

THE MIGRATION OF NATIVE LABORERS IN SOUTH AFRICA¹

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IN the development of European colonial administration and economic exploitation of the African continent, the problem of making productive use of native labor has been continuously paramount. Indeed, the labor resources of the continent figured in the world economy long before the completion of political subjugation and regular colonial administration. The slave trade provided one kind of answer to the problem of using native labor, representing in a sense the removal for processing elsewhere of a replaceable natural resource. With the development of tropical agriculture, mining, and permanent white colonization, the problem became one of using tribal natives for local economic production. Although slavery, called by one name or another, has been practiced at one time or another in all parts of the continent, there has gradually been established an indirect, less openly coercive expedient for the integration of culturally and economically backward peoples into modern economic life. This coercion by indirection, which is more in keeping with European canons of law and ethics and conceptions of productive relationships, has been accomplished mainly by the use of the power of taxation as a prerogative of constituted governmental authority. Tribal natives have been brought within a wage and money economy by levying head taxes or hut taxes, payable only in cash, and thus obtainable only by wage employment or by selling agricultural produce. The taxation policy has been supplemented in South and East Africa by the seizure of good agricultural land by Europeans and the confinement of tribal natives to ever narrowing territories or preserves.

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Aside from a whole range of questions concerning the difficult adaptations of native institutions to European culture and civilization as represented in piecemeal contacts,² the full utilization of native labor resources has been blocked by inconsistencies in the policies of Europeans. Throughout British South Africa (as well as in most of East Africa, namely, where there is a strong white settlement) a racial caste system prevails. This inevitably affects the division of labor, and its particular form in South Africa affects also the actual territorial disposition and mobility of labor. Not only are some jobs regarded as exclusively African occupations and others as exclusively European, but also some territories are regarded as appropriate permanent residences of natives and others as exclusively under the ownership and control, if not the exclusive occupancy, of Europeans.

This dual separation between Europeans and natives—of strata in the social scale and of areas within the country—has its inconsistencies. The territorial segregation assumes completely separate communities; this is in exact opposition to the demand for cheap and exploitable native labor in the white community. To some extent this inconsistency is resolved by the use of more or less temporary laborers who retain tribal affiliations and are considered as residents of the native reserves. This in turn creates a number of serious difficulties, not only for the white employer but also for the economy and social structure of the native villages. On the other hand, the caste system of occupational distinction would bar full qualitative use of native labor, even if the labor force were less transitory and mobile.

It is only against this background of dual separation that the particular features of migratory native labor in South Africa can be understood.

² See, for example, Hunter, Monica: *REACTION TO CONQUEST: EFFECTS OF CONTACT WITH EUROPEANS ON THE PONGO OF SOUTH AFRICA*. London, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1936; Malinowski, Bronislaw: *THE DYNAMICS OF CULTURAL CHANGE: AN INQUIRY INTO RACE RELATIONS IN AFRICA*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1945.

MIGRATORY LABOR AND NATIVE EMPLOYMENT

In British South Africa there are four main types of demand for native labor in the white community: agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and domestic service. Table 1 indicates the relative importance of these modes of economic activity among natives in the Union of South Africa, but unfortunately does not distinguish within the category of "agriculture" between tribal natives and those employed by European farmers or "squatting" on land legally owned by white cultivators. In any event, European agricultural production does not depend heavily upon migratory farm labor but rather enjoys a more or less permanent native labor force in various degrees of personal dependency upon the white land owner.³ Similarly, migratory labor is rarely recruited in the native territories specifically for domestic service, which rather depends upon fairly permanent resident natives, whether in urban or rural areas. Manufacturing depends to a considerable extent upon unskilled native labor recruited on a temporary basis, but, because of the typically small size of estab-

Table 1. Economic activity of native males and females, 1936.¹

ECONOMIC GROUP	MALES		FEMALES	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Agriculture	1,437,087	62.4	1,659,349	86.5
Mining	393,020	17.1	—	—
Manufacturing	210,407	9.1	3,358	0.2
Transport and Communication	90,193	3.9	146	— ^a
Commerce and Finance	6,447	0.3	242	— ^a
Professions, Sport, Entertainment	17,605	0.8	4,335	0.2
Personal Services	112,901	4.9	243,369	12.7
Other	35,411	1.5	8,520	0.4
TOTALS	2,303,071	100.0	1,919,319	100.0

^a Less than one-tenth of one per cent.

¹ Union of South Africa, SIXTH CENSUS, 1936, Vol. IX, pp. 71, 74.

