

LABOR AND LABOR HISTORY IN AFRICA: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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No subject has in recent years so intruded into the scholarly literature on Africa as the African worker. Labor has become a fundamental issue to those who seek to develop African economies or to revolutionize African polities. The elucidation and debate about the relationship of labor to historical and social issues is currently under way over an impressive range of places and in a number of languages. It is thus highly appropriate at this juncture to assemble some of the themes that emerge most sharply in contemporary writing on Africa.

A broad range of opinion would concede that the worker, when organized in the pursuit of specific objectives or as a class, necessarily takes on a special political importance. One aspect of the literature on African labor is thus political, studying in particular the organizations workers have created, their significance and direction. Whether or not such organization exists, labor has a fundamental economic role to play. In bourgeois economics, labor is generally categorized as a factor whose productivity, contribution, and wages need to be assessed to understand the broader picture. Marxist economics gives labor a fundamental position; it is from the surplus extracted from the worker that the ruling class ultimately lives while the form of extraction determines more than purely economic relationships. In particular, Marxists thus emphasize as well the broader social significance of labor. They have been responsible for introducing labor-related questions to a broad range of historical and societal discussions typical of much recent literature on Africa.

Given the huge and varied literature on labor to be considered in this paper, the problem presents itself as how best to organize the discussion. To the extent that the discussion dedicates itself to theoretical rigor it will be almost impossible to consider a broad enough range of themes or authors. The method that has been preferred tries rather to explore the issue of labor as part of a history of ideas. The scope of this paper does not permit an analysis deep enough to satisfy all needs. It is particularly intended instead to develop new connections and insights that can inform an understanding of the literature under specific consideration and permit a more critical appreciation of the work in which scholars are currently engaged.

The British social and labor historian, Eric Hobsbawm, has suggested in a useful essay how one might conceptualize the field of labor history. He notes (1974: 371) that "labor history is by tradition a highly political subject, and one

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which was for long practiced largely outside the universities.” The type of engaged labor studies to which Hobsbawm is referring has classically been “in house”: the work of men and women committed to specific traditions, if not actually organizations, generated from the working class.¹ Such literature exists on Africa, although much of it has only appeared very recently, and South Africa with its rich and troubled history of organized trade unions has the most.

First, however, it is necessary to consider the development of a literature that Hobsbawm (1974) mentions in the European context only to dismiss rather rapidly—“the various enquiries into the condition of the new proletariat. When practiced by academics (i.e., social scientists) they were essentially ‘problem-solving’, the problem being what to do about the workers.” Hobsbawm’s characterization seems perfectly applicable to social science literature on Africa and can readily be designated from its administrative bias as managerial (Bozzoli, 1977). That literature, however, deserves considerable attention because it continues to have a critical social and political importance as well as because of the scientific value of its contents. Moreover, it is by no means true that managerial approaches to labor studies in Africa are confined either to the private sector or to the Right. Yet as Belinda Bozzoli has pointed out for South Africa, managerialism is not an unproblematic concept. It requires periodizing and situating within specific historic conditions. It also contains its own contradictions and may intersect with more genuinely autonomous analyses. There is a managerialism of the state, of the trade union hierarchies, of committed radical intelligentsias as distinct from that conventionally to be associated with private enterprise. It should prove valuable to see how managerial strategies actually are articulated and do develop through the words of ideologues who intervene through their writing in managerial debates.

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF LABOR

More than half a century ago, Harvard University sponsored the first really significant attempt by American academics to confront the human situation in Africa. This was Raymond Leslie Buell’s remarkably extensive compendium, *The Native Problem in Africa*. The “problem,” of course, was the African, who was a problem for the colonial regimes and to a lesser extent, the businessmen. Buell wrote a liberal capitalist’s guide to Africa, and the contemporary reader will find his volumes rich in pages comparing how labor was administered and procured in the various African colonies during the middle 1930s. Different approaches are appraised but all are frankly understood to be fundamental to the entire colonial enterprise.²

The most basic question of all concerning labor in Africa was how to get it. The prevailing assumptions were of labor shortage on the one hand (with morbid population decline as almost irrevocable) and the persistence of primordial African cultural traits, what André Lux (1962) called the “civilisation du loisir,” militating against the presentation of a suitably sizeable, disciplined, and cheap work-force on the other.³ In the pre-war years, it was normal for Jules Ninine (1932) to accept this shortage of labor as a phenomenon of nature that permitted forced labor in the French colonies and underpinned the entire perspective he held on African workers. Even after, this problematic continued to be emphasized in Portuguese colonial literature which frequently justified forced labor in veiled forms (Afonso Mendes, 1958).

In general, however, the Second World War marked a basic break in colonial and managerial thought about Africa with regard to labor as to other phenomena. In classic Marxist terminology, the new aim was to move from the extraction of absolute surplus value (primitive accumulation) to the creation on a systematic basis of relative surplus value, in which labor was not so much expropriated through various crudely coercive forms but appropriated through the systematic operation of the labor market and a deeply internalized cash nexus. W. Arthur Lewis (1954), an economist closely bound to advanced thinking in the British Labor Party, raised the issue theoretically by increasing productivity in Africa, and with it wages to press forward development from a previous concentration on unskilled, unlimited supplies of workers. Incentives rather than force were to help shape a labor supply.⁴ This was the economic expression of what a school of political scientists have called "modernization," the shift from "tradition" to a Western-modelled "modernity."

Lonsdale and Low (1976), with reference to East Africa, consider the new approaches to the economy as a virtual "second colonial occupation." The occupation encountered some severe setbacks and showed more continuity on the ground with the past than the dramatic claims for novelty implied in the idea of a second occupation. Ideologues, however, are often the vanguard suggesting big changes, and the temperature in the literature on labor altered far more rapidly than actual conditions. Indeed, a major feature on the new map of late colonial Africa was so-called development experts. They created for the first time a distinctive body of academic literature on African labor that reflected the perspective of the state and the impingement of particular academic disciplines on relevant labor issues.

The central proposition on the agenda during this period was the stabilization of selected African labor forces and the consequences of its stabilization for the industrial and/or urban setting. An early academic attempt to conceptualize the issues lies in the work of the South African anthropologist Ellen Hellman (1948), which was based on her study of a working-class, largely African yard in Johannesburg in the early 1930s. Its paradigm was detribalization (1948).⁵ Hellman's training as a social anthropologist determined her approach which examined the change from rural to urban in terms of rites de passage and a familial view of the life cycle. In this there is little hint of a new urban civilization being born or the coming into being in South Africa of a black industrial working class.

Hellman's study of Rooiyard was not published in South Africa but by a major institution of late colonial scientific research, the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute of Northern Rhodesia, situated in a thinly-peopled colony whose life had been transformed through the development of the copper mines. Rhodes-Livingstone was a central formative place in the construction of new managerial ideologies that belonged to a new era. It was within British colonialism that the greatest need was felt for academically-led and conceptualized studies of labor that were conducted with substantial autonomy from state agencies. The first director, Godfrey Wilson, an Englishman, and his South African wife, Monica, were innovative anthropologists anxious to confront the urban question. Godfrey Wilson (1941, 1945) pursued the idea of detribalization and posed the emergence of an urban work-force in Africa in classic *Gemeinschaft*/*Gesellschaft* terms: the villager, living in harmonic wholeness and isolated from the outside world, was being wrenched by modern twentieth century industry into an alienating and harsh new

environment. The difficulties of bringing up a family in the town coupled with the lack of essential cash in the bush came together to bring about a pattern of oscillating labor migration that increasingly dominated the lives of all the peoples of Central (and, from an earlier date, South) Africa. This the Wilsons, with their deep Christian commitments, opposed; what was required was state intervention to stabilize both rural and urban working classes and to break down the labor migrancy cycle inimical to a bounded family life.

A classic debate in late colonial thought developed over the vices and virtues of labor migration which attracted a very considerable range of contributions from social scientists. To some, like the Wilsons, the migration cycle seemed profoundly destabilizing. It militated against community and family life and blocked the necessary intensification of labor productivity. The migrant worker of the 1940s and 1950s, as shall be argued later, was often a militant and uncontrollable worker, deeply disturbing to the vision of the social planner. Simultaneously for a section of official opinion, the biggest question of all posed by labor migration was the threat of rural dislocation, decay, and decline. Isaac Schapera (1947), in discussing the impact of labor migration in Bechuanaland, focused on cultural aspects, the search by migrants for adventure, and tests of manhood. By contrast, P. H. Gulliver (1955) writing about Tanganyika, attacked what he deemed the "bright lights" theory of migration and established the rationale for why workers travelled to the sisal plantations in economic terms of rural collapse. Margaret Read (1942), pointing to Nyasaland, fingered the cheap labor system as underlying the whole migrant pattern and stressed the decay of rural life that resulted from it.

The implication of Read's work, as with that of the Wilsons, was that migration undermined traditional cultural values and hierarchial authority in the village. This view came under increasing challenge from researchers in the 1950s who found that virtually the opposite was the case: labor migration appeared to buttress conservative values of rural life and to stave off the drastic social challenge (and potential political challenge) that a deeper urban or industrial commitment might entail. A major study by William Watson (1958) actually considered the impact of labor migration as largely building rural cohesion among the Mambwe of Northern Rhodesia, which many writers (van Velsen, 1960; Elkan, 1960; Skinner, 1960) confirmed for other parts of Africa. Watson rejected the notion of detribalization entirely.

The makings existed by the middle 1950s for quite a sophisticated academic understanding of the economic underpinnings of labor migration in Africa. J. Clyde Mitchell writing in 1961, effectively articulated the major economic and extra-economic mechanisms that had brought about the creation of a wage labor force in Africa. R. M. Prothero (1957), writing of Northern Nigeria, noted the relationship of labor migration to ecological patterns, while Robert Montagne (1952) in a major study of migration in Morocco, could bring to bear factors of broad geographic movements of historic sweep. There was a basic divide, however, between those who saw labor migration essentially as a product of coercion, of state policies, or of the tyranny of the city over the countryside, and those who came to view it as fundamentally voluntary, the best possible way in which African cultivators could solve their various problems in covering both cash and subsistence needs. The heated debate at the end of the 1950s in *Africa* between Marvin Harris (1959), and A. Rita Ferreira (1960, 1963) staked the ground out clearly. Rita Ferreira stressed the voluntary side of labor migration

from Mozambique, its antiquity and its legitimacy in terms of peasant needs. In fact, he described the Portuguese state as intervening largely to regulate an existing situation and thus to stabilize it. For Harris, the dependence of Mozambique on migrant labor underlay its backwardness and the coercive nature of the Portuguese regime. Migrancy was a psychological, social and economic disaster.

Closely allied to the question of labor migration was the narrower issue of turnover and absenteeism in the African workplace. The scholarly literature of the 1940s and 1950s includes numerous references to this problem often linked to assumptions about specifically African worker characteristics that were culturally determined. The issue was particularly refined in South African literature, with Simon Biesheuvel and Yetta Glass among the most important researchers. In South Africa, black workers were obliged, through the coercive power of the state, both to migrate and to commit themselves to urban employment, creating a historically distinctive worker milieu and consciousness.⁶ Yet the issue of turnover was everywhere a sensitive one and vital to corporate profits. It related back to the earlier colonial problem of prizing loose a labor force, and it pressed forward to questions about skill and level of productivity.

