([1867] 1976: 784). In fact, with respect to biological determinism, Marx argued that 'an abstract law of population exists only for plants and animals, and even then only in the absence of any historical intervention by man' (784). Marx, therefore, asserted the primacy of the economic character of production in shaping population dynamics. In Marx's view, then, with respect to the capitalist mode of production, it is not the pressure of population against the *means of subsistence* which matters most, but the pressure of population against the *means of employment* (Meek, 1971: 19). Consequently, it is the character of accumulation and its related dynamics of the demand for labour (power) that are seen to be the principal determinants of the supply of labour and, hence, of population dynamics (Coontz, 1957).<sup>8</sup> In this context, the demand for labour as determined by the regime of accumulation does not merely refer to the quantity of labour, but also to its quality <sup>9</sup>. In this view, population dynamics are seen to be *endogenous* to economic development and

particularly to the demand for labour, but no assumption is made as to the necessary existence of any long-run demographic and economic equilibrium.

This approach, therefore, puts the emphasis squarely on the *demand side* as reflected by the prevailing regime of capitalist accumulation and, hence, by the pressure of population against the means of employment. This notion of the importance of the demand for labour in determining its supply was inherent in the writings of most classical economists. Malthus ([1830], 1970), who is best known among the classical economists for his work on population, also stressed the importance of the demand side, but treated the demand for labour as synonymous with the supply of the means of subsistence, notwithstanding the fact that this conception went counter to Malthus' s own awareness in his other work of the importance of the role of effective demand in the operation of the economy (Coontz, 1957: 91; Sen, 1996: 75).<sup>10</sup> In more modern days, this distinction between the pressure of population against the means of subsistence or, instead, against the means of employment finds its expression in the debate on food availability versus food entitlements in the analysis of famines (Sen, 1981; 1984).<sup>11</sup>

In this paper I intend to show that this approach which puts the emphasis on the macro foundations of micro behaviour by looking at the dynamics of the demand for labour and its effects on its supply is eminently suited to deal with the concrete analysis of societal processes of development and change, particularly those which involve the emergence, development and transformations of capitalist relations of production. This approach, as exemplified by Coontz's work (1957), is however not without its drawbacks. More specifically, it is important to locate household production as part of the overall equation which shapes the organisation of labour, *paid* or *unpaid*, in society. Two aspects are of particular importance in this respect.

First, a credible analysis of the mechanisms through which the demand for labour influences fertility behaviour will need to take account of the division between, and interplay of (what is called) *productive work* and *domestic labour*. It is the latter in particular which secures the 'production of the producer' and encompasses biological reproduction (childbearing), generational production (child rearing), and daily reproduction or maintenance (cooking, cleaning, caring for the sick and the old, etc.) (Crehan, 1992:113). The sexual division of labour - the allocation of different tasks and responsibilities between women and men - cuts across this division. While in most societies the burden of *unpaid* domestic work falls mainly on women, women also participate in the labour force, and, hence, the changing conditions in the demand for labour, both with respect to its quantity and its quality, will affect the balance between

*paid* and *unpaid* labour in society, which is bound to have implications for decisions concerning marriage, the organisation of domestic units, and fertility.<sup>12 13</sup>

Second, Coontz's analysis explicitly assumed that complete proletarianisation prevails and, hence, that the worker is completely divorced from the means of production. Capitalist development, however, often entailed that various forms of household production came to be integrated within the realm of commodity production. A rural household, for example, is not just a unit of consumption and of reproduction, but also of production (both for own consumption as well as commodity production). In many instances, as is the case in Southern Africa, the sale of labour power is but one aspect, albeit often an (or the most) important one, of the ways a household obtains its livelihood. Consequently, in such circumstances, the question of asset acquisition needed to establish the domestic unit - not just as a dwelling place, but also as a workshop or farm - matters a great deal in any analysis of the interrelationships between the character of economic development, household formation and reproduction, marriage and fertility. Wrigley's question whether marriage involves establishing a new household or joining an existing one remains, therefore, quite relevant for any analysis which attempts to situate micro-level behaviour involving marriage, household structure and formation, fertility, and household-based accumulation and survival strategies within the context of broader macro-economic developments.

The relevance of this last point can be illustrated with the aid of Deaton's (1990) analysis of savings behaviour in poor (predominantly agricultural) countries. In fact, Deaton's basic assumption is that households in developing countries are not only larger than those in Europe or the United States, but that there is also 'a much greater tendency for several generations to live together' (*Ibid*: 64). In other words, young people join an existing household, and the old, when they die, are replaced by those somewhat younger, such that the household is, as it were, *an ongoing concern*.<sup>14</sup> In such circumstances, Deaton argues, there is no 'life-cycle hump or intergenerational savings', but instead savings will be 'high frequency, intertemporal smoothing savings' to provide a buffer between uncertain and unpredictable income and an already low level of consumption (*Ibid*: 65).<sup>15</sup> Deaton's argument implies that the marriage valve does not exist under these conditions since marriage does not involve establishing a new household and, hence, does not require the *prior* accumulation of savings out of income. Interestingly, it is this crucial assumption which he takes to be the norm for most developing countries. As I shall show in this paper, this assumption is not always valid, even in an African context.

My object of inquiry, then, is the effect of the emergence of a particular form of wage labour (that is, the migrant labour system) as the basis of the regime of accumulation stamped by the development of the gold mining sector in South Africa, on the dynamics of marriage and fertility.<sup>16</sup> Such an approach, while located at the macro level, will nevertheless need to heed Wrigley's warning that it is necessary to show how macro processes of development and change work their way down to the micro level, particularly with respect to the dynamics of marriage and fertility.