³ See Tinley, J. M.: *THE NATIVE LABOR PROBLEM OF SOUTH AFRICA*. Chapel Hill. University of North Carolina Press, 1942, pages 85-98.

lishments and their territorial dispersion, is less exclusively dependent on nonresident labor than is mining with its predominant concentration in the Witwatersrand area of Transvaal Province. The gold mines of the Rand provide the most important single source of employment for migratory workers within the Union, with much smaller numbers employed in diamond mines and manufacturing establishments. Copper and tin mines have an analogous significance in the economic structure of the Rhodesias. Thus the most outstanding economic feature of native labor migration is the recruitment of laborers in the native reserves under contract or indenture for work in the fairly limited mining areas.

This clear territorial concentration of economic activity employing large numbers of native workers would seem to facilitate the statistical analysis of labor mobility. And in fact the movement of labor to the mining areas is sufficiently marked to make its main features clear. However, numerous difficulties impede precise statement of the situation.

As previously noted, European employers for the most part do not recruit a *permanent* labor force for work in the mines, nor can they rely upon a resident urban proletariat attracted and held by employment opportunities. However much individual employers might find a dependable, resident labor force advantageous, they are barred from fostering such a development by the principle of territorial segregation and the attempt to maintain natives in tribal conditions. This policy is naturally reinforced by the limited, although increasing, interest of tribal natives in modern economic life and their preference for traditional modes of agricultural life functionally related to the whole institutional framework. Concretely, this means that the native labor force as enumerated, for example, by any given census may be quite different from that which would have been enumerated a few months earlier or later. The infrequent censuses of the Union do not at-

tempt to classify natives according to permanent residence; they are enumerated *de facto* and not *de jure*. Thus, although natives in 1936 were tabulated according to place of birth, there is no way of determining how many of the migrants at the time of the census were temporarily at employment centers and how many were more or less permanent additions to the labor force (the so-called "detribalized natives"). The direction of the flow can be determined, but not its exact size for a given period or its duration with respect to individual components.

Workers for the principal centers employing native laborers are recruited both from the predominantly native areas within the Union and from neighboring territories. The data concerning native immigration⁴ from the three High Commission Territories — Basutoland, Swaziland, and Bechuanaland — from Mozambique, or from British colonies to the north are no more satisfactory than those relating to migration within the Union. Statistics of immigration for the Union exclude natives. The number of natives leaving the High Commission Territories during any year may be approximately determined from passes issued in those territories; how many return in the course of the year is completely unknown. For Basutoland the 1936 and earlier censuses enumerated "absentees," but the difficulty of length of residence remains. Even less evidence exists with respect to other areas of labor recruitment, except that the annual number of workers under indenture from Mozambique is fixed in round numbers by treaty. These scattered bits of evidence, supplemented by statistics on place of birth and by statistics of employment, provide only rough measures of the ebb and flow of migratory movements.

In general, therefore, the possible statistical description of native labor migration in British South Africa is considerably less

⁴ "Native" as used in this discussion refers uniformly to Negroid natives of the African continent, primarily Bantu in the areas here under consideration. This explains the use of such otherwise contradictory terms as "native immigrants."

than could be desired. Data on place of birth, for example, do not have the same significance as similar data where migration involves a definite change of legal residence, and where census data present *de jure* as well as *de facto* enumerations. On the other hand, the significance of temporary migration with more or less frequent turnover of labor supply should not be misinterpreted. As long as the total labor force remains reasonably constant, or is at most subject only to long-term variations, the enumerated native population may for some purposes be regarded as permanently resident in the places where enumerated. This would be true even if no laborer gained legal residence at his place of work and remained only for one year under indenture and never returned. If each departing worker is replaced by another during the same year, or any shorter or longer period under consideration, the total for the period obviously remains constant.

The foregoing should not obscure other demographic, as well as economic and social, consequences of such labor mobility. The "permanent" labor force by statistical artifact would still not be self-reproducing by natural increase. Moreover, extended periods of absence on the part of the laborers from their truly permanent places of residence may affect the demographic balance in those areas. Unfortunately the available data do not allow adequate appraisal of these effects. They permit, indeed, only the determination of the direction of labor mobility, its approximate extent in terms of statistics on place of birth and on employment in labor centers, and some of the more obvious changes in population composition resulting from the movement.