By 1960, Yetta Glass, in research directed particularly towards the problem of productivity, was beginning to note that absenteeism and turnover had ceased to be a special problem in South Africa. At the same time, a study from the Belgian Congo on the eve of independence discovered that absenteeism had no special African dimension after all but correlated best with the sexual identity and family situation of workers as well as the specific conditions found at the place of employment, just as typical survey research data from European workers revealed (Périn-Hocker, 1959). A Portuguese writer (*Estudo sobre . . .*, II, 260, 1960) summarized his findings in noting that:

l'absentéisme est d'avantage la résultante des conditions de vies assurées par l'entreprise que la conséquence d'une ou plusieurs caractéristiques générales de la main-d'oeuvre africaine.

"Conditions de vie" had by no means ceased to trouble the worker in Africa, but what was happening was the formation of a distinct working class in which absenteeism was no longer a mark of more or less purposive maladaptation to capitalist definitions of time and workplace regimen. The absenteeism/turnover problem had indeed already been discarded as a major public concern in the more industrially advanced (particularly British) colonies while social scientists began to attempt to sketch out industrial and urban man in Africa. This was the special province of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and the major anthropologists attached to it, in particular Max Gluckman, A. L. Epstein and Clyde Mitchell.⁷ What was so important about the Rhodes-Livingstone anthropologists was their willingness to come to terms with cultural change, to recognize that the miner, even in African guise, was and functioned as a miner. In their work, they mapped in new cultural forms such as Mitchell's (1956) *kalela* dance and new organizations such as urban clubs and trade unions (Epstein, 1958).

In portraying the world of the worker, however, these scholars largely left out the constraints of the laborer's situation which the state did not dream of reforming: the impact of racism, the constraints of capitalism, the less savory aspects of the colonial regimes (Magubane, 1971). Very little attention was paid to the actual social relations embodied in the work situation itself. Moreover, in general, during the 1950s the question of class was not brought up systematically.

The Rhodes-Livingstone writers usually refer not to class formation but to urbanization.

Mitchell (1956: 29) characterized the new and politically salient ethnicity of the Copperbelt towns as a kind of retribalization which related to new material conditions. This important insight, however, was coupled with an insistence that tribalism "was the most significant day-to-day category of social interaction" despite his own abundant evidence of a high level of tolerance and interaction across tribal boundaries, barring intermarriage. Montagne (1952: 213–14) describing the new Moroccan working class, provides much evidence of a "mélange inévitable" in urban life but similarly insists on the use of ethnicity as a primary indicator of social differentiation throughout his work. In the studies of the era, ethnic categories were the fundamental analytic units: which "tribe" was more skilled, educated, committed to town, etc., etc. In a collection on migrant labor working in the farms of Buganda, the authors show intense concern at the "problem" posed by the incursion of aliens of whom the Ganda casually think as culturally inferior. Yet the Ganda themselves, apparently less ethnically obsessed, saw the "problem" purely in economic terms; there was never a sufficiency of cheap labor from Burundi and Rwanda (Richards et al., 1954)! A re-examination of the literature in fact tends to reveal how irrelevant this kind of categorization actually often is even in its own terms and, by implication, how relatively impoverished were the operative social categories that appear to have been available to social scientists at the time. Perhaps this reflected as well the relatively close links that bound academics to the colonial state and its strategies.

As African states progressed towards independence, some of the labor problems of the late colonial regimes became irrelevant. Whether or not to stabilize the workers and where ceased to be a question. Managerial approaches did not die; they multiplied but they concerned different types of conditions. In that most baldly managerial of colonies, the Belgian Congo, such researchers as A. Doucy and P. Feldheim (1952) had already detailed a new social problematic concerning labor, the broader issues of health, education, housing and nutrition which needed to be tackled if one was going to raise the productivity of the worker. These became more typically central issues in Margaret Peil's (1970) study of Ghanaian factory workers and others post-independence studies. For the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1966, 1971), considering Algeria on the eve of independence, the problem was not the condition of the settled worker under full-time employment conditions but the unemployed or marginal figure (1966: 312):

Avec l'emploi permanent et le salaire régulier, une conscience temporelle ouverte et rationnelle peut se former; les actions, les jugements et les aspirations s'ordonnent en fonction d'un plan de vie. C'est alors et alors seulement que l'attitude révolutionnaire prend la place de l'évasion dans le rêve ou de la résignation fataliste.

From the 1960s, African states began to interest themselves in the systematization of manpower studies given the new hegemony of development as national ideology. Mostafa Nagi (1971), surveying the problem of manpower in Egypt, integrated the problem of unemployment to that of overpopulation, which has dominated the concerns of Egyptian labor bureaucrats (Nagi, 1971). The growing sophistication of the manpower approach associated with the International Labor Organization can be observed in R. Sabot's (1978) recent study of

migration in Tanzanian economic development, a work addressed directly to the state apparatus in a country particularly committed to a rationalized manpower planning structure. The old problem of labor migration has in fact been central to regional or national development policy debates as in the significant volume of conference papers edited by the Egyptian economist, Samir Amin (1974). Amin's concerns are those of the administrator tracing (with an aim to stopping) the structural link between migration and the flow of resources, capital and manpower, the processual underdevelopment, of migrant labor reservoirs: "the modern migrations are periodical migrations of labor, not of people" (Amin, 1974: 66).

It was a striking feature of the immediate post-independence years, however, that much of the intensifying literature on African labor, quickly moved to focus on one institution, the labor union, which appeared to have the capacity not only to control, discipline, and develop labor but potentially to be the greatest single political force in African countries. The social struggle often seems reduced in these studies to a universally applied model, the one-way street of "modernization" that would sweep Africa forward along a route long since pioneered by the industrial nations (Peil, 1970; H. D. Seibel, 1968). The real battle was for the union and who would lead it.

At one level, the international context, classic Cold War confrontation, inspired some of the new work on African unions. Academic writing was frequently a means of backing up American or West European labor affiliations and contacts. A considerable amount of material was published simply with the aim of identifying players in the African trade union movements accurately. This makes sense if one considers the importance of unions in the developing foreign aid structure, which included the more or less open bribing of what were seen to be key personnel. While a number of works of this type appeared in the USA and France, introductions to various union movements were also notably sponsored from the Federal Republic of Germany. The best of this material was informative (Beling, 1968; Meynaud and Salah-Bey, 1962, 1967; Norman, 1965; A. November, 1965; Beling, 1965; Ndiaye, 1964; Tulatz, 1963; Geiss, 1965; Plum, 1962).

All of this literature took the continued institutionalization of trade unions very much for granted and had a second, perhaps more significant, function: that of theorizing and regulating the relationship of state to trade union in the new Africa. Roberts and de Bellecombe (1967) were able to produce by 1967 a compendium of African labor legislation that proceeded from the central role of collective bargaining. Given the increasingly direct role of the state in economic activity and direct employment, such regulation was of the utmost importance and justified an appropriate consideration of industrial relations by representatives of the new African bureaucracies (Yesufu, 1962; Bokonga, 1967). Conveniently for this class, the union was reconceptualized, after independence and in this context, as a tool in the development process.

This was in fact consonant with a less statist formulation from earlier: that the union was essentially an extension of African nationalism. Such claims had been made by Nkrumah, Nyerere, and other nationalist spokesmen. Perhaps the first really worthwhile article on Nigerian labor history by Agwu Akpala (1965) on the coal mines looks this way at worker activity; the complex story of struggle and worker consciousness at Enugu is largely reduced in the framework provided to an aspect of Nigerian nationalism. Terence Ranger (1970), discussing early labor

movements in colonial Southern Rhodesia, similarly integrated them into a somewhat seamless “African voice.”

With independence, however, the nation had become the state. In the cold light of day, between the state and its one-time apparently boundlessly loyal right arm, the union, sharp conflicts were possible and indeed characteristic. Tanganyika was one of the countries where a relatively radical nationalist movement came to power and fell into very sharp conflict with a large union movement. In the consequent struggle, the union federation was dismantled and its leaders who remained outside the TANU ring were thrown out of public life. William Friedland (1969: 166) wrote of this that “the Tanganyikan unions did not in fact engage in political unionism or, indeed, in politics at all to any significant degree, but that even when the political arena—Nkrumah’s ‘Kingdom’—was eschewed, political consequences could not be avoided.”

Nyerere’s absorption of the trade union federation of Tanganyika by the state is often ascribed to the influence of Kwame Nkrumah who had fostered similar conflicts even earlier. Drake and Lacy (1966), in discussing the Ghanaian general strike of 1961, pioneered a new kind of “managerialism” in acting as apologists for the state and dismissing the unions as “economistic,” interested only in the defense of consumption standards. The flavor of the new form of conflict comes out sharply indeed in a remarkable quote from a Zambian Minister of Labor (Bates, 1971: 45):

My father chastised you with whips but I will chastise you with scorpions. My stepfather made your burdens heavy, but I will make them ten times heavier. Because the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility. . . . In future there is not going to be quid (or kwacha) without plenty of pro quo. I am not going to tolerate behavior from workers crying “give, give” without them giving in return.

Robert Bates’ (1971) study of union-party relations in Zambia, which provides the above quotation, explicates sensitively some of the internal dynamics of the union. He was among the first scholars to show a comprehension of the workers as a class, but his work characteristically revealed the union as an impediment to Zambia’s ruling party. For Bates, UNIP was a more appropriate body than the copper workers’ union in the struggle for development, in organizing the Zambian people, and even in standing up to the mining companies, who are largely embodied as “whites” rather than seen as “capital” (Burawoy, 1972a).

Hostile views of African trade unions during the colonial era had largely been confined to colonial apologists. However, with both more and less radical nationalism enthroned, this was no longer the case. Bates’ line of argument was consonant with a social democratic approach. Lacy and Drake supported Nkrumah’s policies. With reference to Southern Rhodesia, the neo-Marxist Giovanni Arrighi (1970) thought he saw a labor aristocracy of the kind Lenin had once deplored. Arrighi envisioned a minority of African workers in Southern Rhodesia, as elsewhere, brought into relatively depoliticized unions, paid fairly decently by capital-intensive multi-nationals and thus in alliance with imperialism and separated from any commitment to socialist transformation.

The powerful, impressionistic writing from the West Indian Frantz Fanon (1963) who believed that the hopes of the African revolution lay in a rather undifferentiated, immiserated urban crowd from which he sharply distinguished a bourgeoisified and stabilized waged working class, provided Arrighi with an eloquent predecessor on the Left. Of course, existing African regimes were happy

to concur with this approach. Nyerere preferred to concentrate his view of exploitation to a generalized urban over rural category and attacked strikers as exploiters. Léopold Sédar Senghor considered that the peasantry were the only true dispossessed proletariat of Senegal (Pfefferman, 1968).

In South Africa, perspectives were very different but not unrelated. Black workers were relatively ignored while liberal scholarship focused on the bigotry and protected status of a white working class, empowered with the vote, as the principal prop of an illiberal and potentially unstable system. Academic experts on labor attacked the apartheid state harshly for its unwonted interferences with the beneficial market forces that would otherwise have been spreading their blessings. One of the most doughty and uncompromising, the economist W. H. Hutt (1964), characteristically began his study on South Africa with a quote from Milton Friedman. Francis Wilson, a young economist in the 1960s, was then preparing the first major academic study of labor in the South African gold mines. His history (1972), typical of the liberal school (and rich in valuable data), directed the blame for the appalling conditions under which African miners worked entirely on the minority of white workers; he took the capitalist structure of the industry as immutable. Only in the privileges of a white labor aristocracy (operating through the agency of unions and the state) could Wilson find it useful to speak of exploitation.