### 3. MIGRANT LABOUR SYSTEM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE MARRIAGE VALVE

It is perhaps paradoxical that, while in Europe the conditions which secured the operation of the marriage valve as a regulator of fertility *ceased* to function with the emergence of fully-fledged industrial capitalism (Wrigley, 1987), in Southern Africa it was the development of the mining industry which led to its introduction. This apparent anomaly can only be understood in the light of the differential nature of the underlying processes of *proletarianisation* which accompanied the development of industrial capital. In most of Europe, after a long spell of proto-industrialisation (which retained the domestic unit as the location of production), the introduction and development of factory production in the 19th century led to the extensive proletarianisation of the peasantry; the concentration of the labouring classes in industrial town and the initial widespread use of female and child labour; and, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the subsequent shift in demand to (mainly male) labour of a higher quality of grade and skill along with the historical improvement of the quality of unskilled and semi-skilled labour - which, among other factors, resulted from the need for increased literacy of the labour force (De Swaan, 1988: 52-117), all of which changed the dynamics of family and fertility in dramatic ways (Coontz, 1957; Segalen, 1996). In Southern Africa, however, the development of *male* wage labour in response to the needs of mining capital did not lead to the complete separation of the labourer from the land, but instead involved that the migrant labourer retained an organic link with family agriculture in his rural homestead (Wolpe, 1972).<sup>17 18</sup>

But, while the migrant labour system did not uproot the rural base of an increasingly (yet incompletely) proletarianised peasantry, it nevertheless brought about profound changes in the dynamics of marriage and of rural livelihoods. More specifically, it set in motion processes of change which made that the formation and consolidation of a rural household came to depend on the prior and concurrent accumulation of savings out of wage income. In other words, the mechanisms characteristic of a 'marriage valve' came into existence, be

it in their specific form link with the emergence of a migrant labour system. This section argues that the marriage system changed as bride-wealth came to depend on wage income, and the next section argues that rural production also came to depend on the accumulation of savings out of wage income .

To be able to pinpoint changes within the marriage system as a result of the introduction of the migrant labour system in Southern Africa, it is important to have some idea of the nature the pre-industrial marriage systems in Africa in general, and in Southern Africa in particular. It is always precarious to generalise about marriage systems across history or regions given the often bewildering variety they display in reality. For example, in their discussion of pre-industrial European marriage patterns, Burguiere and Lebrun (1996) talk about the 'one hundred and one families of Europe' to indicate that variation was the rule, and not the exception. The same is true for Sub-Saharan Africa, in the past or in the present (Lesthaege *et. al*, 1989; Dozon, 1996; Aryee, 1997; Ocholla-Ayayo, 1977). It is well beyond the scope of this paper (and beyond my own competence) to attempt any detailed analysis of the variety of marriage systems which prevailed in the past in Africa in general, or in Southern Africa in particular. The most I can do here, is to use Bongaarts' s framework as a convenient starting point (and no more than that) to furnish a brief sketch of some of the salient themes characteristic of so-called 'traditional' African marriage systems and fertility patterns which are directly of interest to the argument in this paper.

Bongaarts' s decomposition model suggests that there are essentially two main social mechanisms through which societies can influence fertility outcomes: that is, either by postponing the starting patterns of fertility, or by using either spacing or stopping patterns of fertility (Lesthaege, 1989: 15). The former mechanism most commonly works through the existing marriage conventions in society and the prevalence of sexual taboos surrounding pre-marital fertility, and generally involves the operation of some sort of 'marriage valve' (late first sexual unions, celibacy) as a check on fertility. The latter mechanism relates to checks on marital fertility which depends on existing social practices of lactation, postpartum abstinence, contraceptive use, or abortion, as well as on social conventions regarding widowhood and remarriage. In the African context, it is commonly argued that socially constructed checks on fertility mainly derived from the reduction in marital fertility through extensive child spacing as a result of prolonged lactation and postpartum abstinence, and not from the operation of a marriage valve since, generally, women married early and marriage was almost universal (Lesthaege, 1989; Aryee, 1997).<sup>19</sup>

As to the social context in which marriage systems were located, marriage generally involved an exchange between lineages and entailed the payment of bridewealth by the kin of the groom to the kin of the bride, which often involved a substantial transfer of material objects or cattle (Goody, 1983:241). Given the reciprocal process of bridewealth, it were the receipts obtained for women which were paid out for men (Goody, 1973: 3). Most of the African agrarian societies were characterised by gerontocratic control and its correlate, polygyny, where the elders held political power and exerted control over the acquisition of women in marriage (through their control over bridewealth) and over female labour, as well as over the distribution of lineage land and cattle (Lesthaege, 1989). Polygyny on the part of the elders implied that young men had to await their turn before being able to marry: that is, as Goody (1973: 5) put it, 'the authority of the older generation is linked to the extent to which the young are dependent on them for marriage cattle or the equivalent'. Since the young men depended on the elders to pay their bridewealth, however, marriage did not involve the *prior* accumulation of savings or wealth *on the part of young men*, although they might have to wait a long time before bridewealth was made available for their marriage. In fact, in general, a high incidence of polygyny implies a large age difference between husbands and wives with the age at (first) marriage of women being significantly lower than that of men (Lesthaege, 1989: 22). Similarly, since young men also depended on the elders to acquire access to land, cattle, and other material resources, the establishment of the productive base of a rural domestic unit did not require prior accumulation of savings on their part.

This brief sketch is undoubtedly crude and incomplete and bound to offend the sensibilities of anthropologists who are most knowledgeable in this field and less inclined to generalise. But, nevertheless, this generalisation is often held to be valid not just for past African social formations, but also for the present. Moreover, the assumption that marriage does not require the prior accumulation of savings out of income to establish a new household is even more generally held to be true as, for example, Deaton's (1990) analysis of savings in developing countries illustrates. In this paper, the sketch merely serves to pinpoint some key changes in the social organisation of marriage and livelihood which profoundly affected the dynamics of the transformations that took place within the rural societies of Southern Africa under the impulse of the introduction of the migrant labour system.

To understand these changes, it is necessary to situate them in both their *economic* and *political* contexts. The economic context was the development, from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, of the mining industry in South Africa characterised by a rapidly expanding demand for cheap labour. The political context was that these developments took place

against the background of the expansion and consolidation of colonial rule in Southern Africa.