INTERNAL MIGRATION

The census enumeration of natives by place of birth allows the tracing of migratory movements only among the four provinces of the Union and not by smaller administrative districts. Indirect evidence, however, in the form of age and sex distribu-

PROVINCE OF BIRTH	NET BALANCE IN PROVINCE OF ENUMERATION			
	Cape	Natal	Orange Free State	Transvaal
Cape	—	+18,089	+18,478	+233,846
Natal	-18,089	—	+1,414	+73,634
Orange Free State	-18,478	-1,414	—	+70,710
Transvaal	-233,846	-73,634	-70,710	—

¹Based upon data in Union of South Africa, SIXTH CENSUS, 1936, Vol. IX, p. 70.

Table 2. Place of enumeration against place of birth as an index of internal migration of natives among the four provinces of the Union of South Africa, Census of 1936.¹

tions allows a more definite identification of the two principal sources within the Union of native laborers recruited for work in the Transvaal, namely, the Transkeian district of Cape Province and the Zululand district of Natal. The data on place of birth in the 1936 census allow calculation of the net balance of movement among the provinces as represented by the enumerated native population in 1936 (Table 2). Aside from a quite minor movement from Natal to Orange Free State, these data show the Cape Province to be something of a "universal donor," and the Transvaal to be a "universal receiver." As might be expected from knowledge of the South African economy, the most significant movement is that from all of the other provinces to the Transvaal. The predominant importance of that movement

Table 3. Place of enumeration against place of birth as an index of internal migration of urban male natives among the four provinces of the Union of South Africa, Census of 1936.¹

PROVINCE OF BIRTH	NET BALANCE IN PROVINCE OF ENUMERATION			
	Cape	Natal	Orange Free State	Transvaal
Cape	—	+4,176	+1,403	+165,223
Natal	-4,176	—	-34	+44,853
Orange Free State	-1,403	+34	—	+19,382
Transvaal	-165,223	-44,853	-19,382	—

¹Based upon data in Union of South Africa, SIXTH CENSUS, 1936, Vol. IX, p. 70.

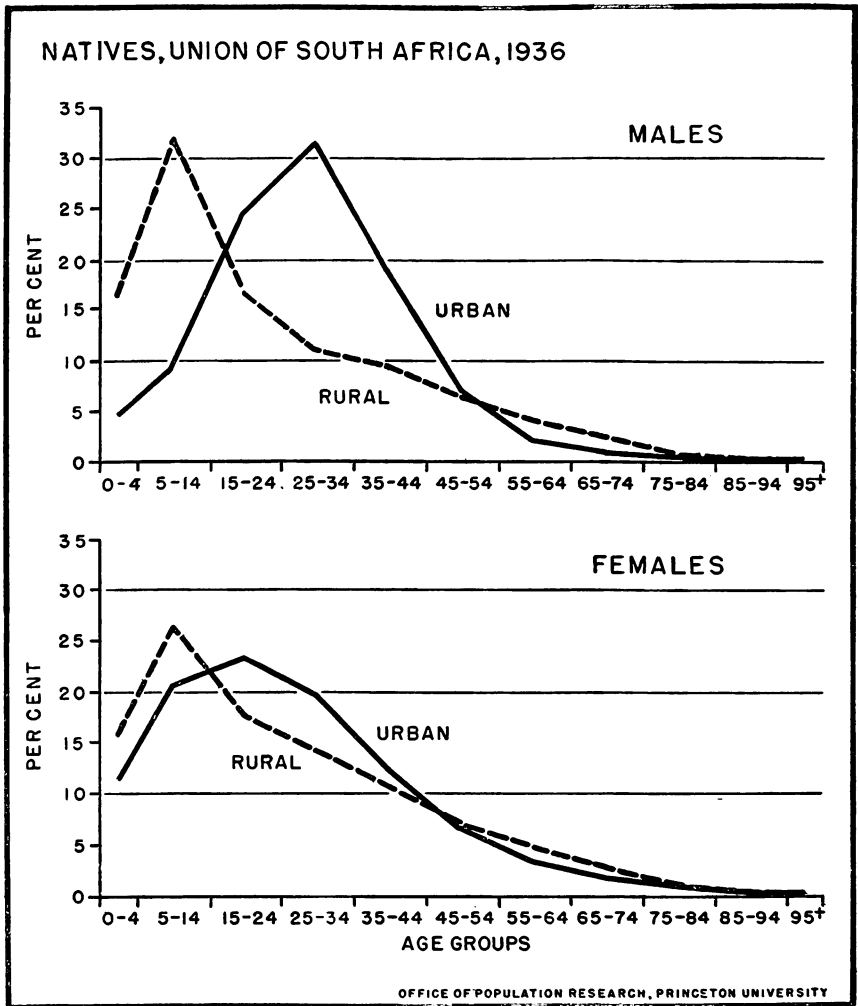


Fig. 1. Age distribution of native males and females in rural and urban areas of the Union of South Africa, 1936. From Union of South Africa: *SIXTH CENSUS, 1936*, Vol. IX, page xi.

is made even clearer if the calculation is limited to native males enumerated in urban areas. Table 3 indicates that on this basis other inter-provincial movements are substantially reduced or even reversed, whereas the volume of native male migration from all provinces to the urban areas of the Transvaal represents virtually half of the total migration to the province.

