

# **Comparative Perspectives on Reforming Regional Migrant Labour Regimes: Theoretical questions and empirical insights from Southern Africa**

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# Outline

- Background
- Theoretical framework
- Preliminary evidence
- Key questions for discussion

# Background: theoretical animation

- Historicity of labour migrant regimes in the world: formulation and shifts. eg US-Mexico, Turkey-Germany, France- Algeria, South Africa and SADC
- Structuralist understanding of migration dynamics :
  - intermediate emerging structures
  - political economy of regions (sources of wealth accumulation) and
  - identification of key factors of change
  - Centrality of labour migrant system to core sectors of the receiving economy and role of LM in capital accumulation
  - The role of (sending/receiving) states in regulating migrant labour regimes and ensuring the reproduction of labour
  - Levers of change that affect the nature of LM regimes, investigating the broader economic and structural dimensions: political shifts, global economic systems, de-regulation of markets, securitisation of migrant regimes, migrant mobilisation and organisation
- Need to shift away from methodological individualism dominant in NELM: does not explain historical trends, role of LM on developmental indicators, or help identify levers of change

# Theoretical framework

- **Central hypothesis: the crisis of accumulation in the core sector leads to a crisis of reproduction of migrant labour at regional level**
  - Demand side: continued privileged access for core sector albeit in changed conditions; diversification of access for other sectors but in deteriorated conditions
  - Supply side: Continuation of system but increasingly for domestic labour and casual foreign labour
  - Maintenance: increase in remittances while wage stagnation or deterioration but little knowledge of informal sector & self-employed;
  - Crisis in core sector: key factor of new relations of production in 1990s & 2000s
  - Regional economy: reduction in future remittances and limited social portability

# Epistemological context in Southern Africa

- Centrality of migrant labour in the reproduction of the SA capitalist system
- Core sectors of economy (mining & agriculture; MEC Fine & Rustomjee, 1997) reliant on cheap and docile migrant labour
- Bridging the gap between political economy studies of LM and post apartheid migration studies in SA
- Marxist studies: Intersection of capitalist system and racist state to ensure 'reproduction of Black labour'  
Burawoy (1976, 1981); First (1972), Wolpe (1972), Fine & Rustomjee (1996), Arrighi (1967 & et al. 2010); Webster & von Holdt (2006); Barchiesi (2011)
  - Post-apartheid citizenship closely associated with waged work
- Migration studies: SAMP; ACMS; independent researchers. multi-disciplinary, empirically rich

# Preliminary evidence

- Key changes in the
  - **numbers** eg. Number of foreign workers in gold mining decreased from **47%** in 1990 to **38%** in 2006; in 2012 only **31 151 of a total of 117 870** gold miners recruited by TEBA were foreign born, and;
  - **positions** of LM in South Africa. MW more likely than locally born people to be working as service and sales workers, as craft-related (skilled) workers, and as domestic workers (13% of all DW in SA are foreign born) QLFS in Budlender 2014
- Changing role of the state from regulation, role of inspectorates, issuance of documentation, deportation (in **2012 - 103 529** people were deported compared to **65 383 in 2011** Budlender 2013)
- Increase in **precarity**: eg, poorly regulated sectors, emergence of parallel economies (informal mining) eg 50% of MW are in the informal sector vs 29% of local born (QLFS Budlender 2014)
- Representation: organised labour regards MW as a threat, limited mobilisation (12% of MW unionised – QLFS cited in Budlender 2014)
- Sending countries: portability of benefits (more than 5 billion Zar in pension funds unclaimed- SAT 2014)

# Key Questions

- How does the relationship between the state and business develop over time?
- Regional/global cooperation: How do states interact with each other? What role do bilateral agreements play in regulating LM regimes in current deregulated context?
- What is the role of IO? Should it extend beyond normative frameworks to policy development and how for eg?
- Which intermediary structures (transnational networks, unions, etc) have the capacity to exert pressure for decent work conditions?