Two factors are particularly important to understand how the operation of a marriage valve emerged in the rural societies of Southern Africa, and how it might have affected fertility. The first is that the access to wage income on the part of young men provided them with independent means to pay their own bridewealth, or *lobolo* as it is commonly called in the region. This, in itself, does not necessarily imply that such transformation effectively takes place, but it entails the possibility. The imposition of colonial rule, however, and the economic demands it made on the peasantry, made that savings out of wage income rapidly became the dominant (if not only) means to provide for bridewealth because the elders came to 'consume' the bridewealth obtained from daughters, or used it to pay colonial taxes, rather than 'circulate' it by paying the bridewealth needed to marry their sons (First, 1983: 118).<sup>20</sup> In colonial Mozambique, for example, this led to the rapid *monetisation* of the bridewealth in a context where its value became a multiple of the level of average money wages on the mines (*Ibid*). In similar vein, rural colonial taxes (mainly consisted of the hut tax) was principally paid out of remittances and linked up with the general evolution of average money wages on the mines (*Ibid*). As far as the payment of bridewealth was concerned, therefore, this came to depend on the *prior* accumulation of savings out of wage income.<sup>21</sup>

The need to pay lobolo was not necessarily a one-time event in the life cycle of a migrant labourer. The death of a spouse or the 'breakdown'<sup>22</sup> of a marriage might be followed by remarriage and, hence, necessitated the payment of lobolo. Moreover, it appeared that polygyny also largely came to depend on wages earned through mine labour providing the means to finance successive bridewealths (First, 1983: 86-107).

In sum, it is the migrant labour system which brought the marriage valve into existence in the rural communities of Southern Africa. Or, as Timaeus and Graham (1989: 375) put it, men could 'only afford to marry after they have spent one or more periods as migrants earning a cash income'. This might explain why the age at first marriage of both men and women is significantly higher in Southern Africa than in other parts of Africa, and the incidence of polygyny lower (Timaeus and Graham, 1989; Ariyee, 1997).

The second important factor concerned the remarkable long run constancy of a low real wage paid to black labour on the mines over a period which lasted nearly three-quarters of a century. The consolidation of the mining industry through the monopoly power exerted by a limited set of companies grouped together in the powerful Chamber of Mines; the



creation of a single labour recruitment agency (NLSA, the Native Labour Supply Association, which later became WNLA, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association) under the control of the Chamber; along with active state support; together led to a 30 per cent cut in mine wages on June 1897 (Harries, 1994: 129-140).<sup>23</sup> Thereafter, the mining industry succeeded in keeping the real wages low and constant notwithstanding its rapidly expanding demand for labour: more specifically,

it was not until fifty years later that the wages of black mineworkers were to rise, in cash terms, above the level of 1897; *in real terms they would not do so until the mid-1970s*. (Harries, 1994: 137: my emphasis).

The mechanisms which secured an expanding labour supply in response to the expansion of demand had little to do with 'laissez faire'. Instead, within South Africa, the peasantry was forcefully removed from its land and relegated to the labour reserves (Wolpe, 1972). Furthermore, in Mozambique, which at the turn of the century was the single largest supplier of migrant labour, colonial policies actively sought to increase the flow of labour to the mines in exchange for transport services (First, 1983; Wuyts, 1989: 11-36). In fact, the hut tax played an important role in this respect: to prompt a greater supply of labour, the colonial authorities would raise the tax (Harries, 1994: 167-173).<sup>24</sup> Finally, the increase in the labour supply was further assured by the gradual incorporation of more Southern African regions within the ambit of labour recruitment for the mines. Lesotho, for example, only became a significant supplier of migrant labour from the 1930s onwards (First, 1983: 30-34).

The issue of the constancy of the real wage over a prolonged period of time matters for the analysis of the operation of the marriage valve within the rural societies which supplied labour to the mining industry. Unlike Wrigley's famous correlation between nuptiality and the real wage which revealed a joint movement through ups and downs, in Southern Africa the relevant real wage remained constant for about three quarters of a century. Hence, a marriage valve came into existence in this period, but, for a long period, it did not operate through the fluctuations of average real income. When the labour market was tight, excess demand for labour did not result in an increase in real wages; when the labour market was slack, adjustment took the form of unemployment as reflected by the increased difficulties men experienced in obtaining employment on the mines (First, 1983). Only in the early 1970s did mine wages increase significantly in real terms. Interestingly, Timaeus and Graham (1989: 376) argue that, in Lesotho, 'the slight decline in age at marriage between the mid-1960 and the mid-1970 coincided with a period of rapid growth in mine earnings that would have made it easier for men in their twenties to marry'. But, at the

time, other changes were taken place in the mining industry which were to affect the evolution of the demand for labour and, consequently, the context of marriage and rural livelihoods in dramatic ways. Before turning to this issue in section 5, however, it is important to look how family agriculture came to depend on the accumulation of savings out of wage income.

#### **4. WAGE INCOME, THE DEVELOPMENTAL CYCLE OF THE HOUSEHOLD, AND RURAL LIVELIHOOD**

The way the linkage between wage earnings from migrant labour and farm income is viewed is of fundamental importance to the understanding of the nature of the differentiation of rural livelihoods in the labour supplying areas of Southern Africa. On the basis of his fieldwork in Lesotho, Colin Murray (1987:238) highlighted two important conclusions to reach such understanding: first, that 'migrant wage-earning capacity, rather than farm income, had to be viewed as the independent variable in assessing the manner in which individual households disposed their resources', and, second, that 'the development cycle of the household - the way its size and composition change through time - must be built into any explanation of observed differences in wealth and income between rural households'. Furthermore, both these points matter a great deal in the analysis of the gender dimensions of rural differentiation in production and livelihoods.