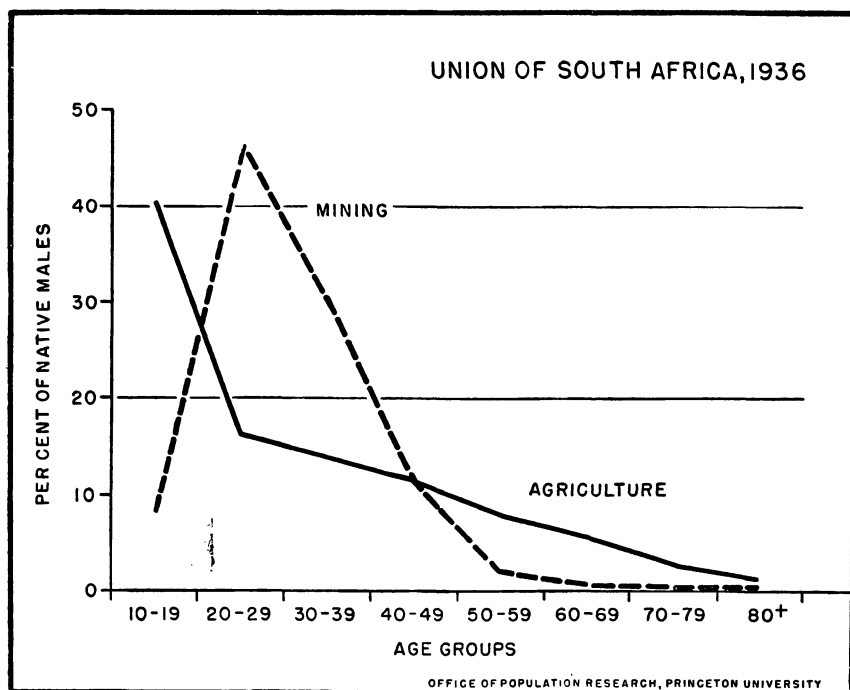


Fig. 2. Age distribution of native males engaged in agriculture and mining, Union of South Africa, 1936. From Union of South Africa: *SIXTH CENSUS, 1936*, Vol. IX, page xvi.

Three points will bear reiteration for their relevance to the interpretation of these balances in migratory movements: (1) There is no satisfactory way of separating permanent migration of detribalized natives to places of employment in predominantly white areas from the temporary migration of tribal natives to labor centers. (2) The reliability of the size of these balances is relative to the numerical stability of native employment.⁵ (3) The particular composition of the enumerated native population is unstable in the degree that there is a continual ebb and flow of migrants.

⁵ Independent evidence on native employment in the chief labor centers indicates some seasonal variation, with a low point around the end of December and a high point in June or July. These variations are by no means uniform from one year to the next, however, and are partly affected by longer-term trends in employment. In general, May, the month of the 1936 census, seems fairly representative, at least for that year. See: Union of South Africa, *Monthly Bulletin of Union Statistics*, issues for 1936 and other years.