Much of the writing until the early 1960s on African trade unions appeared, however, to be undercut by a single article on the subject produced by E. J. Berg and Jeffrey Butler in 1964. Berg and Butler wrote at a time when struggles such as those in Nkrumah's Ghana and Nyerere's Tanzania between state and union movement seemed to be going irrevocably on the side of the governments. They tried to demonstrate that the power of trade unions in Africa had been greatly exaggerated, both from the point of view of their ability directly to raise the purchasing power of African workers and, more critically, in their political impact as the "leading edge of the nationalist movement." Their argument related closely to policy debates about the desirability of placing less aid/Cold War money into African trade unions, heretofore a major thrust of Western policy. It was thus primarily an intervention in an intragovernmental debate (see Weeks, 1968: 15). The Berg and Butler hypothesis had enough plausibility so as to threaten to drop trade unions entirely from managerial view. However it had some critical flaws. How could one explain those cases, such as Zambia, where union movements did retain considerable social power? Why did strike movements continue to arise and threaten African governments? They left completely open the question of the working class as distinct from the trade union: the union was simply assumed to be the (more or less) effective instrument of that class. Even if we accept at face value Berg and Butler's debunking job in managerial terms, there are many relevant topics which are far from self-evident: the uses of unions as instruments of state control, the conflicts that can exist within unions, alternative ways the state has attempted to deal with workers, etc. It can hardly be disputed, however, that their considerations have had a great merit in opening up new vistas through closing some old ones and forcing those with other perspectives to broaden their horizons effectively to meet a challenge. For more than a decade, they were the butt of numerous and increasingly stimulating critiques.

In the year that Berg and Butler published their article, 1964, Nigerian workers, cross-cutting ethnic lines, defied the state and made a successful general strike. Nigerian conditions fit the Berg and Butler model rather poorly. The unions

were not effectively confined to a "labor aristocracy" nor were they controlled by the state. The vigorous militancy of power-brokers within the union movement resurfaced again and again amid great strike movements such as those in 1964 and 1971. Yet it appeared to be the initiatives of the Nigerian state rather than direct union action which allowed for periodic wage increases through the constitution of federal commissions that recommended raises for the public sector with which the private multi-national sector was largely obliged to go along. The heart of contention was the question of how wages were actually determined in independent Nigeria. The role of the state presented particular conceptual difficulty because Nigeria transparently was among the least socialist of African countries. Suitably complex in structure, the Nigerian unions provoked the most extended debate between academics through the 1960s and after (Kilby, 1967, 1968; Warren, 1966, 1969; Weeks, 1968, 1971; Berg, 1969; Cohen, 1971, 1974). In fact, what was required was a reconceptualization of the entire issue and an escape from the one-way tradition-modernity street that dominated social science perspectives as well as a narrowly economic view of working class activity.

There was little to be derived along these lines from previous academic writing on Africa. Alternative traditions, however, did exist, at least internationally, connecting directly to the dominant trends in working class politics. In the USA, for instance, business unionism formally sponsored and informally inspired, an academically established approach to labor history.⁸ In Africa, however, the labor movement was too institutionally weak to throw up an autonomous equivalent. With the single exception of South Africa, African labor movements have only recently begun to even provide very little in rudimentary written internal history or analysis.⁹ Indeed even most of the institutionally oriented or committed trade union literature from South Africa beyond a few biographies has been produced only since 1960. Yet political and social thinking existed nonetheless. There was a specific view of the African working class, moreover, developed well before the Second World War under Comintern auspices in Moscow. An exiled South African Communist, Albert Nzula, together with two Soviet authors, Potekhin and Zusmanovitch, wrote a Russian book on *Forced Labor in Africa* (1933) which has recently been translated and edited through the good offices of Robin Cohen (Nzula et al., 1979). Nzula placed the question of labor in an entirely new light, that of the rise and sufferings under colonialism of a new class, the African proletariat, which was destined to play the foremost part in the forging of an African revolution. Nzula's book was in fact rich in empirical material and specifically historical in orientation if lacking in any strong periodization.

Nzula's work has only recently been unearthed by Cohen but a similar approach can be found in the work of a Hungarian who was associated with the same circles in pre-war Moscow, Endre Sik (1966-74), and, earlier and far more readily, in the journalistic writing of the British Communist Party expert on Africa, Jack Woddis (1958). Within this approach there are a number of signal qualifications to consider. If Nzula averred that the proletariat would have the leading role in the nationalist struggle against colonialism, later writers such as Woddis virtually assume an identity between class and national issues. For the Communist-influenced pioneer Kenyan trade unionist, Makhan Singh (1969), for instance, working class struggle in Kenya was indeed a stream that fed into the great nationalist river. Woddis has provided a very valuable account of numerous strikes and labor organizations in late colonial Africa, but he never elucidates their relationship to particular historic developments and social and economic

formations.

This Communist-militant tradition of writing on Africa took for granted the classic formulae of Marx on the British working class: the wrenching of workers off the land through various coercive and, increasingly, extra-coercive devices, the accumulation in great towns of a new class, and the movement of that class towards organization in the form of trade unions and working-class political parties. If the class defined itself, it did so in the form of resistance, and in colonies such resistance would be primarily anti-colonial and nationalist in character. Without wanting to deny the power and very considerable relevance to Africa of this formulation, it should be stressed as well that it left out the specific conditions under which proletarianization in Africa has (and has not) occurred to an unacceptable extent. Jack and Ray Simons' *Class and Colour in South Africa* (1969) exemplifies the problem. This lengthy study is of the greatest value as a historical source to the South African labor movement. Although Marxist in affiliation, it tends to see the impact of industrialization and consequent class formation as virtually unproblematic in South Africa, however, apart from the specifics of name and place. Cultural issues are not raised. To this linear unfolding there is only one major wrinkle, the special issue of race, which distorts the class confrontation. The heart of the book is an investigation of where and how the race issue forces South Africa to deviate from the norm.

In a critique of Sik, Henry Bernstein (1977) has elegantly put it that Sik assumes that a *mode of production*, in essence the material form in which surplus is extracted from a working population, directly and simply determines society. Bernstein argues instead for the broader idea of the "social formation" which can explain how material life is culturally and socially mediated as invariably it is. Bernstein's critique is directed at Sik's particularly inadequate treatment of pre-colonial Africa, but it can equally be applied to the problem of class formation in the twentieth century.

It is Bernstein's type of Marxism, broadly speaking, rather than Sik's, which has had so much influence on the efflorescence of labor studies in recent years. This Marxism, which often has involved fresh interpretations of Karl Marx's own ideas, has cast adrift from any particular political moorings. It is part, in fact, of a two-sided process whereby political Marxism has lost much of its coherence and vision while intellectual Marxism has flown in new directions and become far more stimulating than when it was the tail wagged by the party or union movement.

The possibility of movement away from the classic organizationally and politically muted studies of labor depended on a breakdown of orthodoxies. This, in fact, has been the dominant trend of the past twenty years. As Eric Hobsbawm puts it (1974: 372): "with the gradual ideological or political disintegration of the great socialist movements—whether social-democratic or communist—in most of Europe, even the more committed historians . . . now have more room for scholarly maneuver than before." A major result has been the gradual liberation of Marx from Marxism, or at least any of the standard formulated brands, Leninist or otherwise. There has also begun a simultaneous liberation of the western university from its previously narrow service to managerial approaches.¹⁰

A major element in the academic discovery of a working class in Africa was the loss of faith by an increasingly independent academic Left in radical nationalist regimes in Africa to which workers' struggles had once been tied automatically. In contrast to the critical stance towards trade unionism of Bates,

Arrighi, and Drake and Lacy, more voices were raised to suggest that it was the union, not the state, which needed defending as the authentic voice of the working class of Africa (Braundi and Lettieri, 1964; Guérin, 1964; Waterman, 1970; Henderson, 1973). A particular hallmark of this line of argument was a wide-ranging attack on the application in a pejorative sense of the Leninist term "labor aristocracy" associated with an alliance between sectors of the working class and imperialism. The militancy and political seriousness of the organized working class was defended, notions of the otherwise undifferentiated urban population exploiting the countryside criticized, and the actual, frequently appalling, living and working conditions of the African working class described (Sandbrook and Cohen, 1975; Hinchliffe, 1974; Cohen, 1974; Jeffries, 1975; Waterman, 1975).

At the same time, discussion of the revolutionary potential of the unorganized was not entirely dropped. Indeed, in an important study of multinationals and labor in Kenya, Alice Amsden (1971) began to stress that stabilization and unionization were in good part managerial techniques aimed at depoliticizing Kenyan workers that had arisen in an important historical conjuncture. Hermassi (1966) reported for Tunisia resistance to stabilization by militant dockworkers. Peter Gutkind (1974) portrayed graphically a Fanonist urban crowd without simultaneously dismissing the organized workers as conservatives.

Giovanni Arrighi's (1973) work on Rhodesia had a particular seminal role because of the attention that he gave to class formation. Labor needs are restored to a fundamental place in the comprehension of how and why colonialism operated. The main thrust of Southern Rhodesian legislation, particularly land legislation, had as its aim the establishment of a substantial and inexpensive army of African workers prepared to labor on the mines and farms of the settlers. His writing came to have an influence particularly among scholars on southern Africa.

Two collections, *The Development of an African Working Class*, edited by Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen (1975), and *African Labor History*, edited by Gutkind, Cohen, and Jean Copans (1979), really establish the parameters of the new radical thinking on labor. Labor is now primarily an object of study not of anthropology but of history (and to a lesser extent sociology) in Africa. The colonial period has been reinterpreted as the era of capitalist penetration and, in varying degrees, the introduction into Africa of capitalist production. This in turn required the creation of a proletariat, which in African conditions, where few peasants were made landless, was overwhelmingly migrant in nature. The intensification of cash networks and new demands from capital eventually brought about the emergence of a completely landless proletariat which, particularly from the 1940s, began to organize trade unions and influence politics, providing indeed what radical thrust the nationalist movement could muster. The first collection covered a fairly broad political spectrum, revealing quite a strong social democratic strain which saw the rise of unionism in Africa as an end of study in itself and was very open to union-managerial interpretations. The second posed a more radical challenge and insisted on the classic revolutionary thrust of the proletariat as its historic task in Africa (Cohen, Gutkind, and Copans, 1979: 17): "What matters particularly at this juncture of class formation and action in Africa is what workers do (including Ludditism) and perhaps as much, what they do not (yet) do."

What was new in their approach compared to a Sik or a Woddis? First, the insistence that the working class, acting as a class for itself and formed in

struggle, did not necessarily organize itself into any particular given party or organization. Instead the autonomy of working class organization is emphasized. Secondly an overt attack is mounted on nationalist literature aimed at obscuring or subordinating that autonomy. The radical African nation-state is no longer assumed to be the object of working class struggle. Thirdly the situation of the working class in Africa and its historic formation is gauged only secondarily in terms of colonialism or what Balandier once called the "colonial situation" but rather against the specific needs of capital at various times and places in Africa. Finally, considerable attention is paid to "hidden forms of consciousness" (Cohen, 1980) apart from the more conventionally recognized forms of labor resistance to capital such as strikes.

The last two points owe a great deal to the writings of scholars on southern Africa. Frederick Johnstone's study of the Rand, *Class, Race and Gold* (1976), if not exactly a warm view of the white miner, totally opposed Francis Wilson's pro-business assessment. Johnstone portrayed capital as holding South African society in a vice. The price of gold on the world market and the particular technical features of the Rand, as well as intense class struggles, created the special labor conditions of the South African minefield and led to what Johnstone called super-exploitation of African workers. A somewhat contrasting but equally compelling portrait of mining capital in Africa exists in Charles van Onselen's *Chibaro* (1976), which revealed an equally stringent set of constraints for Southern Rhodesia's scattered and overall limited gold deposits.