The first point implies that the relation between wage earnings from migrant labour and farm income is *interactive* rather than *additive*, with wage earnings constituting the driving force in shaping rural livelihoods. This dimension of the migrant labour system was often overlooked. The assumption of *additivity* between wage and farm income, for example, was *de facto* intrinsic to the economic policies pursued in post-independence Mozambique inasmuch as the fall in recruitment of migrant labour, from 1977 onwards, was not seen to have any major implications for peasant agriculture, and, consequently, state-propelled investment in agriculture by-passed the peasantry first in favour of state farms, and, subsequently, with the changing policy context, in favour of large scale private farms (Wuyts, 1981; 1989: 133-150). Similarly, Colin Murray (1987:237) pointed out that, in Lesotho, while the World Bank recognised the importance of migrant labour, its linkage with peasant agriculture (which was assumed to have remained 'virtually untouched by modern economic development') was poorly understood: that is, it was merely asserted that 'the incidence of migrant labour varied inversely with the size of landholding, and poorer families sent out more migrant labourers than better-off families' without much consideration as to how investment in agriculture was financed. In contrast, some radical critics of the migrant labour system, while agreeing with the wage-dependent

nature of rural livelihoods in labour supplying areas, held the view that the creation of labour reserves had effectively destroyed the potential for agricultural development (reducing agriculture to a side activity akin to gardening) and, hence, paid little attention to possible feedback mechanisms between wage income and agricultural production.<sup>25</sup>

But, in many rural labour supply areas, remittances from mine labour did not just finance items of regular consumption only. Income from migrant labour was used as well in at least three other ways. First, as argued in the previous section, mine wages were used to pay lobolo and, hence, enabled a man to set up a rural household and to obtain title to land. Second, it enabled a household to guard against entitlement failure: to pay for food in a period of drought, to pay medical expenses when a family member fell seriously ill, to restore the herd when cattle was lost, etc.<sup>26</sup> But, third, and most importantly, mine wages were used to invest in agriculture or in crafts: that is, to finance the purchase of oxen and plough, a tractor or pickup truck, to construct a water well to catch rain water in water-scarce areas, or to pay for fertilizers or for having one's land ploughed, but also to purchase the equipment and tools of a craft (sewing machines, carpentry equipment and tools, builder's equipment, etc.) (First, 1983: 111- 182; Murray, 1987; Wuyts, 1989: 11- 36). The level of agricultural output, the income it generated, and the income gained from rural off-farm activities such as crafts, therefore, largely depended on investment financed by income from mine labour. This explains why the link between wage income from migrant labour and rural income generating activities cannot be seen as additive, but needs to be looked at as interactive in the sense that the former drives the latter: that is, the development of peasant agriculture and local off-farm activities are essentially wage-dependent within the labour supply areas.

In some labour supplying areas, remittances from migrant labour did not only buy commodities from *outside* the rural areas, but also provided a market for goods and services within the labour supplying areas (First, 1983). That is, the inflow of remittances generated income multiplier effects within the rural economy, and, hence, created locally based income generating opportunities. First, the production of marketed surpluses of food and of cash crops was distributed unevenly among the peasantry, with poorer households often only producing enough for their own subsistence or having a deficit of consumption over production, necessitating the purchase of food out of remittances. Part of the food requirements of deficit producers were met through purchases from surplus producers. Second, the use of oxen and plough was far more widespread than its ownership, and owners would often plough the land of absent migrants against payment out of remittances. Finally, craftsmen produced for the local market propelled by expenditures out of remittances.

The patterns of rural differentiation, therefore, depended on this wage-dependent nature of rural production and livelihoods. In Mozambique, for example, with very few exceptions, all able bodied men in the Southern rural areas went to the mines to earn money to be able to marry and to set up an agricultural homestead, to pay for manufactured consumer goods or for food if own production fell short, and, for some, to invest agriculture and to acquire the skills and tools of a craft. This process enabled some men to withdraw from mine labour and to earn their keep by combining the production of marketed surpluses of food or of cash crops with local crafts and the sale of services. A good deal of chance variations in day to day life experiences and its cumulative effects, particularly when linked with a feedback mechanism linking wage income to agricultural development, are enough to set the mechanisms of rural differentiation in motion.

Murray's second point about the importance to locate these processes of rural differentiation within the perspective of the *developmental cycle* of households is important in this respect. Merely taking a snapshot of the structure of rural households at a particular point of time can be seriously misleading, and, hence, the analysis of the patterns and structures of rural differentiation must inevitably have a longitudinal dimension which takes account that, at a given point in time, different households operate at different points within their developmental cycles, and that the nature of such cycles will differentially depend on the resources households command and the economic opportunities they effectively confront.<sup>27</sup> Hence, households differ in form and in size not only because of differences in demographic events but also because of their differential access to assets and wage labour. But, while a household may be a site where strategies of survival are forged, it never is a monolithic whole characterised by harmony of interests, but instead it is subject to inequality of power, to tension and conflict, and, hence, always in danger of fragmentation or breakdown.<sup>28</sup> Particularly, in a context of migrant labour, when absences of men are prolonged and the stability of a household uncertain and continuously threatened, experiences of men and women are very different, and, moreover, vary significantly over time.

It is, therefore, important to look at the way the development of the migrant labour system affected the sexual division of labour. The withdrawal of male labour from agriculture for considerable amounts of time meant that the burden of agriculture work shifted to women. Hence, apart from reproductive work (domestic labour expended on biological, generational and daily reproduction), agricultural production came to depend primarily on women's labour. This change, however, did not take place under static conditions. The change in agricultural technology with the introduction of plough and oxen cultivation

earlier this century led to the redefinition of 'male' and 'female' tasks, and displaced women from the tasks of land preparation for cultivation (Timaeus & Graham, 1989: 374; Pearson, 1992: 298). But, at the same time, male labour was being withdrawn in large number from agriculture, thereby producing tensions in the organisation of agricultural production. These tensions were addressed in two ways: women increasingly responded by taking over land preparation and ploughing themselves, or by hiring casual labour for, or paying for the service of ploughing the land (First, 1983: 1967-179; Pearson, 1992: 298). The money to do so was available because of the remittances from migrant labour. In fact, more generally, certain tasks previously performed by men in the household (such as ploughing, house-building, the construction of a water-well, etc.) effectively became *commoditized* and paid for out of remittances from migrant labour (Wuyts, 1989: 31-32). This is precisely the reason why, for example, in Southern Mozambique, some men, after several contracts on the mines, managed to withdraw from migrant labour and engage in crafts or the provision of services (such as ploughing the land for others).