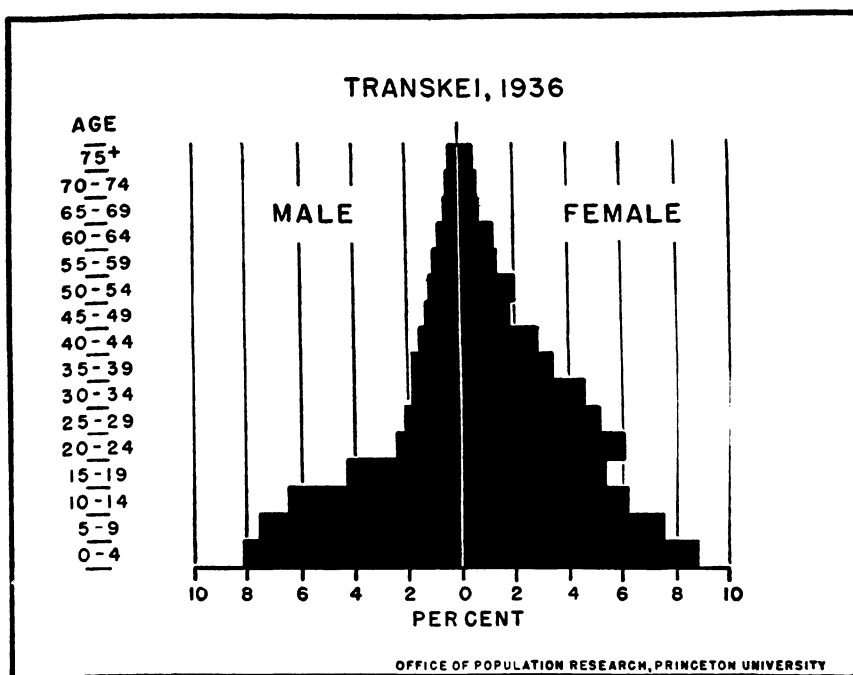


Fig. 3. Age and sex distribution of natives in Transkei, Cape Province, Union of South Africa, 1936. From Union of South Africa: *SIXTH CENSUS, 1936, Ages and Marital Condition of the Bantu Population*, Table 3, pages 6-27.

The effects of these migratory movements, however temporary the stay of particular migrants, is reflected in the age and sex composition of the native populations in the areas of supply and in the areas of labor demand. The percentage age distribution of rural and urban native males (Figure 1) indicates that one aspect of the migratory movement is a concentration of native males of working ages in urban areas. The selective aspect of the migration with respect to sex is emphasized by comparison of rural and urban age distributions of native females (Figure 1) which shows no such marked contrast as found with native males. Another aspect of the movement is a shift out of agriculture into other economic activities, particularly mining. The results of this movement may be seen in the contrasting age distributions of native males in agriculture and in mining (Figure 2).

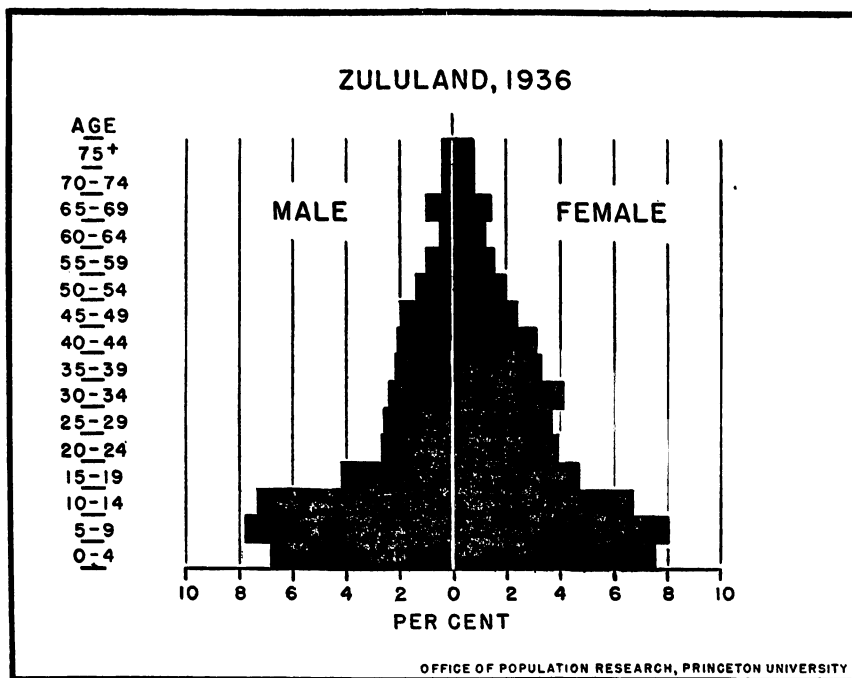


Fig. 4. Age and sex distribution of natives in Zululand, Natal Province, Union of South Africa, 1936. From Union of South Africa: SIXTH CENSUS, 1936, *Ages and Marital Condition of the Bantu Population*, Table 3, pages 6-27.