Van Onselen, who has very special gifts as a storyteller, compellingly pieced together variable evidence of sabotage, slacking, desertion, and other forms of protest that appeared common in early mining days. This has captured the imagination of many of his successor historians as has his description of the conditions of living in the mine camps which seem to reproduce the texture of the workers' lives. Using a very generalized idea of resistance, he has tried to broaden dramatically the spectrum of points at which a working class could acquire self-consciousness, while continuing to bring to bear the idea of resistance as determining consciousness (van Onselen and Phimister, 1978). It can be argued, however, that consciousness perhaps requires more careful relating to the particular historical context and that groups other than self-conscious proletarians are capable of skillful (but not working class) forms of resistance to capital (Goldberg, 1981). An all-inclusive "worker consciousness" tends to lead some authors towards the creation of African equivalents to Hobsbawm's primitive (and romanticized) rebels with peasants and artisans inexorably turning to real proletarian forms of protest in later phases (Perrings, 1979).¹¹

In general, however, one can applaud the power of the broad portrait which can be called proletarianization. Here the various Marxisms, old and new, are generally agreed. The theme has been clearly and handily sketched by Robin Cohen (1976), developed in rich historical detail for Kenya by Sharon Stichter (1982) among others and theorized elegantly by Pierra-Philippe Rey (1973). Where does it lead us though? Will the working class commit itself to socialism and the reorganization of state and economy? Books such as Stichter's, Perrings' and perhaps my own as well appear to call for a happy revolutionary ending which is now long overdue. Do we not need to explain instead why African workers are what they are and do what they do and think what they think rather than what they seem not quite yet to be? As a very able young historian of another part of the world where socialism, although not the working class, seems fairly dim on

the horizon has recently written (Wilentz, 1983:):

The question posed by Sombart two generations ago should be turned on its head; rather than ask why there is no socialism in America, or no class consciousness in America, historians should find out more about the class perceptions that did exist.

With Wilentz, we are back by a difficult route to the concept Henry Bernstein called by the name of "social formation."

The impact of Marxism on African labor studies has thus been very marked but also wide-ranging and difficult to categorize simply. This is one aspect of the literature whose themes are examined below; growing depth, complexity and diversity. Labor has been inserted into a growing number of fundamental historical and social problems where it enjoyed little attention before. At the same time, the nature of labor has become increasingly problematic. One major feature is the attention paid to what can be termed the labor process.

What goes on at work is, we are understanding, increasingly complex and problematic. The labor process combines technical elements, the use of specific tools or premises, the hours spent laboring, and the intensity of that labor. Social control at work and outside takes many forms, not always internally consistent or efficacious. The relationship of social controls to economic exploitation is also often quite problematic. Uncovering these relationships and, more precisely, what goes on within the labor process constitutes the germ of the most interesting current work being written on labor.

The first sections below will consider newer looks at great stock themes of the 1950s and 1960s: the trade union, self-conscious working class activity as usually defined, labor migration and stabilization. Then we shall focus on the analysis of labor in the African past, colonial and pre-colonial. From this, the essay moves to look at the growing innovative literature expanding the boundaries of African labor studies, labor in agriculture, labor in the functioning of the so-called informal sector of the economy, and the labor of women and children. These last topics are in fact closely interrelated. Finally, we will return to Hobsbawm's stress on commitment, considering first the assessment of workers' control in contemporary African workplaces and then the influence on recent scholarship of the black labor insurgency in South Africa.

THE UNION, THE WORKPLACE, AND THE WORKING CLASS

Much of the literature on African labor assumed that stabilization in the urban setting and unionization represented unproblematic progress. It has, however, already been noted that they did not necessarily represent a gain for African workers who might, in fact, feel freer to resist the demands of management without a contractual collective bargaining procedure and without being tied down to the demands of urban life that stabilization represented. For Kenya, this was already well-developed by Amsden's work and has been further advanced by Stichter and Cooper. In Cooper's post-war Mombasa, dock workers rejected and resisted decasualization which closely connected to managerial attempts at speed-up and intensified work conditions. They fought against the work of "committees headed by Phillips in 1945, Northcott in 1947 and Carpenter in 1954 to develop the sanctions, incentives and values that would shape work over the course of a working life" (Cooper, 1982: 39; see also Parpart, 1982) and resisted unionization which appeared to spell control even if higher wages were in the end a great

attraction.

The point, however, is not to return to the idea of union memberships as captured and controlled labor aristocracies. It is increasingly clear that within unions (and within the African working class), sharply distinct, sometimes conflicting strata exist. In his perceptive survey of African trade unions Ioan Davies (1966: 13) already in the mid-1960s expressed his own nervousness at the tendency to write about workers as "a vast undifferentiated mass being acted on by small elites."

This section explores relevant literature through the widening circles of union, workplace and community/class. The best descriptive work of the 1960s on African unions, such as that of the Americans Bates (1971), Friedland (1967, 1969), and Smock (1969), all noted the divide between labor leaders and the rank-and-file. Smock commented extensively on the problem of "centralization" in the Nigerian coal miner's union; he was perhaps writing towards the end of the era when African trade unions were in good part run as businesses by petty bourgeois entrepreneurs. While such crudely clientelist situations continue, they are increasingly marked by the cracks of class lines widening into open internal conflict during crises (Lubeck and Remy in Sandbrook and Cohen, 1975). Jon Kraus (1979) writing on Ghanaian unions, has insisted that post-Nkrumah Ghanaian unions are really not dominated, as some have claimed, by small numbers of bureaucrats in accordance with an inevitably iron law of oligarchy. Certainly leaders have become authoritarian and corrupt at times, but they have finally had to cement effective relations with the rank-and-file or they do not survive; indeed Ghanaian trade union leaders have not generally known an easy or long tenure of office.

With regard to Kenyan unions, Richard Sandbrook (1972, 1975) has presented a subtle portrait of internal movement and conflict woven into a "complex, interrelated web" that builds towards a clientelist but often crisis-ridden structure. The organizations of the so-called Kenyan labor aristocracy sell-outs, according to Sandbrook, are neither powerless nor apolitical. If they are ridden with "tribal" tensions mirroring those in Kenya as a whole and often fall prey to venal leadership, that leadership dare not entirely neglect the needs of the workers. One can regret that this absorbing portrait is not more firmly moored in an analysis of Kenyan society as a whole. We need more detailed studies such as Peter Waterman's (1977, 1978) studies of Lagos dockers' organizations to enrich our understanding of African trade unions in this way.¹²

Until the 1970s, discussions of labor in Africa rarely dealt with the workplace itself despite its importance (Iliffe in Sandbrook and Cohen, 1975). It is within the specific conditions of the working situation that the politics and social ramifications of work can develop. It is useful to talk about the idea of work culture, as does one American labor historian most incisively in a recent contribution (Benson, 1983: 185–86):

The concept of work culture—the ideology and practice with which workers stake out a relatively autonomous sphere of action on the job—is a useful tool for analyzing shop-floor interactions. A realm of informal, customary values and rules mediates the formal authority structure of the workplace and distances workers from its impact. Work culture is created as workers confront the limitations and exploit the possibilities of their jobs. It is transmitted and enforced by oral tradition and social sanctions within the work group. Generated partly in response to specific working conditions, work culture

includes both adaptation to and resistance to these structural constraints.

In an alternative formulation, Michael Burawoy (1982) has spoken of the "politics of production" in contrast to "global politics." Reacting against the dominant emphasis in Copperbelt studies on management strategy, another American who has chosen Zambia as her research field, Jane Parpart (1981, 1982, 1983) has counterposed worker strategy as the key analytical tool for understanding the copper miners and their history.

A number of writers have discussed African labor from the perspective of social science theory considering human interaction in institutional settings. This is a far more abstract concept than work culture. Bruce Kapferer (1972), the Australian anthropologist, used a "strategy and transaction" formulation to observe interactions within a Zambian clothing factory. Looking at the urban African from a dramatically different perspective than the Rhodes-Livingstone tradition, Kapferer provided a minute view of specific transactions and observed power relations from an individual-centered line of sight. K. G. Hahlo (1969), in a somewhat parallel study, looked at race relations in the South African workplace from the perspective of the sociology of interpersonal contacts. Rob Gordon (1977), an anthropologist, has applied Erving Goffman's models of institutional interrelationships, such as deference and demeanor, to a Namibian mineface. One remarkable essay on Tunisia has considered the labor strike from various phenomenological points of view, as a deliberate alternative to other forms of action, as a field for demanding social change, and as a form of negotiations. Above all, the strike represented for Salah Hamzaoui (1976: 68) an arena through which conflict is organized and synthesized, "toujours un défi (et un pari)." The strike in his view becomes a form of theater. Some of these studies virtually omit the idea of class and do not relate to wider economic and social issues as do Marxists when they speak of capitalism as a mode of production. Power relations may be taken into consideration but are generalized in a way that deprives the reader of any historical or societal specificity. Kapferer's factory seems to be simply an arbitrarily chosen venue for the spectacle he wants to elucidate.¹³

Gordon's work is so rich in revealing how workers survive and cope that it has a special fascination. On his Namibian minefield, oppression and misery are delineated but it is also the scene for an amazing range of interactions that constitute a complex informal economy within the formal capital-labor contradiction. This includes the extra service trades some workers can perform, the impact of illicit diamond dealings, and the bonds which are established between whites and blacks enacting clientage links and blacks establishing among themselves what they call ties between "brothers."¹⁴ "Work culture" is increasingly revealed in many contexts to have an enormous richness and may well illuminate social and historical problems more than has been suspected.

Looking at the gold mines of Ghana, Jim Silver (1978) has stressed precisely this, the link between the mineshaft and the broader society, insisting that the consciousness of miners is "rooted in the workplace." However, the best efforts of his miners brings forth activity that is fundamentally defensive and disruptive. Worker pilfering, extensive inter-union struggles, and an unending fight with management over productivity dominate the miners' working lives. This consciousness lacks any aware socialist vision in part because of its separation from the ideological channels of radical intellectuals. The disconnection between workers and intellectuals in Ghana has been near-total despite the rhetoric of several Ghanaian regimes. There is a Marxist formulation which views the

working class, acting consciously for itself, as building a political movement that transcends economism. Silver suggests another dimension must be added. By implication he is supported by Jane Parpart's (1983) work on the *Zambian Copperbelt*, where miners have been at once class conscious and economic in outlook.

Peter Waterman (1976) has referred to "conservatism" among Nigerian workers. The perspective of the highly-educated stabilized worker who identifies with his employer is one, though secondary, reason. There is as well, he states, a more pervasive conservatism deeply embedded within the main body of Nigerian urban culture distinguishable from the impulses derived from the workplace. Workers identify intensely with the "big man," who may be feared or envied but is also respected and can provide favors. In Nigeria, such a figure may live physically in the midst of popular neighborhoods. At the same time, the worker dreams of becoming independent through running his own business and is thus not by any means immune to petty bourgeois ideas. Interestingly, the same point has historically been made for the American factory worker, who has shared with other social strata the "American dream" (Chinoy, 1955).

Waterman's findings are closely paralleled by those of Janet Bujra (1978-79) on working-class life in Nairobi. Bujra sees the ambitious politically-minded power-brokers of working-class quarters actively promoting a vague populism which brings together currents of protest at poverty and humiliation in a wave that never quite reaches the heart of the problem and which helps to perpetuate corrupt politics. Certainly, "populism" has been used as a way of explicating the typical working-class consciousness of urban Africa rather widely (Williams, 1974; Gutkind, 1975; Sandbrook and Arn, 1977; Jeffries, 1975).

