

Arbeiten in der Stadt I: Migratory Labour

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Between the 1930s and 1950s a crude division was drawn between migrant workers in the compound and sometimes hostels and more settled African families in the towns. The division is seen to apolitical and political propensities of the urban population. For the urban migrants populations social structures , political and ethnic identities were profoundly misleading.

An account seen is the formation of the gang group in the middle month of 1947 called „The Russians (MaRashea)“ .There was a visit of large groups of Basotho mineworkers to Benoni’s African township of Tswatwa. The visitors were alleged to be living with the wives of the other Basotho residents of the location. Mabiloko Molapo and Mohau Massau were leading the residents where they grouped themselves to a gang called **the Russians** in order to drive out the interlopers. The visitors and other Basotho from the mines coalesced into a rival gang called **the Japanese** under Lekhetla Mokhtlane leadership.

The Mpondo gang was another one. Due to these events, a strong cycle of Violence were seen which could not stop for five years. Violence involving the Basotho gangs, another dispute erupted between the Basotho residents of the Asiatic areas in Benoni and Basotho miners visiting from local mines, 1947 fighting among Basotho (Basotho resident of Benoni against Mpondo Zulu- reason) the Basotho’s refusal to pay the admission fee to a dance organised by the Mpondo. Out of all these, the Russians and the Japanese were born in mid-1947. August 1947 gang battle, in October these spilled out to be a major ethnic conflict between the Russian and a section of the Xhosa residents of Benoni’s Tent Town. Another conflict which turned to a violence was between the Molapo and Matsieng and ethnic skirmishes Russian Zulu conflict, 1955- conflict between the Russians and the civilians. There are a lot of conflicts which occurred during this period, one needs to keep them in track, one after the other. I would generally say that there are a lot of conflicts which for some of them ended up becoming violent. Funding was also a major source of the conflict whereby for some of the groups this did not bring satisfaction to their lives.

An Argument is, why was Basotho workers experiencing the scale and rapidity of transition from migrants to immigrants status that was responsible for the Russians Development? Economic factor: Basotholand’s economy entered a period of deep distress in the 1930s when the effects of he rapidly climbing population , mounting land shortage, and accelerating soil exhaustion were compounded by savage drought. Basotho land turned into a net importer as opposed to a net exporter of grain. A growing gulf was developing between rich and the poor households in the territory while within individual households younger sons had to wait for a longer time in order to gain independence of he land. Brides wealth in other sub-continent was anything between four and 12 cattle whereby according to Basotho tradition ,brides wealth stood at 20 cattle or more and for this reason, Many men Marriage was deferred till the age of 30 or 35 hence men resorted the abduction of brides and the payment of smaller number of cattle in compensation and many wives abandoned in this fashion set out themselves to the employment centres of south Africa ,i would therefore say that this shows how the combination of economic collapse and dependency on labour migration pushed a number of Basotho women to opt for commercial beer-brewing and prostitution and this became an essential part of migrants lives. Fort he women at the urban areas,they wanted to get resources from men who were working at the mines,they new very well that those men heard wives at home but they wanted to influence and even showing an interest of beine the wife of those men in order to get a share of there salary.

For the Basotho society ,there was also a rise of secondary industry in South Africa and at the Rand. Between 1933 and 1946 the number of establishment rose from 6 543 to 9 999, creating a steadily increase demand fort he semi-skilled and the as many argue, non migrant labour. S.Pelanyane respond on his job saying :

I wouldn't say I had problems. In fact it was wonderful, earning some money. At home i would be given five shillings a month and not even regularly, and now i was earning 3 Pounds a month. I thought, hell, there is a lot of money here in Gauteng...I mean i could buy some khaki trousers for four shillings, a lamb's head for a penny and cigarettes for a shilling.(pp 171)

The need for a more stable semi-skilled labour force had little to do with the decision to settle in the towns. Urban living was also a key component for many migrants cultures on the mines that were very suspicious of urban life and particularly tot he urban women . Migrant workers were urged to keep in close within the migrants networks and not to mix or rather contaminate themselves with the physical morals of the urban life (towns). In the contrary , the Basotho never followed that, in that they went a head and done what they thought was right for them, they even ended up involved in “ factions fights „ broke out. Sudden immigration to towns during and immediately after the 2 World War led to shortage of housing hence leading to squatter movements.

The Russians on the Reef were above all fighting machines and they used material skills that they had learnt in their youth to defend new kinds of resources which were sources of dispute- women and urban space. They were in no sense a youth culture (middle class), there was no majority of older or younger generation. They believed totally in traditional doctors and members of the legal profession for their welfare and survival. The Russian do also place value on positive value, on manual labour and on types of self employment, Example on tailoring. The communist party of South Africa leader J. B. Marks who lived in Newclare, issued a call to May Day meeting in Newclare square for the mass burning of passes since employment and passes were almost impossible to secure.

Literatur: Bonner, Philip (1993): The Russians on the Reef 1947-1957: Urbanisation, Gang Warfare and Ethnic Mobilisation. In: Bonner, Philip/ Delius, Peter/ Posel, Deborah (Hrsg.): Apartheid's Genesis 1935-1962. S. 160-194.