As previously indicated, the data on place of birth of the native population of the Union of South Africa as enumerated in 1936 allow only the determination of net balances of movement among the four provinces. However, a closer identification of the areas of origin and of destination may be gained from the age-sex composition of the native population by smaller areas. Figures 3, 4, and 5 show the per cent of total native population represented by each quinquennial age-sex group in the Transkeian area of Cape Province, Zululand in Natal, and the Witwatersrand urban concentration in Transvaal. The Transkeian and Zululand areas are the two portions of the Union of South Africa with almost entirely native populations, and these constitute the principal areas of origin within the Union of the heavy concentration of males of working ages evident in the Witwatersrand gold

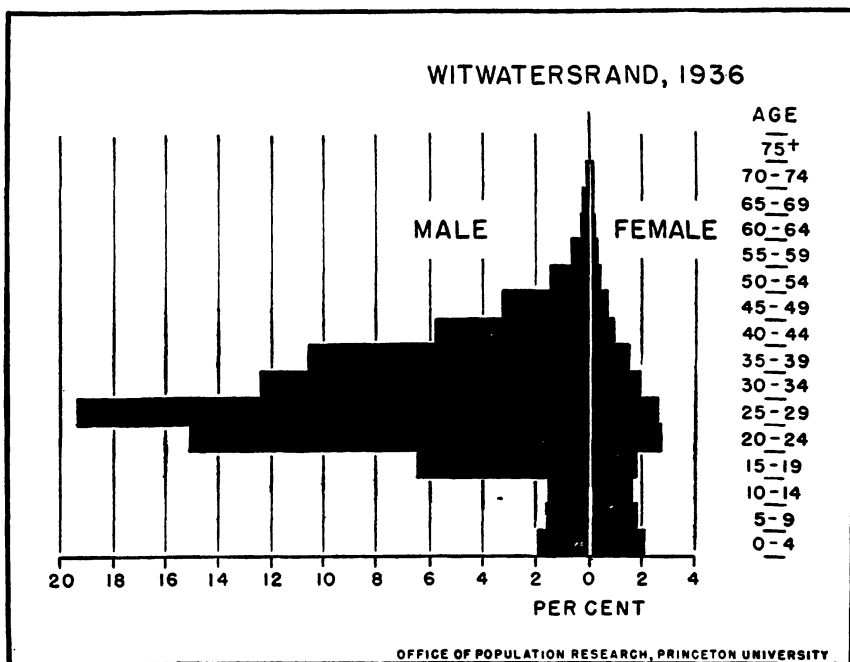


Fig. 5. Age and sex distribution of natives in the Witwatersrand, Transvaal Province, Union of South Africa, 1936. From Union of South Africa: *SIXTH CENSUS, 1936*, Vol. IX, Table 5, page 27.

mining area. It should be observed that this is a rough and indirect measure of the size and direction of migratory flow, as the native laborers found in the Witwatersrand are also drawn in lesser numbers from other parts of the Union and in substantial numbers from outside the country, as will be noted below.

MIGRATION FROM OUTSIDE THE UNION

The pull of the labor markets of the Union of South Africa extends beyond the political boundaries of the state. It is essential to an understanding of substantial flow of native migratory workers from surrounding areas to bear in mind certain peculiar features of South African economy. The social structure includes a somewhat unstable combination of three elements of particular importance in this connection. Those elements are (1) white

supremacy, enforced in law and custom and applied in a caste division of labor; (2) territorial segregation of natives; and (3) economic activity, especially mining, that rests in large measure on cheap gang labor by natives. *This is an economic regime based upon cheap labor used with deliberate waste*: there is the waste arising from the failure to develop and use potential skills of native workers, owing to the institution of white supremacy, and the waste of rapid turnover and expenses of continual recruiting, owing to the refusal to develop a stable resident labor supply in the employment centers.

It is understandable that this combination of structural elements may produce recurring or chronic shortages of labor supply, somewhat independent of the number of native nationals of working ages. This in fact has been the situation in the Union of South Africa and it has given rise to the recruiting of native workers in other parts of British South and East Africa, and in the Portuguese colony of Mozambique.

At the time of the 1936 census there were in the Union about one-third of a million natives born outside the country (Table 4). This represented 5 per cent of the total native population. Almost half of the immigrants were born in the High Commission Ter-

Table 4. Natives enumerated in the Union of South Africa, Census of 1936, born outside the Union, by specified countries of birth.¹

COUNTRY OF BIRTH	TOTAL NATIVE POPULATION BORN OUTSIDE THE UNION	NATIVE MALES, AGES 20 AND OVER, BORN OUTSIDE THE UNION
Basutoland	163,838	93,686
Portuguese East Africa	98,031	87,643
Swaziland	31,092	18,740
Nyasaland	17,657	16,555
Rhodesias	13,871	12,210
Other	9,288	4,568
TOTALS	333,777	233,420