In this context, most households were *de facto* female-headed for significant periods of time over the life cycle, due to the absence of men. Access to remittances allowed women to hire labour or to pay for services to undertake tasks which otherwise would be done by men. Similarly, remittances could be used to buy seeds or other agricultural inputs, and, hence, agriculture normally involved monetary costs even for households which mainly produced for own consumption and seldom for sale. But a significant proportion of households were *de jure* female-headed due to the death of a husband, divorce or abandonment, and, hence, had no access to income from migrant labour. The plight of a household under these circumstances was closely connected with the nature of the access it had to remittances from migrant labour (O'Laughlin, 1996).<sup>29</sup> Given the uncertainty inherent in social life under the migrant labour system, the distinction between *de facto* and *de jure* was by no means clear cut, but merely served to delineate the extremes of a continuum.

A final point. The fact that, with the development of the migrant labour system, the dynamics of rural production came to depend on wage income does not mean to say that the migrant labour system was in some ways beneficial to rural development. On the contrary, the opposite is more likely to be true. In South Africa, for example, the development of the migrant labour system went together with the creation of the labour reserves and, hence, with the forceful removal of the peasantry from their lands. More generally, the hardships and the uncertainties it introduced in rural life have undoubtedly been considerable (Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1993), and its impact on the nature of rural production is questionable. The point I am making here, however, is different. It merely

asserts that the development of the migrant labour system brought about the dependence of rural production on income from wage labour, and, hence, in this sense, wage labour became 'the independent variable' which drove the system thus created. This was not necessarily a 'good thing', but it certainly became a 'real' feature in the experience of rural communities which depended on migrant labour for their livelihood.

## **5. THE CHANGING DEMAND FOR LABOUR, THE MARRIAGE VALVE AND FERTILITY**

In the previous two sections I have sketched some key features of the social and economic dynamics introduced within rural communities with the development of the migrant labour system. To recapitulate, I have argued that the incidence and timing of marriage came to depend on the prior accumulation of savings out of wages to pay for lobolo, the bridewealth. I further argued that rural production came to depend on income from wage labour as savings out of wages were invested in agriculture or rural crafts and as remittances created a market for rural goods and services. Finally, I argued that, whatever patterns of rural differentiation then emerged, they can only be understood if this fundamental interdependence of wage labour and rural production and livelihoods is taken into account. But, obviously, there was a great deal of variation in the intensity with which these mechanisms operated within the different labour supplying areas of the Southern African region. The specific character of rural production, the nature of alternative avenues of industrial development, the proximity of urban centres, the differential access to transfer payments such as pensions or compensation for illness or accidents, and the complex employment patterns to which these various components gave rise, all account for considerable regional variations in the context and content which shaped rural livelihoods and their dependence on remittances from wage labour (and transfers).

It is well beyond the scope of this paper, nor its purpose, to take account of these myriad forms of regional variations. This paper merely developed a general *theme* by abstracting from its multiple variations in concrete experiences and from its interactions with other *themes* which also characterised regional or local developments. This is not, however, a fruitless exercise. Indeed, if this theme is of major importance to the economy and livelihoods of large sections of the population in the region, the analysis of its inherent mechanisms, even when abstracting from other processes at work, can be of help to understand some of the social tensions to which they may give rise. The point of such exercise is not *prediction*, but springs from the need to recognise social tensions which emerge within society, the outcome of which depends on specific context, history and contingency, as well as on the nature of policy interventions and the extent to which the latter respond or are oblivious to the character of the processes at work.

How then does the nature of the interdependence between wage income from migrant labour, the marriage valve, fertility and rural livelihoods evolve in the light of the changing demand for labour as determined by the changing nature of the regime of accumulation of mining capital? This is the question with which I am concerned in this section.

As Coontz (1957: 169) pointed out, when analysing the consequences of changes in the demand for labour for population dynamics, two aspects are of particular importance. First, whether not only the (long-run) demand for labour is rising, stagnating, or falling, and whether it does so at an increasing, constant, or decreasing rate of growth. Second, whether, along with the general evolution of demand, there are any concomitant changes in the quality of labour demanded since the latter either increases or reduces labour's normal supply price.<sup>30</sup> Note, however, that Coontz's analysis refers to the reproduction of labour-power within fully fledged capitalist relations of production in which the labourer no longer has any connection with the means of production. In the Southern African context, however, it is important to take account that wage labour remained organically linked with family agriculture.<sup>31</sup>

In the case of the development of the gold mining industry, the demand for labour was initially characterised by its rapid expansion up to the 1940s, after which its growth slowed down and effectively stagnated during the 1960s and subsequently declined from the mid-1970s onwards (First, 1983: 32-33; O'Laughlin, 1996: 26). This pattern of growth and decline fell unevenly across the region as a whole given the tendency of the mining sector to reduce the proportion of foreign (i.e. non- South African) workers in the total labour force whenever unemployment rose in South Africa (*Ibid*). As to the quality of labour, for a long time, skilled labour was the preserve of white labour, and, hence, the margin for skill acquisition and improvement of black labourers was severely limited. The rise in the price of gold and the massive mine strikes in the early 1970s, the subsequent investments in technical change as well as the closure of marginal mines, meant that the wages of black labour increased significantly, and so did its spread as the range of its skill composition widened progressively. In short, the dynamics of the demand for labour of mining capital changed from a situation where the demand for low skilled labour was rapidly expanding, and subsequently tapered out, to one in which demand contracted and shifted in favour of higher skilled labour. A period of chronic labour shortage, therefore, was succeeded by one of growing unemployment in which the mining industry shed the labour it no longer needed. The shift in the quality of labour meant that the mining industry increasingly came to depend on a more stable (often more urbanised) and better-skilled black labour force. Even when this higher skilled component of the labour force

retained its links with its rural base, access to this form of employment became more severely restricted and was no longer open to a majority of young men in search of wage work.

One obvious major implication of this change from chronic labour shortage to structural unemployment is the dramatic *closure* of the marriage valve it implies. As argued above, past development meant that, for men, marriage had become contingent upon the *prior* accumulation of savings out of wages to pay for lobolo. Similarly, rural farm and off-farm production had come to depend on investments in assets and skills obtained through migrant labour. This avenue towards establishing a rural livelihood, which by now had become the 'traditional' route, became increasingly less accessible. The implications of these changing economic conditions on marriage and family formation are likely to be substantial, although they may vary significantly both within as between the different rural societies of Southern Africa..