Bujra's community, Pumwani, itself powerfully impinges on the formation of the consciousness of its variegated inhabitants. This point emerges from very different parts of Africa also. In Agege, a pulsating urban quarter of the Lagos mainland, Adrian Peace's (1979) factory workers find themselves among an army of the self-employed and other categories of the poor who generate the dominant vocal ideology. Paul Lubeck (in Sandbrook and Cohen, 1975) is convinced that the values of Kano industrial workers are deeply marked by the particularities of Islamic belief. Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (1962) suggest for South Africa that the African working class has never been entirely isolated (at least before 1930) from either the African petty bourgeoisie on the one hand or the peasantry on the other. The research of different scholars in most recent years has in fact led to a new emphasis on the distinctiveness of specific communities. Unlike Pumwani or Agege, for instance, Sekondi, Ghana, dominated by the railway workers, is according to Richard Jeffries (1978) an essentially working-class community. In Sekondi, it is the experience of life on the railways and the long history of unionization that determines the essence of political culture. Here working class ideas are more likely to overwhelm other influences than the other way around.

Some South African urban communities such as Sophiatown during the 1940s and 1950s have been discerned as predominantly and vitally working-class (Proctor in Bozzoli, 1979). Tom Lodge (in Bonner, 1981) has succeeded in explaining the significant contrasts in bus boycotts between two urban black communities in the Rand area, Alexandra and Evaton, in terms of relative class cohesion and community consciousness. This kind of consideration could lead on to richer and more culturally imbricated investigations of the deeper racial

contrasts and divides of South African history, often explained in too narrowly construed economic or political grounds.

Apart from the workplace and the community, a third theme which emerges from current attempts to grasp class consciousness in Africa is the impulse to recover the changing historical experiences of particular working classes. During the colonial era, the working class appeared to the ruling powers as a dangerous class, often discussed in a terminology devised in early industrial Europe. Frank Furedi (1973), in a memorable article (inspired by George Rudé) portrayed the intensely oppressed, turbulent "African crowd" in pre-Mau Mau Kenya, which had to be broken up under very repressive conditions in the early 1950s for the British regime to regain effective control.¹⁵

Such crowds are far from having disappeared in contemporary Africa. Jean Bonis (1973) contrasting the styles of militant organization in a Mauritanian minefield at the beginning of the 1970s, penned the contrast between the ambitious clientelist *interlocuteur valable* linked at least potentially to the state bureaucracy and the uncompromised wild men who arise inexplicably and temporarily in the heart of strikes and give to them their strength and fury which in the end must underlie any mundane gains the workers achieve in formal collective bargaining. In this defiance ultimately does rest their ability to register gains.

Many writers have observed that the late colonial era witnessed class-orientated struggles that can be seen, not primarily as part of some nationalist thrust, but as a conjuncture that helped to form the working classes of Africa (Jewsiewicki, Lema, and Vellut, 1973; DeMunter, 1972). Sharon Stichter (1982) points out for Kenya, however, and the point can probably be more generally applied, that so long as colonialism was in the ascendant, workers continued to see their situation as being dominated by racial or national, rather than class, oppression (see also Grillo, 1972b). When he writes about the *beni* dancing of southern and eastern Africa, Terence Ranger (1975) refers to this cultural form that embodied adaptation and resistance as colonial in context. Yet it appears to me that *beni* relates both to class formation and to work situations in many places. Ranger is, however, right to stress that *beni* declines rapidly with independence.

Independence altered the perspectives of African workers. Thereafter their struggles related much more sharply to the state and a rising elite. By the end of the 1960s, "Zambianization" of executive positions meant nothing to Zambian workers (Burawoy, 1972b). Peace was able to witness the major impact on a raw industrial working class of the Adebo strikes of 1971. Paul Lubeck (1978), in the course of several research visits to Kano, has recorded an intensification of class consciousness that has gone hand in hand with waves of strikes and a growing sophistication about industrial life.

Nowhere does recent discussion on working-class consciousness in tropical Africa come together more sharply than in the work of Jeffries (1978) on Sekondi. In Sekondi, a working-class culture arose dominated by railwaymen from the 1930s. During the post-war era, nationalism and support for Kwame Nkrumah took over the dominant political expression. Later, workers were profoundly influenced by the intensifying conflicts between union and state, the attempts by the Nkrumah regime to take over their union, and the general strike of 1961. From this, they learned a hostility to big men from Accra and to the demands of the Ghanaian state in general. The dominant ideology can be considered populist

in that the railwaymen favor the poor in general and do not entirely dislike entrepreneurialism. They identify corruption, favoritism, and bureaucratism as the enemy. There is in fact a certain anti-Marxism in response to the Marxist formulae that were taken over by the Nkrumah government in its last years. Politically, the workers are pragmatists. they do not see the possibility of a separate labor party gaining ground in Ghana, and they are above all concerned with their commitment to a free, fighting trade union. Jeffries says too little about non-political aspects of Sekondi life and culture. Despite these limitations we have in his work a relatively convincing portrait of African working class life that is critical of most managerial perspectives and as remote from an idealized Leninist prototype as it is from such writers as Berg and Butler (or Saul and Arrighi in their labor aristocracy phase).

We can test the observations of Jeffries, Silver, Crisp, Parpart and other Westerners (so far joined by few African scholars) by considering the growing body of fiction by Africans that looks at the life of the urban poor. Where once the best African literature concerned itself with the dilemmas and ambitions of the young, educated male bourgeois ready to step into the driver's seat, over the past decade there has been a turn towards considering the life of the common man and, in a few cases, woman. Who can read Jeffries and not think of Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969) which painfully and powerfully suggests the rise and fall of Nkrumah in the hearts of the plain people of Accra? Meja Mwangi has brilliantly sketched the hard life of Nairobi workers in *Going Down River Road* (1976). Their cynicism is matched by a profound inability for them to thrive in the world formulated by the Kenyan bourgeoisie. Felix Iyayi's *Violence* (1979), hailed as Nigeria's first proletarian novel, is a less cynical work (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1981). It does not hide from us the war between the sexes, which is as intense in Benin City as in Nairobi or Accra, but Iyayi is less misogynist than Mwangi or Armah and holds out a view of the poor African woman as something other than man's exploiter. Although it is less systematically class-oriented in feeling, Buchi Emecheta's ironic *Jays of Motherhood* (1979) conveys with the pungency of an Igbo proverb how the life of the exploited appears in the eyes of a woman. Iyayi graphically shows the dependence of the Nigerian poor on the net of clientelist relations for work and the extent to which that net, since the oil boom, provides less and less safety as the capital accumulation, bourgeois instincts, and alienation from the masses of the Nigerian ruling class intensifies. He articulates wonderfully the contradictions of class in contemporary Nigeria. All of these socially rich novels are more somber and pessimistic in tone than Sembene Ousmane's magical invocation of the 1947-48 railway workers' strike in French West Africa, *God's Bits of Wood* (1962) which once stood in such splendid isolation among early African novels.

South African fiction and poetry has long concerned itself with the impact of industrialization and the detachment of men and women from the land. Classic examples include such diverse work as Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy* (1963), Harry Bloom's study of urban confrontation, *Transvaal Episode* (1959), Jochem van Bruggen's Depression account of the proletarianization of landless Afrikaners, *Ampie* (1931), Alex La Guma's (1972, 1974) stories of Cape Town slum life, the Zulu poetry of B. W. Vilakazi (1957, 1960), and the moral (and highly anti-urban) tale that made Alan Paton an international byword, *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948). More recently, Elsa Joubert's fictionalized account of the life of an African working woman, *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (1978), translated

into English as *Poppie*, has perhaps explained better the circumstances of the African working population of her country than could any historian or social scientist. It evokes such divergent international comparisons as Brecht's *Mother Courage* (1966) and Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

LABOR MIGRATION REVISITED

Having surveyed how the themes of worker community, organization, and politics have been reshaped in more recent literature, we now turn to more recent treatment of an even older theme, that of labor migration. Labor migration generally was very well described and its outlines in many respects understood in the literature of the late colonial period. More recent material has above all historicized this knowledge and been more successful in relating the purely economic aspects of migration to the more complex issues of consciousness that arise from them. As Luke Malaba (1981) puts it with reference to Zimbabwe, "migratory labour has a historical origin and forms part of a totality in process of change."

William Beinart (in Mayen, 1980), in his study of Pondoland, South Africa, weaves quite intricately the patterns through which the interests of capital and of elders and chiefs in the rural areas came together to promote migration, at first in the development of a cattle advance system. Philip Mayer (1980: 58–59) adds:

There is a remarkable fit between the requirements of a smoothly working system of oscillating migration and the moral tenets of Red ideology. . . . Red ideology thus sanctifies and makes into moral axioms what happens to be advantageous for the capitalist and the State.

For Burundi and Rwanda, J. P. Chrétien has (1978) exposed the other side of the coin, the extent to which labor migrants in the colonial period were fleeing from forms of local oppression. It is increasingly important in current accounts of labor migration to understand that it has become the underpinning of important cultural patterns and an ideology. In this sense, even the "bright-lights" theory has a partial truth once placed into a context.

Colin Murray's *Families Divided* (1981) set in Lesotho is an ambitious and theoretically impressive attempt to show, from the rural end, the world that oscillating labor migration makes. In South Africa, the system is geared to perpetuate and indeed to intensify migrant labor. Other African countries are also anxious to block rural migrants from establishing themselves in town but hardly with the success, the ruthlessness, the political conviction, or the scale of the South African state. Murray deplores labor migration of the South African type as much as did the Wilsons when they opened up the subject to academic circles forty years earlier, but he is able to examine from inside a world where, from the point of view of the ordinary person, the migrant is the lucky one who brings home what income is available and where women try to function as household heads.¹⁶ This parallels the observations of Hoyt Alverson in Botswana (1978) who noted both extremely demoralized and immiserated migrant communities on the edge of the desert and others where migration apparently can still be fitted into a pattern of cattle accumulation and the maintenance of "traditional" values.

Apart from the well-known literature on entrepreneurial cocoa tree planting migrants in the West African forests highlighted by Polly Hill (1963) and Sara Berry (1975), work by John Sender (1974) and Gavin Kitching (1980) from East Africa also sees a type of migrant as the model African petty accumulator who

lays the foundation for a future local bourgeoisie during the colonial period. Migration (perhaps outside of the extreme South African example), then, is perhaps best viewed as a structure in which various kinds of relationships with various outcomes can occur, depending on other social and economic contexts.

The burden of literature available suggests that the balance between elder and chiefly power in the countryside, the infusion of necessary cash and the satisfaction of capitalist needs for ultra-cheap labor, belongs to a particular historical moment that in most migrant-dependent zones has passed. It is a long way from Alverson's stock accumulators to the demoralized rural female-headed households so common in the South African "Homelands" (Desmond, 1971; Homeland, 1982; Murray in Cooper, forthcoming; Freund, 1983). The contributions in the important collection recently edited by Philip Mayer (1980) suggests that the "Red" and "School" cultures that once typified the rural Transkei were closely linked to old migrant patterns of work and subsistence. These have now given way, it might be inferred, to a generalized and more homogenized working class culture that has swept the South African countryside in the past twenty years.

The in-house journal of Africa's most powerful corporation, Anglo-American, published recently a lengthy and compelling analysis of labor migration by Merle Lipton (1980), who is also known as a champion of the revival of agriculture in the black homelands of South Africa. Lipton makes the classic case for stabilization and against migrancy with practical suggestions for its processual institution. Her most convincing pages assess the rapid changes in power relations in the South African workplace to the benefit of black workers and the consequently dramatic need for reform in a period when what she calls the "workability" of the whole migrant system has broken down. Even Polly Hill's (1963) cocoa migration pattern breaks down disastrously in time, by her own admission. Philippe David's (1980) recent account of the *navétanes* has among its most interesting pages discussion of how migrant labor in this form ended in the 1960s, as a response to mechanization in peanut production and social change in the receiving country, Senegal (see also Parkin, 1975; O'Brien, 1982). In general, migration patterns have altered substantially since independence (Sabot, 1978).