¹Union of South Africa, SIXTH CENSUS, 1936, Vol. IX, pp. 68-69.

ritory of Basutoland, which is an enclave within the territorial extension of the Union and adjoins a portion of the Transkeian region in Cape Province. Not all of these migrants were of the temporary sort, however, and a precise distinction is not possible. However, in the 1936 enumeration almost 70 per cent of the total native population born outside the Union were males of 20 years of age and over. These 233,420 immigrant native males may be considered as a maximum estimate of migratory native laborers from outside the Union. Basutoland was the country of birth of about 94,000 of these African male immigrants, and about 88,000 were born in Mozambique (Portuguese East Africa). Those two areas alone accounted for approximately 78 per cent of the total native male immigrants of working age.

Although no official statistics record the annual number of na-

Table 5. Total employment and employment of immigrants in native centers, annual average, 1925-1939.¹

YEARS	ALL MINES			TOTAL EMPLOYMENT		
	All Native Employees	Immigrant Native Employees		All Native Employees	Immigrant Native Employees	
		Number	Per Cent		Number	Per Cent
1925	218,071	114,965	52.7	306,092	124,502	40.7
1926	231,325	123,100	53.2	326,281	134,005	41.1
1927	235,175	128,350	54.6	332,491	139,178	41.8
1928	243,276	134,222	55.2	344,419	145,082	42.1
1929	239,310	130,594	54.6	347,254	141,051	40.6
1930	245,727	127,229	51.8	354,940	137,455	38.7
1931	242,907	118,380	48.7	356,663	129,445	36.3
1932	240,605	107,405	44.6	348,875	117,151	33.6
1933	253,002	101,197	40.0	374,063	111,407	29.8
1934	275,392	109,689	39.8	416,372	124,641	29.9
1935	304,711	127,222	41.8	476,775	147,541	30.9
1936	330,829	138,749	41.9	528,633	162,431	30.7
1937	338,188	158,436	46.8	556,982	185,811	33.4
1938	357,861	174,102	48.6	577,191	200,948	34.8
1939	361,024	174,430	48.3	588,601	199,180	33.8

¹The annual averages are derived from monthly averages as given in Union of South Africa, *Monthly Bulletin of Union Statistics*, Nos. 37-180 (1925-1936) and Vols. XVI-XIX (1937-1940).

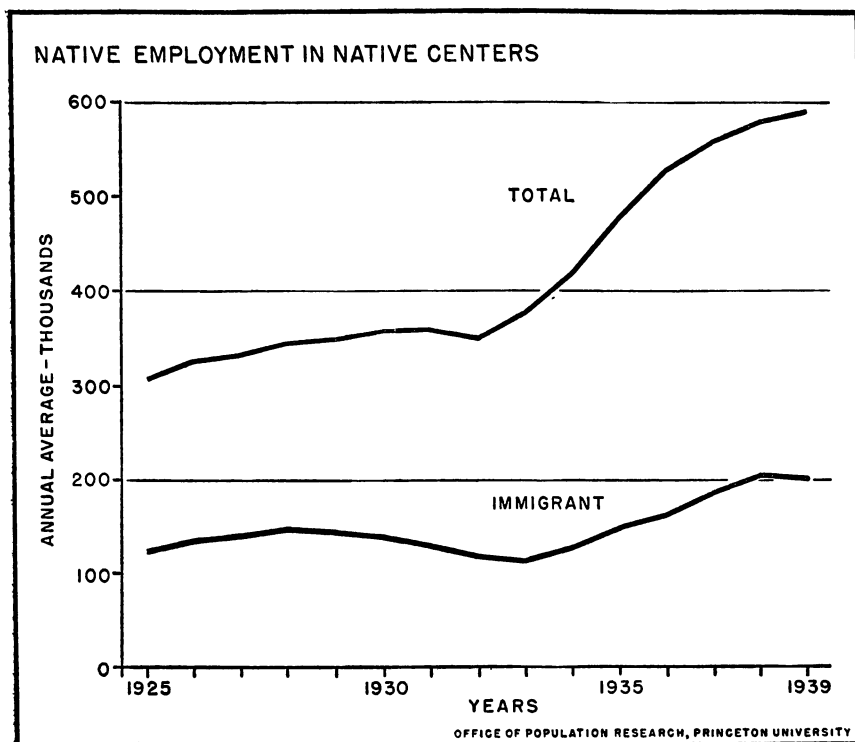


Fig. 6. Total and immigrant native laborers in established labor centers, Union of South Africa, annual averages, 1925-1939. Source: Table 5.

tive immigrants into the Union of South Africa, data are available on native employees, by territory of origin, in the principal labor centers. These labor centers comprise, besides the Witwatersrand gold mines, a number of scattered mining and manufacturing areas,⁶ and probably account for nearly all natives employed in the two major types of economic activity that depend upon migratory workers.