Tentatively, given the growing unemployment of men, the survival of the household is likely to come to depend more on women's coping strategies, among which, given the cash dependent nature of family agriculture, female migration to obtain cash income features prominently. Timeaus and Graham, for example, point out that,

In the earlier part of this century outmigration was a means of 'escape' for women and was often a response to extramarital pregnancy, infertility, or marital breakdown. Increasingly, it has become part of the diversification of women's roles to encompass the position of breadwinner and household head (1989: 371-2).

Indeed, as they continue to argue, 'while their patterns of movement may resemble that of men, the distinctive feature of rural-urban interdependence for women is *its development of family forms in which the role of the father is marginal in both social and economic terms and of households permanently headed by women*' (Timeaus & Graham, 1989: 372: my emphasis). In fact, this process is not surprising and its general character is more widely known. Segalen, for example, argued that 'among the poorest Italian households in Florence at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a large number women were heads of family; these were families which had become *matricentral out of poverty*, and as often happens nowadays in the least privileged groups in society' (1996: 391, my emphasis). In Southern Africa, however, what underlies this process of growing impoverishment is what Bridget O'Laughlin (1996) refers to as the phenomenon of *missing men* caused by the growing absence of men from income generating employment as a result of the demise of the migrant labour system.<sup>32</sup>



the growing absence of men from income generating employment as a result of the demise of the migrant labour system.<sup>32</sup>

The implications for fertility are hard to predict and depend on the concrete context. More specifically, it will depend on how the increased pressures on women affect fertility behaviour. The closure of the marriage valve does not mean that fertility necessarily reduces sharply since fertility outside marriage is likely to increase. But, as Timeaus and Graham (1989: 382, 386) showed, fertility of unmarried women is significantly lower than that of married women, and fertility of unmarried women who migrate is less than that of those who remain within the rural areas. As to the latter point, the direction of causality may go both ways: that is, women may be unable to migrate because they are pregnant or breastfeeding young children, and, hence, the care for children prevents them to migrate, or, conversely, women may limit their fertility to be able to migrate. Timeaus and Graham (1989: 385) argue that most probably both factors are important.

Tentatively, however, one could argue that the fall in demand for male migrant labour and its shift towards higher skill levels, together with its implications for changing family structures and the greater burden and responsibilities this imposes on women, may well be important mechanisms which *may* favour lower fertility.<sup>33</sup> What matters, however, is not fertility decline *per sé*, but the conditions under which it comes about. If the mechanisms described above are indeed operative within the rural areas of Southern Africa, and if (and this is a big if) they induce fertility decline, one can only conclude that this is obtained at the expense of considerable social costs.



## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a preliminary literature survey, on the one hand, and, on the other, on reflections and a reinterpretation of earlier fieldwork on migrant labour and rural development in Southern Mozambique, in which I participated as researcher of the Centre of African Studies (Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, Mozambique) in the second half of the 1970s and the early 1980s (First, 1983; Wuyts, 1978; 1981; 1985; 1989). In writing this paper I have benefitted from the comments by Bridget O’Laughlin whose own paper (1996) gave the inspiration to the argument developed in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> As Harris and Ross (1987: 88) point out, age at marriage matters as a ‘risk factor’ only insofar pregnancy and child rearing outside wedlock are preventable in any significant degree. Whether this is the case depends on the social fabric of society and the place of marriage therein. Demographers are in fact quite aware of this and pay attention to fertility outside marriage, but argue that, to the extent that the latter is significantly less than marital fertility, age at marriage can be taken to be an important intermediate variable. The point is, however, that the sole preoccupation with age of marriage as a risk factor reduces the effects of the social character of marriage to a supposedly biological cause.

<sup>3</sup> This ‘innovation’ view of fertility transition differs markedly from an ‘adjustment’ view. In the former view, the absence of a fall in marital fertility in pre-industrial or traditional societies is essentially ascribed to ignorance of an effective method of limiting family size. In the latter view, different societies always had some (but differing) knowledge and concept of family limitation but its application depends on broader contextual circumstances. (Wrigley, 1987)

<sup>4</sup> In contrast, in France, for example, this practice was less common and the event of marriage mainly depended on the transfer of property contingent upon the death of the father before children could settle down (Burguiere and Lebrun, 1996: 49).

<sup>5</sup> In Wrigley’s view, population adapts to economic and environmental constraints which in the context of pre-industrial societies are seen to be governed by decreasing return to scale (Wrigley, 1988). That is, to prevent that the Malthusian (positive) mortality crises (caused by population outstripping food availability) are operative, societies are seen to develop preventive checks which contain fertility in accordance with economic circumstances. Wrigley (1996) argues that these preventive mortality checks allow societies to attain a higher standard of living than would otherwise be the case. In contrast, Boserup (1965) argued that it is technical progress which is endogenous to the pressure of population on food and, hence, causality runs the other way around: from population to economic development.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent general argument in favour of the use of biological metaphors in economics, see, for example, Hodgson (1993).

<sup>7</sup> In this sense, it could be argued that this approach has a distinctive (but not exclusive) Post-Keynesian flavour. As I shall show below, there is a further reason why this is the case. For a general argument on the macro foundations of micro behaviour, see, for example, Bhaduri (1993).

<sup>8</sup> Coontz’s book, while little recognized, is a remarkable piece of scholarship which continues to retain its vigour and power in the analysis of the study of population dynamics within modern capitalism despite the fact that the historical evidence on which it is based has now been superseded by more recent research.