It is this historical and social dimension which is largely missing in the *dependencista* approach typified by Samir Amin's (1975) work on migration in West Africa. Amin's approach is also essentially managerial, if from the perspective of a potentially industrializing and popularly supported state. It helps to illuminate the global problems of particular regions or countries.

While some writers have seen migrancy as a form of backwardness or regional dependency, David Hemson (1979: 20) has insisted that its development (but particularly its perpetuation) represents a "foremost attempt to politically disorganize the working class." Hemson, the historian of Durban's dockers, believes that in fact this attempt has by no means always succeeded and that migrants have often constituted an effective wedge of resistance to capital initiative in South Africa. He concurs with Richard Moorsom (1979), writing about Namibia and Pierre-Philippe Rey (1976) that migrant laborers are not "semi-proletarianized" but full-scale workers forced to experience a particular living situation, workers who have in fact a powerful role to play in the long-term emancipation of African labor.

AFRICAN LABOR AND AFRICAN HISTORY

So far we have looked at work that has followed along the lines of writing on African labor back into the colonial period. Moving beyond this, it is of particular moment to consider a generally new phenomenon. In recent years, labor issues have played on the main stage of African history to an unprecedented degree. Some historians have taken a leaf from the older Communist school in stressing the relationship between colonial conquest, colonialism, capitalism, and labor-related issues. This relationship has been given increasing historical specificity with regard to particular industries (mines, plantations, etc.), particular periods, and particular colonial economies. For such writers as Sik, African history under colonialism consisted of almost undifferentiated protest: a kind of timeless celebration of bravery. This is being replaced by a sense of context, milieu, and historical process.

The question of how African labor could best be exploited by European capitalism has been raised as central in explaining the Partition. The so-called mineral revolution in South Africa which meant such a dramatic historic break and so urgently required overcoming a variety of labor-related production constraints to carry through, has lent itself to such revision particularly (Marks and Trapido, 1979; Etherington, 1979). However, the "humanitarian" attack on slaving and slave production and the pressure in western Africa for penetrating the interior and eliminating constraints to trade can be interpreted in related ways (Hopkins, 1966). Tim Weiskel (1979) has shown how labor-related issues were often crucial to anti-colonial resistance.

As has already been suggested, van Onselen (1976) and Johnstone (1976) in their discussions of the mining industries of Rhodesia and South Africa impressively detailed the labor constraints imposed by particular demands made by capitalist mining operations. In South Africa, the labor demands of the mines conflicted qualitatively and quantitatively with those of other concerns, particularly agriculture where labor was administered on a largely non-capitalist basis. The resolution of the conflict between "gold and maize," which underlay much of the British-Boer clash, involved a lengthy crisis-ridden process which has a close relation to much of the politics of South Africa during the first half of this century (Trapido, 1971; Davies, 1979; Lacey, 1980). For the Copperbelt, the logic of capital imperatives has been powerfully developed by Charles Perrings (1979) in a comparative study of Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo. All of these writers have stressed the particular financial needs intrinsic to the context they develop, as I myself have tried to do for tin mining in Northern Nigeria (Freund, 1981).

One may readily be persuaded with John Iliffe (1981) that "low wages, long-distance migration and quasi-political constraints" formed the very essence of capitalism in colonial Africa in the era of what Marx called primitive accumulation. One reason was that the fundamental need for coercion, fundamental in the sense that it was basic to the whole colonial enterprise, required state and thus political intervention. Iliffe has stressed the intimate relationship between coercion and wage labor in the creation, sustenance, and continuity of an army of Tanganyikan *manamba* (numbers). Jeanne Penvenne (1979a: 12) has seen *shibalo* in Mozambique as fundamental to the rise of a particular class whose opportunities are cut away thus from below "just as the color bar cut them away from above." The exploitation of this class she views as the heart of the Mozambican economy.

Compulsion is often quite mistakenly associated with settler colonies alone. Indeed contributions on such regions as the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, Senegal, Northern Nigeria and French West and Equatorial Africa increasingly suggest its long-term and wide-spread importance (Mason in Cohen, Copans, and Gutkind, 1979; Anouma, 1976; Sautter, 1967; Thomas, 1973; Fall, 1976/77, 1981; Babassana, 1978).¹⁷

In close conjunction with coercion, historians have stressed the cheapness of labor as a specific feature of "colonial capitalism" (van Zwanenberg, 1975). The link between cheap labor and basic industrialization comes to the fore in particular with reference to southern African history during the twentieth century.¹⁸ Duncan Clarke has suggested the role that contractual forms and an elaborate system for importing distant labor has played in the development of commercial farming in Zimbabwe through cheapening the price of labor. Martin Legassick (1974a, 1974b) has powerfully welded this insight together with an analysis of racism, authoritarianism, and labor coercion in his broader interpretations of the rise of modern South Africa.

A consideration of coercion leads as well to the complex and often extra-economic dimension of social control over labor. As early as the nineteenth century (and outside the mines), South African capitalists and administrators were concerned to create controlling devices such as the Durban system aimed at mastering the "social Pest," an undisciplined and potentially emancipated working class shorn of its rural roots and the Zulu cake of custom (Swanson, 1968, 1976). Maynard Swanson's discovery of the urban menace in Durban has been taken up and extended in the more recent work of Paul Maylam (1982) for the inter-war years which subtly considers the contradictions of industrialization and segregation, South African style. At the same time, Christopher Saunders (1979) has shown for Cape Town that the drive for segregation and the controls that go with it was not so much spearheaded by manufacturers (and actually opposed within the commercial sector) but was a generalized social response by the bourgeoisie to the fear of crime and pestilence. Van Onselen (1982) calls it the desire to "separate the labouring from the dangerous classes." Outside South Africa, Frederick Cooper (1981, 1982) has been among the first to look at colonial capitalism from the perspective of a colonial ideology of control over workers and attempts at consequent social restructuring from the vistas of Zanzibar and Mombasa, while Francis Snyder (1981) has pioneered the study of the relationship between labor control and colonial law with reference to Senegal.

The historic links between wage and non-wage labor must be fleshed out to make sense of the colonial period. Monique Lakroum (1983) has tried to develop them for Senegal by considering productive labor as a totality on the territorial scale in reinterpreting colonial policies. She has neatly undercut the conventional distinctions made between rural production and the rise of an urban working class. Leroy Vail and Landeg White (1980) in their fittingly entitled book on capitalism and colonialism in Mozambique, both emphasize agricultural wage labor and its articulation, through various periods and in conjunction with state policies, with non-capitalist forms of agricultural production. They have produced perhaps the most exhaustively researched and impressive single analysis of labor as the center of modern African history highlighting what such forms as labor migration have signified to both workers and business. One might compare this lengthy book with the method employed by Dan O'Meara (1975) in an article on the 1946 African mineworker's strike in South Africa. O'Meara has brilliantly and

concisely used this important conflict as a touchstone for explaining the entire era of the 1940s.

There is a certain danger in simply applying the dictates of capital as a means of explaining history even in capitalist or capitalist-dominated societies. Following John Rex (1974), Charles van Onselen in *Chibaro* (1976) created a picture of the compound as virtually a totalitarian institution in Southern Rhodesia. Other historians have suggested, however, that this picture may have been overdrawn and that actually compound controls could be bent in various ways. Not all compounds constitute a uniform type. Indeed Jane Parpart (1982) has seen the Copperbelt compound as a forcing-ground for working-class consciousness (see also Hemson, 1977; Moroney, 1978). Another historian in a compelling study of state-capital ties has considered that UMHK molded a genuinely totalitarian society in Katanga; most likely, the fuller our knowledge of the social fabric of the mining communities, the more this appellation would need qualification (Fetter, 1973).

At the same time, the other side of the coin is the exaggeration of worker initiatives and the painting of attractively romantic but ultimately unconvincing heroic portraits from the past. It is possible to take the worst aspects of "African initiative" from the 1960s whereby everything done by an African was celebrated in an attempt to overturn colonial judgements about African passivity and backwardness and similarly celebrate the world of the worker. Capital and colonialism both enjoyed some great successes, after all. Fred Cooper's (1981) ex-slaves and squatters on the East African coast were remarkably successful at scotching the plans of capitalists for disposing of their labor in the twentieth century, but the price they paid was that the regional economy stagnated and became marginalized. Jeff Crisp's (in Cooper, forthcoming) Ghanaian miners are equally effective at resisting post-World War II attempts to introduce "Scientific Management" into the mines. In a surely related development, however, the mining industry itself became of diminishing interest for capitalist development.

What I have tried to accomplish in my own writing on West African miners (Freund, 1981) is to attempt a synthesis of capital and labor strategies. Specific cultural and social forces rooted in the history of Nigeria have molded the tin mines and, indeed, capitalist development. They do not simply reproduce a pattern of development derived from the colonial metropole nor can they be understood simply as "dominated" or "dependent." Equally Nigerians of any class do not simply make their own history. Recovering these particularities will be essential to a next wave of studies, if economic conditions will permit such a wave to occur. From the larger view of political economy, these studies are likely to reveal the inhibitions to the capital accumulation process in Africa (whether capitalist or state-directed) rather than pinpointing specific roads to development that are occurring (Berman and Lonsdale, 1979, 1980).

The intrusion of the labor process into modern African historiography is less surprising an innovation than its entry into the study of pre-capitalist African societies. By the end of the 1960s, however, pre-colonial African history reached something of a dead end. The limits were apparent to the possibilities of oral tradition and other substitutes for conventional documentation in many areas. The recovery of assorted factual material on one region or another, while praiseworthy, looked narrowly antiquarian to all but other locally-oriented specialists. Thus some historians welcomed the rebirth of materialist considerations among some anthropologists and the rise of a new Marxist-

influenced economic anthropology, especially in France. It suddenly appeared that there were new and interesting questions to ask about trade, the state, and perhaps other central themes in the existing history. Behind every society, it was now asserted, lay the potential for exploitation and surplus expropriation, and this in turn underlay the possibilities of understanding how the society was organized. It should be stressed that these questions had long seriously exercised the minds of a number of interesting East European scholars—Olderogge, Malowist, Tymowski, Kubbel, Potekhin—some of whom had long since gone beyond Sik's limitations in comprehending the "social formations" that had developed over the centuries in Africa. Their work provided some inspiration itself to the revival of French Marxist studies on Africa.

The Marxist tradition places a great deal of weight in attempting to organize social organizations in a limited progression of structured types or modes of production. Definitions may differ somewhat but modes generally are acknowledged at heart to consist of specific forms of labor control and surplus derivation defined by type. How universally Marx himself intended us to understand his own short list of modes is unclear; his use of the term is certainly not very systematic by contrast to the powerfully drawn architecture of the capitalist mode of production. Those he used, however, have been applied from Europe and Asia to Africa—the slave mode, the feudal mode, the "Asiatic" mode. At the same time, other scholars have tried to formulate other modes, including Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch's African mode of production (Stewart and Crumme, 1981).

Where a ruling class can be found that transparently related its material and ideological power to an income derived from a particular type of surplus extraction, the application of the idea of mode of production has in itself often been a breath of fresh air. However, things are often not so clear. Almost every African society produces a surplus and shows aspects of surplus appropriation by individuals. Yet, these individuals often do not form a class, nor is it very clear on what basis the appropriation takes place. Claude Meillassoux's (1972) neat model of a kinship mode of production in which elders control a surplus produced by the labor of male clients and cadets and above all women, often fails to apply in practice. There is often a dissociation between the wealth and power of a royal court and the process of social and economic reproduction in the rural household. Coquery-Vidrovitch's African mode of production is in fact based on the idea of a distinctive lack of connection here.