From the employment statistics it is possible to arrive at a fairly adequate picture of the annual average number of immigrant laborers during the period 1925-1939. These averages are shown in Table 5 and Figure 6. As shown also in Table 5, immi-

⁶ Witwatersrand, Heidelberg, Vereeniging, Rayton, Witbank, Breyten-Ermelo, Dundee and Vryheid, Kimberley, and Orange Free State.

grant workers regularly account for 30 to 40 per cent of the total native employment in the labor centers, with some tendency for the proportion to decrease. The proportion of immigrant workers in the mines is considerably higher, ranging from 40 to 55 per cent, with no such downward trend as is evident in total employment. Both series of averages show an absolute and percentage decline in immigrant workers during 1933 and 1934, with some recovery thereafter. The more marked upswing in the number and proportion of immigrant workers in the mines reflects in considerable measure a shift in the area of recruitment for the Witwatersrand mines, to be noted presently.

The same series of employment statistics also specify, with more or less adequacy, the country of origin of the immigrant workers. These data thus allow a comparison of the principal places of origin of immigrant workers in a longer time perspective than that of the *de facto* enumeration of natives by place of birth in the census of 1936. From the basic employment statistics by area of origin of the employees, annual averages for each country have been computed. Table 6 summarizes these averages

Table 6. Native workers in labor centers by country of origin, 1925-1939 average.¹

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	EMPLOYEES IN ALL MINES	TOTAL EMPLOYEES
Union of South Africa	143,301	269,054
Portuguese East Africa	82,655	83,382
Basutoland	33,323	38,218
Bechuanaland	6,411	8,653
Swaziland	5,997	7,030
Rhodesias	1,431	6,024
Nyasaland	1,353	3,084
<i>Total Immigrants</i>	<i>131,170</i>	<i>146,391</i>
Unclassified	35	264
TOTALS	274,506	415,709

¹Based upon data from Union of South Africa, *Monthly Bulletin of Union Statistics*, Nos. 37-180 (1925-1936) and Vols. XVI-XIX (1937-1940). The averages for Bechuanaland, Nyasaland, and the Rhodesias are estimated in part by an apportionment among them of natives from tropical areas, not separately classified by territory of origin.

for the entire period of fifteen years (1925-1939) covered by the available sources. Table 6 shows some considerable differences from the statistics on place of birth in the 1936 census (Table 4). Aside from the fact that the employment statistics represent long-term averages, it is clear that many immigrant natives enumerated in 1936 were not in the category of temporary migrants, at least as represented in the principal labor centers. Thus, for example, the 1936 census shows a larger number of immigrants from the Basutoland enclave than from Portuguese East Africa, whereas migratory workers from the latter territory in the labor centers are more than twice as numerous as those from Basutoland. However, detailed statistics for each year indicate a growing proportion of workers from Basutoland through the 1925-1939 period.⁷ It should also be noted that the averages, even those covering a much shorter term than the fifteen-year period summarized in Table 6, refer to those actually in employment in the labor centers and must therefore be presumed to understate the total potential workers in the labor centers at any given time.

Certain features of the migratory movements not appearing in Tables 5 and 6 but evident from the data upon which those tables are based may be noted. The number of native immigrant laborers from Swaziland showed little change throughout the period, in contrast to the fairly sharp fluctuations in the number from Portuguese East Africa and the rapid increase of those migrating from Basutoland. On the other hand the decision taken in 1935 to recruit experimentally from tropical areas to the north resulted in subsequent sharp increases in the number of immigrants from Bechuanaland, the Rhodesias, and, especially,

⁷ The number of migratory workers from Portuguese East Africa is fixed in round numbers by treaty, which provides also some greater safeguards, particularly in wage payments, than those enjoyed by workers recruited from British territories. The Mozambique natives are under annual contract, and part of their pay is withheld for payment after their return to their home communities. The maximum period of reemployment is six months. The number of workers as fixed by treaty has varied from 80,000 to 100,000 per year. (See OFFICIAL YEAR BOOK OF THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA, 1940, p. 468.)