<sup>9</sup> Coontz points out that A. Marshall, one of the founders of neoclassical economics, was quite aware of the importance of the quality of labour in the determination of its supply, and, consequently, in shaping fertility behaviour. Marshall argued that the standard of living of a worker depended on the expenses of rearing and training efficient workers at different skill levels. According to Coontz (1957: 95), this argument entails an implicit argument for differential fertility:

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Efficient labour requires an objectively determined higher standard of living to insure its continuous supply, i.e. its replacement in subsequent generations. In terms of costs, the rearing of an efficient (or skilled) labourer will be some multiple (say 2) of the cost of rearing an inefficient labourer (or unskilled) labourer. In order, then, for the fertility pattern of the efficient or skilled labourer to coincide with that of the inefficient labourer or unskilled labourer, the differential in remuneration would have to be such that the efficient worker's higher income would suffice to compensate him for rearing as large a family as that reared by the inefficient labourer. In the absence of the full amount required to compensate him for the expenses of such a large family, we would expect the efficient labourer to limit the number of his progeny.

But Coontz (1957: 96) goes on to argue that,

He [Marshall] could not relate the fertility decline of the last quarter of the nine-teenth century to the relative diminution in the demand for labour. His acceptance of a theoretical model which postulated a tendency towards full employment of all factors of production excluded such possibility.

<sup>10</sup> Coontz (1957: 167), for example, put this point as follows:

But the means of subsistence and the demand for labour must be distinguished; and Malthus, himself, made just such a distinction when he turned to a consideration of the problem of effective demand.

Sen (1994: 75) expressed the same point as follows:

Interestingly enough, while Malthus had tended to concentrate rather wholeheartedly on the rhetoric of 'the proportion between the natural increase of population and of food' in his *Essay on Population*, in his other works he was very acutely concerned with the role of effective demand and incentives in the operation of the economy.

In contrast, it is perhaps somewhat paradoxical that most post-Keynesians, who stress the importance of effective demand, are largely oblivious to its importance for population dynamics, in particularly fertility which they tend to treat as exogenously determined.

<sup>11</sup> Sen's entitlement approach is formulated in the language of micro economics and, hence, the link up with the macro question of effective demand is less obvious. It is, however, particularly in his analysis of case studies of famines that the macro dimensions come to the fore. Here, the analysis features group j rather than person i, where group j refers to people with a similar 'occupation' and, hence, with similar endowment structure and subject to similar vulnerabilities inherent in, and shaped by, the historically specific structures of the macro economy.

<sup>12</sup> Jane Wheelock (1996: 108 - 111) provides a useful cloverleaf diagram to illustrate the interdependence between paid and unpaid labour in sustaining households' livelihoods.

<sup>13</sup> Most demographic analyses ignore the complexity of the interplay between the demand for labour and the organisation of domestic work in the analysis of fertility behaviour. It is commonly asserted, for example, that an increase in female labour force participation goes hand in hand with lower fertility. Such relationships, where they occur, are nevertheless contextual.

Segalen (1996), for example, showed that during the early phases of the industrial revolution when female and child labour was extensively used (and, hence, female labour force participation was high), fertility was also high, even if,

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domestic skill relating to the care of babies and sick children, household duties and the preparation of meals, were forgotten. Harassed wives now had no time or energy for cooking. What was the point of maintaining a dwelling which was no more than a sleeping-place, and how could this be afforded when there was no room even for the basic necessities? Working-class women had the reputation of not knowing how to cook, and of putting a 'little something to make it sleep' in the baby's bottle. (Segalen, 1996: 389).

The point was that 'these children's wages were so important that they account for fertility levels among workers' (*Ibid*: 390). At a later stage, when the demand for labour slowed down and shifted towards higher quality, 'workers' demand for higher wages were often based on the argument that these would allow their wives to escape factory work and stay at home to take better care of their children' (*Ibid*: 400). Yet, at this stage, the decrease in female labour force participation did not go hand in hand with an increase in fertility, but instead fertility declined.

<sup>14</sup> Deaton assumed that most households will essentially be complex in form and involve several generations living together by sharing and transferring resources. In reality, even if a complex household structure is the preferred norm and usually also the modal category, actual variations both in household size and form are invariably large due to demographic factors (in particular, mortality) and economic circumstances (Segalen, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> Deaton identifies the role of savings as that of smoothing consumption of the household, and not to finance its investments. However, if the household is a production unit, investment in productive assets is essential. In a context where a married couple joins an existing household, investment in productive assets would not be primarily conditioned by the life cycle.

<sup>16</sup> Coontz (1957: 8-9) argued that to understand population dynamics it is not sufficient to look at capitalist development in the abstract, but rather in the context of specific experiences, 'each with its own peculiar economic characteristics'.

<sup>17</sup> Harold Wolpe's seminal article was based on the premise that this form of incomplete proletarianisation meant that capital never had to pay to full value of the costs of production and reproduction of (male) labour power since part of these costs were born through rural production. He located this argument within a concept of 'articulation of modes of production' which suggests that the earlier prevailing mode of production is partly retained, yet made subordinate to the needs of capital accumulation. Wolpe's article was a major contribution to the analysis of the development of capitalism in Southern Africa and propelled stimulating debates. The concept of the articulation of modes of production, however, *can* convey the rather *static* notion that the costs of the production and reproduction of labour power depends in a somewhat 'additive' fashion on wage labour, on the one hand, and 'traditional' rural production, on the other, without taking account of the complex ways in which they come to interact and change the dynamics of rural livelihoods themselves.

<sup>18</sup> In Europe, the spread of industrialisation with the development of the factory system initially implied the depreciation of the value of male labour power as a result of the widespread introduction of female and child labour. In Southern Africa, the process was markedly different and did not involve the use of female and child labour in the development of the mining industry. As Wolpe (1972) argued, however, male wage labour was kept cheap because the wage never needed to cover the full costs of the household due to the fact that it remained rooted in rural production.

<sup>19</sup> In fact, this proposition is also quite commonly thought to be valid for present-day African societies. A notable exception, however, is McNicoll (1994: 207) who argued that 'some accounts of the recent evolution of these [= African marriage] systems suggest a trend towards self-generated savings as a source of bride-wealth - perhaps the emergence of a kind of African marriage valve'. As I intend to show, this

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trend, however, is not as recent as all that, but in Southern Africa it was linked up with the development of the colonial economies.

<sup>20</sup> This process did not happen immediately. Harries (1994), for example, provides a fascinating account of the social tensions within rural society and the changes which went along with the emergence of migrant labour from Southern Mozambique to the South African mines during the early days of the development of the mining industry.