The great importance of slavery in many African societies has largely been posed purely as a problem of mode of production (Cooper, 1979; Lovejoy, 1979). Emmanuel Terray (1974), in several articles which constitute a tour de force, brilliantly suggested that the application of the theory of a slave mode of production could explain the basis of Akan states. Raymond Dumett (1979) has shown, however, that Terray's slave mode of production rests on an inadequate empirical basis. Dumett has found that gold production in the Akan forest lands came under the rubric of various social modes intermeshed; I have found the same for nineteenth century tin mining and metal goods production in Northern Nigeria, as has Edward Alpers (1983) for textile production in precolonial Mogadishu.¹⁹ Before we can generalize further we will need to know far more about how labor was organized. This at least creates the possibility of a dynamic, not merely classificatory, history.

Apart from the obvious point that far more research is called for, the new literature centered on modes of production presents certain critical problems. More attention needs to be paid to the labor process itself. It is often assumed that "agriculture" or "slavery" in and of themselves explain social power at work and outside where often they just represent the first steps of an explanation. Production itself has been neglected in favor of using the term to explain something else—kinship ideology, the power of the pre-colonial state or the like—with the result that the line of argument is not entirely convincing.

As in the case of West African gold mining, African productive activity often does not fit entirely easily into the schema of modes created for other parts of the world. Different elements combine differently. For most purposes, therefore, it is more useful to speak of social forms such as master-apprentice relations or land tenancy which are very widely to be found inside and outside Africa while showing considerable variety but do not have the premise of an impenetrable structural totality assumed by the mode as many Marxists have used it. Such forms clearly can survive the arrival of merchant capital and, for some time at least, the presence on the scene of capitalist production.

Our most convincing and reliable material on labor in precapitalist Africa has tended to come so far from those areas highly influenced by merchant capital from Europe and particularly those already ruled by (or adjacent to territories ruled by) colonial governments—notably what Henry Slater (1975) calls the "early development of South African capitalism in its merchant and rentier forms." Thus Mary Rayner (n.d.) and Susan Newton-King (in Atmore and Marks, 1980) are showing us how the ideology and reality of the move from slave labor to free labor at the Cape in the early nineteenth century operated and why it was important to the British state. Some interesting work has been done on South African agricultural labor and peasant production in conjunction with the spread of commercial capital in a somewhat later phase (Dubow, 1982; Slater and Trapido in Atmore and Marks, 1980). Patrick Harries, writing on Mozambique, and Judy Kimble, on Lesotho (in Marks and Rathbone, 1982) and Peter Delius (in Atmore and Marks, 1980), dealing with the Pedi, have tried to come to grips with how and why unconquered Africans came to the South African mines in large numbers as uncoerced wage laborers, somewhat undercutting the whole argument, at least, in its cruder forms, about colonial capitalism as a distinct, inherently coercive form.

Some parts of tropical Africa which came profoundly under the impact of nineteenth-century European merchant capital have also received corresponding attention. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (1971) has suggested for Dahomey that the transition from slaving to "legitimate" trade engendered corresponding changes in the way labor was controlled and used within Africa.²⁰ Tony Hopkins (1966), considering Lagos and its commercial hinterland, has explored the broader links between expanding commerce, imperialism and the forms of labor that prevailed in the era of the scramble. Fred Cooper (1977) has explicated the relationship between the labor process, the institution of slavery, commercial capitalism and the Zanzibari states. This region, of course, still belonged very much to the orbit of international, Europe-centered commerce, which called to life the slave plantation system of which Cooper writes. In reality, research that probes similar issues for other areas in Africa will require new evidence and a new centrality given to labor, rather than limit itself to the formal institutional and ideological labor-related linkages in society such as slavery. There are some areas

where such work has already progressed (Vidal, 1974; Meillassoux, 1975; Clarence-Smith, 1979; Crummey in Stewart and Crummey, 1981).

NEW FRONTIERS OF RESEARCH

The emphasis of this section is on those areas into which the study of labor has begun to move, affecting importantly our understanding of how Africans live. The three areas which will receive consideration, the place of labor in agriculture, the so-called informal sector of the economy, and the African woman perceived as a worker, are actually all to some extent interrelated. Much of the literature until recently has treated labor in Africa from the formal point of view of an acknowledged wage-earning sector in the towns, while other workers and forms of work have received little attention, despite their transparently great numerical importance. It is to a consideration of the available literature on these themes and where and how relevant scholarship seems to be heading that we now turn.

Wage employment exists, of course, within agriculture. In much of Africa this has been a very important sector of the organized working class, as Jay O'Brien's (1982) work on agricultural labor in the Republic of the Sudan and Diane Bolton's history (in Cohen, Copans, and Gutkind, 1981) of labor in the Tanzanian sisal fields have revealed. Claudine Chaulet (1972: 41), in considering the big farms of the fertile Mitidja behind Algiers, refers to both an oscillating migrant class of farm-workers and also to a new working class permanently established on the twentieth century capitalist farm: "la naissance d'un milieu social original." At the other end of Africa, such a milieu appears to have formed on the huge corporate sugar estates of Zambesia in Mozambique (Vail and White, 1980).

Moreover, as Morris (1976) powerfully presses on us in the South African case, how agriculture is mastered and transformed is historically of the greatest significance in development issues and in comprehending the biggest social changes. Following Trapido (1971), Morris views capitalist agriculture and its development as essential to the growth of South African capitalist industry. Part of the strength of his contribution is his emphasis on the intense rural class struggles that accompanied the push to establish capitalist economic and social forms in the lands reserved for whites after 1913.

There has been a tendency among some authors to try to formulate a general theory of the plantation, or to apply to African conditions such a theory. Duncan Clarke (1977) and Roger van Zwanenberg (1975) are among those writers who have written in terms of such a model, in van Zwanenberg's case as the essence of a particular colonial mode of production. However, one wonders then how one could reconcile this view to the idea of the "plantation" in such disparate times and places as pre-colonial Zanzibar in Cooper's (1977) account or the nineteenth century Sokoto Caliphate of which Lovejoy (1979) writes. Graves and Richardson (1980), comparing sugar plantations in Natal and in Queensland, Australia, ended by decisively rejecting the proposition that plantations exhibit the same form of labor usage.

In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of Clarke's study of the conditions of farm workers in Zimbabwe is his discussion of recent notable changes, particularly the beginnings of a stabilization policy. Such changes, essentially representing a transition out of a pre-capitalist set of social relationships, have also been sensitively observed for South Africa (Loudon, 1970). However, the

most systematic study of historical change within agricultural labor in Africa to date is perhaps Jay O'Brien's work on the Sudan. He relates this both to a general process of decline in non-capitalist production on a national scale (1982: 18): "the really fundamental aspect of overall transformation of traditional divisions of labor and the destruction of autonomous systems of social reproduction." It is this which in turn has made possible the increasing use of unemployment as the prime weapon in keeping labor cheap as older and more nakedly coercive forms of labor control decline in efficacy.

One of the first radical scholars who considered the problem of agricultural labor in Africa, Victor Allen (1972), took the conventional wisdom of African populism at its word and wrote that the peasant really was the proletariat of Africa, through his subjection to capital in the form of migrant labor and other coercive and semi-coercive means that forced him to provide goods or services in the capitalist sector. This certainly oversimplifies the problem of proletarianization. For one thing, as an excellent recently translated Soviet survey (Ivanov, 1979) shows, the range of social forms in agriculture in twentieth century Africa is immensely varied. The careful observer finds at any one time and place transitional and apparently contradictory institutions that seem to represent capitalist subsumption over labor while containing both capitalist and non-capitalist elements of production. Vercrujisse (1979), in making this point, effectively considered how capitalist production intruded into fishing and in agriculture. His results show strikingly the far smoother path to full-scale private enterprise and wage labor, accompanied by the rise of a distinct property-owning class, in fishing compared with farming. A thorough history of the *navétanes* who were fundamental to the intensification of the peanut export trade in Senegal and Gambia suggests that even these apparently poor, landless migrant workers were not precisely proletarians. Apart from their access to land back at home in Guinea or Mali, they also acquired some accessibility in the lands of migration. The relationships that they established with their landlord-hosts were cast ideologically in pre-capitalist clientelist language that retained some concrete significance (David, 1980). Leitner (1976), discussing Kenya, emphasizes seasonality of labor as a major reason why the development of a systematically proletarianized population on the land has been slow and for long periods of time actually undesirable to capital.

At this point, the separation between capitalist and non-capitalist farming sectors breaks down analytically, and the investigator has to consider how to conceptualize labor in peasant agriculture. One long-standing approach to understanding the peasant has long been ecological. William Allan's (1961) classic study of the African husbandman entirely in relation to his physical environment provides in essence an ecological view of society. A close reading of his impressive work only hints at what has been left out: the history of colonialism, social relations, and the labor process viewed in social rather than strictly technical terms. Colonialism is undoubtedly inserted into Ken Post's (1976) conceptualization of "peasantization" as a process which brings the cultivator into relations (of exploitation) with the state and the market. This is consonant with the theories of the Russian Left populist Chayanov, arguing for an autonomous peasant mode of production with its own economic laws of motion, Scott's notion of a peasant "moral economy" that determines politics, and so forth. Again though, Post tends to ignore what actually goes on in the labor process and tends to treat the peasantry, once formed, as a rather ahistorical and undifferentiated

mass. The apparently enduring character of the peasant household easily lends itself to such treatment.

The conventional wisdom regarding peasant labor in the colonial, indeed even late colonial, period, was that, being worthless to capital except perhaps in allowing the cultivator to succor a family, it was of little account. Africa exhibited, according to W. Arthur Lewis, "unlimited supplies of labor." It was assumed that peasant activity was basically slack and constituted a potential cornucopia of labor which only needed a vent in the form of transport and other colonial proddings to yield a valuable surplus. This was the essence of Hla Myint's (1965) decidedly non-labor idea of "vent-for-surplus" which has been applied to, and critiqued in, Africa (Hogendorn, 1978; Freund and Shenton, 1977). John Tosh (1978) has perhaps been particularly consistent in explaining the colonial cash crop phenomenon in terms of changes in labor usage. He sees new crops fitting into the existing economy through considering such issues as allocation of labor, seasonality, the use of corporate work parties, intercropping, and cash purchases. Generalizing beyond the northern Uganda case study with which he began, Tosh (1981) has also given considerable weight to purely environmental considerations, particularly the difference between savanna crops and forest crops and the like.

Jane Guyer (1982) has noted that such technicist accounts actually mask questions of social power that are remarkably undetermined, except in the broadest sense of potentialities, by consideration of technique and environment: "One could . . . legitimately claim that farm organization is a function of the organization of work, one's own and others." She is trying to come to grips with how one can break down the peasant household as abstract, and in her penetrating view, deeply misleading, when applied promiscuously over time and space. Differences, which are vast, in how agricultural labor and peasant society are organized in Africa, would by this view require an explanation through the study of historical process in all its rich particularity.

Guyer is very far, even though she is significantly under the influence of Marx's ideas, from the conventional notions of modes of production. Yet her voice does in one crucial way echo that of Henry Bernstein, who writes at a far more abstract level. For Bernstein (1977, 1981), the peasant is abstracted into a type through the application of Marx's model of simple commodity production. He is in accord with Guyer, however, that the fundamental means for assessing peasant production relations is in terms of labor time.²¹

It is by no means only in rural Africa that transitional forms of social labor are to be found; in rapidly growing cities are what bureaucrats have chosen to call the "informal sector" of the economy; that part of it which lies outside the conventional statistics on employment, outside the "pays légal" but well within the "pays réel" to use the political language of early industrial France. Because of the obsession that administrators in poor and discontented communities understandably feel with control, the growth of such a sector was viewed with considerable alarm during the colonial period.