<sup>21</sup> That this is not only the case in Mozambique, see, for example, Timaeus and Graham (1989: 375-376).

<sup>22</sup> As Colin Murray (1987: 242-243) pointed out,

Thus the *experience* of men and women respectively - their differential incorporation in the labour market, their differential access to and control over domestic resources - suggest that the relationship between them is one of constant tension, incipient conflict, potential breakdown.

<sup>23</sup> In the period prior to this, chronic shortage of labour along with competition for labour between mining companies produced conditions more favourable to black mine workers and, hence, had led to higher real wages (Harries, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> There was effectively a two-ways relation between the level of mine wages and the level of the tax. Since remittances from mine labour were the principle source for payment of the tax, the level of the tax fluctuated with changing money wages. But colonial authorities also manipulated the level of the tax in order to prompt an increased supply of labour to the mines.

<sup>25</sup> Harold Wolpe (a frequent visitor to the Centre of African Studies in Maputo, during the second half of the 1970s and early 1980s) was highly critical of the proposition inherent in our work that income from wage labour fuelled processes of rural differentiation in the labour supplying areas of Southern Mozambique. Harold saw our analysis as reflective of a 'sociological motivational theory' about some peasants who made it, while others did not, instead of, as we asserted, it being based on processes of wage-dependent accumulation in the rural economy.

<sup>26</sup> Of relevance here is Platteau's (1991: 140) point that the 'cost of an additional risk depends on its covariance with with existing risks: the cost will be higher the stronger the degree of positive covariance, whilst negatively correlated risks will have the effect of reducing the total cost of risk-bearing'. The rural population came to depend on access to income from migrant labour to gain added insurance against the risk of farm income failure. In the case where farm income mainly depends on selling marketed surpluses of food, the latter risk is particularly high since, as Sen (1994: 64) explains,

because such a high proportion of people rely on food production for earning their income ..., a fall in food output is typically accompanied by the collapse of individual means of purchase and thus by an inability to buy food. The role of production in providing a supply of particular commodities has to be distinguished from its role as a main source of income of a large section of the population.

This explains why those households without regular or secured access to remittances from migrant labour are particularly vulnerable in this context. Not surprisingly, many of these concerned *de jure* female headed households who often constituted a significant proportion of the rural poor.

<sup>27</sup> In the research of the Centre of African Studies on migrant labour we did not root our analysis on a concept of the developmental cycle of households. What prevented the analysis from becoming static in nature, however, was the extensive use we made of work histories of miners which gave an important

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longitudinal dimension to the research which allowed us to gain insights in the processes of differentiation. But perhaps we were a bit too hasty to condense some of these more complex processes in a simple middle versus poor peasants framework, where the former were principally characterised by the active feedback of wage income into rural farm and off-farm activities. In reality, the situation was more fluid and subject to considerable variations (subject to different patterns), part of which were conditioned by the interplay between economic conditions and cyclical nature of the development of households.

<sup>28</sup> In a different setting of European history of the family, Martine Segalen (1986) makes the following remarks of relevance here:

first,

All domestic groups are in transition, are processes, not permanencies, and to seek to understand them by means of censuses fixes their image as a particular type of household, whereas in fact their organisation at any one time may only be temporary (27);

And secondly,

Certain types of domestic groups may have been the result of the adaptation to economic circumstances. The size of the patrimony was also a determining factor. As we have already pointed out, complex domestic groups built up around well-to-do farmers and conjugal groups associated with day-labourers existed alongside each other. The latter could neither support their aged parents nor their children, who had to be sent out to live and work as labourers on other farms when they were between ten and twelve years old. Not only was the form of the labourers' households simpler; it also was smaller in size. When a household was wealthy, young married couples continued to live with their parents all the more frequently, and the domestic group was larger.

In migrant labour areas, the nature and size of the domestic group is also likely to be related to household assets, and further enhanced if sons initially continue to contribute to household income through remittances from migrant labour.

<sup>29</sup> In the argument developed in this paper, my concern has been to investigate the mechanisms at work underlying *male* migration linked with the development of the mining industry. This does not mean, however, that in reality *female* migration did not take place (Caroline Wright, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> Coontz develops this argument as follows:

But for population growth, the situation most favourable would be one in which demand for labour was increasing at an increasing rate ... while simultaneously, there was a great relative increase in the demand for labour of a lower quality. For a decrease in the quality of labour is tantamount to a reduction in the production period of labour-power. That is to say, the more unskilled the labour, the shorter is the period of time required for it to reach the market, and the lower its supply price. An extreme example of such a situation was the utilization of child labour at the time of the industrial revolution.

Conversely, the situation most unfavourable to population growth would be one in which the demand for labour fell absolutely while, simultaneously, there is a shift in demand to a higher quality of labour. But it is obvious that even if the demand for labour were increasing at a decreasing rate ... and this was accompanied by a relative increase in the demand for skilled labour, the rate of population growth would tend to decline.

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<sup>31</sup> Marriage, therefore, implied setting up a domestic unit which also was a site of household production and, hence, required some accumulation of assets, some of which had to be obtained through the prior savings out of wage earnings.

<sup>32</sup> O'Laughlin develops the argument as follows:

The absence of men from income generating employment matters for women and children in rural areas and underlies their demographic disappearance, the high incidence of women-headed households, and the poverty of many rural households. I do not question the importance of recognizing women's initiative and power, nor do I think it undesirable that many women find autonomy in households they themselves head. But it seems to me wrong to take as given an economic and social structure that links poverty to autonomy and gives women authority only in the absence of men (1996: 27).

<sup>33</sup> Fertility in Southern Africa is high, but significantly below that of the remainder of Africa (Adepoju, 1994; Caldwell and Caldwell, 1993). The total fertility rate in 1990, for example, was 6.7 for West Africa, 6 for Central Africa, and 6.6 for East Africa, but only 4.4 for Southern Africa (Adepoju, 1994: 18-19). Furthermore, fertility appears to have been declining in recent decades. A more analytical assessment of the processes at work, however, would require much more disaggregated data derived from fieldwork.



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