Fittingly, Paul Raymaekers (1963) produced in the intensely control-oriented Belgian Congo (shortly after independence), a classic and extreme model of the point of view dominated by these fears. Raymaekers saw the roots of the "informal sector" and of unemployment with the Depression, when for the first time urban workers did not simply melt into the bush when there were no jobs to be had. As unemployment gradually spread, it created an idle youth devoted to drugs, alcohol, crime, and violence. Indeed he even included a sensational picture

of a young man smoking “chanvre” in Kinshasa to astonish the reader and prove his point. Maturer men (women are never discussed) are no longer delinquents, but they remain marginal and continue to inhabit irregular squatter settlements. Pathetic pictures are shown of their contemptible little shack-like shops and service businesses. These “petits métiers” are but disguised unemployment, and the whole situation is in constant danger of getting out of hand, an obvious opening for the Russians. What is needed is a stern system of labor controls, work camps, and effective Catholic discipline.

A decade later, after unprecedented expansion of just such activities and declining controls, the International Labor Organization (ILO) issued a report which totally broke with Raymaekers' view, suggesting that there was much in the informal sector which both capital and the state could applaud. At its best, it was Africa pulling itself up with its own bootstraps. The ILO laundered and formalized criteria for defining the informal: the ease through which newcomers could enter small business activity and the absence of requirements for formal education, which appeared to be so rigid as a demand for most wage work in Africa. In part, as Manfred Bienefeld (1975) has stressed, this new approach was a direct response to the abandonment of modernization theory with its assumptions concerning the ability of Africa to replicate rapidly the economies of the industrialized nations. As such, it was a recognition of reality. One team suggests (surely very conservatively) that the informal sector represents at least half of the employed population of Lagos, probably tropical Africa's greatest metropolis (Fapohunda and Lubell, 1978). Perhaps the most memorable polemicist so far on the informal sector has been Keith Hart who, in a remarkable article (1973), suggested that the whole emphasis on unemployment in literature on the African urban poor consisted largely of the self-interested maunderings of experts in the international bureaucracies. Africans have no problems finding employment; their real problem is low wages and (employed) immiseration (Hart, 1976).

One might start an investigation on the subject by trying to get beyond the Raymaekers version of the origins of “pays réel.” Is it really to be explained simply through the uprooting of an uncontrollable peasantry? In much of Africa, but particularly the north and the west, craft production was in any case developed on a fairly intensive basis long before colonialism. Gabriel Baer (1964) has written an excellent descriptive introduction to the organization of guilds in pre-colonial Egypt. These corporate bodies are said to have embraced virtually the entire urban population. Guilds, however, did not primarily organize labor. They instead dealt with creating an authority for taxation and other state purposes. They included not only such unlikely laborers as the male prostitutes and the pickpockets, but indeed most guilds were concerned with services and sales rather than the manufacturing of goods. Baer claims that little overt class conflict could be found in the guild but Golvin (1945) suggests for the Tunisian city of Sfax, that exploitation as well as self-exploitation was found within its bosom where production activities occurred (and when producers met merchants, it should be added).

Precisely because of the fundamental importance of links with the state, colonial conquest deprived the guilds of their significance and they quickly collapsed in Egypt and lost their importance a generation later in Kano, Nigeria, as well (Jagger, 1973). In Kano, however, a study of blacksmiths shows that much of the older culture of craftsmanship in fact has survived. For Senegal, Diouf (1983) has claimed that there are very close links in some instances

between craft organization in the towns and the older caste organization of the villages, while Nguyen Van Chi-Bonnardel (1983) notes the extent to which old crafts have sometimes thrived and even expanded in the twentieth century. The Senegambian castes were in part a means of organizing labor in the interests of the pre-colonial state, particularly with reference to services the ruling classes needed (Diop, 1981). As such they parallel urban guilds in Mediterranean Africa. Archaeology has permitted us a glimpse of such a service-orientated working class on the edge of Egypt's Valley of the Kings from very ancient times (Della Monica, 1975).

The same conference that evoked the papers of Diouf and Nguyen van Chi-Bonnardel brought forward one interesting contrast: while Philippe Hugon (1983), writing on Tananarive, attributed the efflorescence of a Malagasy informal sector to the stagnation of modern industry, Sara Berry (1983), considering motor mechanics in Ife, Nigeria, took the exact opposite tack and related their remarkable expansion to the oil boom and generally prosperous conditions of the 1970s. Perhaps the point to make is that there appear to be many economic activities which are inadequately, if at all, supplied by large firms but which are clearly needed in the reproduction of the economy of which the most obvious are those working activities connected with maintenance and repair. They can blossom forth in response to a variety of conjunctures. Their growth has been neither parasitic nor a *pis aller* but essential to economic development.

This is the view of Kenneth King (1977), who has written a provocative study of African artisans in a country with little ancient craft tradition, Kenya. King came to this conclusion in trying to assess rather futilely what kind of formal education might be used to intervene and uplift this downtrodden sector. His study thus intersects the lines between craftsmanship and education. The introduction of capitalist mining, farming, industry, and even administrative life everywhere in Africa evoked a host of service activities with a great impact on employment. Ellen Hellman's (1940) survey of Rooiyard, Johannesburg, in the early 1930s gives a hint of what the Rand brought forward along these lines among men and women of all races. These include services for the new ruling classes and for the new "formal" enterprises.

The new working class in the "formal" sector also urgently required a broad range of services. Alain Morice (1982) stresses the importance of the urban "reproduction of labor" as the countryside came to fulfil that task less and less well. In a remarkable interpretation, Luise White (1980) has persuasively suggested that the concept of reproduction can be applied to short-term and daily activities and that such needs offered an important set of opportunities for women in town as prostitutes. Sexual services were, in fact, only one aspect of the "comforts of home" that they provided which included food and shelter (see also Bujra, 1978/79).

Justifiably, considering the conventional view of activities so little under the hegemony of the state, revisionist scholars have been correct to emphasize the functionality of much of the "informal sector." While of course African cities contain their share of criminals and purely parasitic elements, the more one looks at the literature on the informal sector, the less marginal it apparently is and the more essential in performing the labor that actually reproduces the existing economic community. Most of the numerous writers who in the past decade have considered craft and artisanal production in Africa have ended up emphasizing its resilience, capacity for expansion, successful resistance to state attempts at

control, and great variety (Alpers, 1983; Berry, 1983; Salem, 1983; Morice, 1983; King, 1977). Ahmed Kassab (1971) has traced a sharp portrait of state attempts to control squatter communities (*gourbivilles*) associated with irregular and illegal people in a Tunisian city, attempts which have almost entirely failed. Indeed Morice correctly portrays the ambiguous vision of the African regimes; the informal sector after all provides their personnel with essential services and variegated welcome opportunities for petty accumulation.

Some of the positive press about the informal sector masks the usual Western celebration (in print) of the African entrepreneur and a consideration of his needs.²² There clearly are many important figures in the African bourgeoisies who began their careers far from the economic "pays réel et légal." Within the informal sector there is opportunity, it seems; there are success stories.

However, the other side is one of exploitation in forms that often require patient observation to discern clearly. Manfred Bienefeld (1975: 73), from his development specialist's perspective, has suggested that:

detailed observations of "informal sector" activities always reveal great vitality, considerable technological developments and every sign of responsive and adaptable growth, while the larger picture remains one of a seemingly endless perpetuation of the sector and its problems of poverty and low productivity.

One aspect of these problems is that the informal sector never exists isolated from the world of industrial production. It is dependent on that world and constantly expanding or shrinking in accordance with its needs, following those who stress the misery of African petty production. LeBrun and Gerry (1975), carrying forward the argument, stress that the artisanal world is effectively subsumed by the capitalist world even though capitalism not only tolerates but even, in times and places, encourages its expansion. This is particularly notable when historical continuity in the trade exists with the pre-colonial past. It may well be, though more research is needed to prove the point, that its existence allows big capital to lower wages for all, thus serving capital in general. At the moment the available literature is essentially impressionistic.

Certainly what does go on within the informal sector is an often brutal exploitation. As Senghaas-Knoblach (1977) points out, informal labor is legally unprotected labor in blatant contrast to the welfarist pretensions of most African regimes. Much of this exploitation directly depends on the poor wages of women and children, as we shall explore in more detail below. Both King for Kenya (1977) and LeBrun and Gerry (1975) for Senegal have exposed the extent to which apprenticeship systems, just as in the era of early capitalism (and before) in Europe, can be a means of exploiting youth. Often the apparent survival of older concepts about work and its organization from pre-capitalist times is simply a mask for new, cash-defined forms of control and extortion. Indeed, Berry's research suggests that at the ideological level, the artisanate contains an interesting mixture of patrimonial and free market values equally conveniently put forward as a means of controlling apprentices. Morice suggests it is often the merchant-consumer, not the petty producer, who is the exploiter, as in much historic pre-capitalist European production.

It may be true that most urban Africans, if healthy and energetic, are able to find some means of eking out a living through services or simply manufacture. However, as Duncan Clarke (1977b) argued for Zimbabwe, this did not really preclude significant unemployment at a time when the Smith regime would have been only too pleased to have bought a version of Hart's zero unemployment

theory. In the cities of northern Nigeria, tailoring, despite Hart, remains generally a substitute for unemployment in the public eye, just as it was twenty years ago when the problem was studied compassionately by Pierre Bourdieu (1963) for Algeria. Bourdieu (1971) was right to stress the importance of the unemployed defining themselves, just as Hart was right to stress that the core of the problem lies in the helplessness and poverty of the "unemployed," not whether or not their hands are idle.

It is unfortunate that Fanon evoked so much of a politically romantic literature on the subject of the lumpenproletariat of the colonial city (Cohen and Michael, 1976). In reality, the informal sector deprived of its more or less licitly inclined accumulators consists of those who feel themselves outside the orbit of the modern state. No members of the informal sector are more exploited or less equipped to organize effectively than Africa's enormous army of domestic workers. Rarely do they receive much attention in the literature and they have been virtually entirely ignored in independent Black Africa, where their numbers are legion. Duncan Clarke (1974b) has written a short introductory study of domestic workers in Zimbabwe, who are largely male. There is also now Jacklyn Cock's magnificent South African study, *Maids and Madams* (1980), which because it deals entirely with women is discussed below. Clarke assessed the Masters and Servants Ordinance to bring forth its numerous pre-industrial, apparently feudal, aspects such as the legal obligation servants had to accompany their master wherever he chose within Rhodesia and the generally applicable penal sanctions that accompanied breach of contract. In a sense, the servant is the quintessential non-productive worker who would be doomed to economic extinction under socialism or indeed advanced capitalism, but this certainly does not make him (or her) the mostly likely candidate to lead the revolution. Indeed, the servant's isolation and remarkably impermeable form of oppression within an uncontrolled job market are what stand out in available accounts.

Labor in agriculture and labor in the informal sector has often been women's labor. In much of Africa, women are the farmers, and their work is fundamental to subsistence production. Moreover, if we take the peasant household as a unit of production and consumption, the woman's share in its maintenance is clearly crucial even if her activities relate as much to essential reproductive than to directly productive functions. In towns women work largely outside the formal sector. Only to a limited, if growing, extent are they workers in industry. By and large, they are small-scale producers, employees in little enterprises, petty merchants, providers of unmechanized services, and domestic workers. Scattered evidence suggests, moreover, that women are becoming generally more and more significant in every sector of the wage economy throughout the continent.

The woman as agriculturalist presents an increasingly important subject for the social scientist and problem for the development expert. The point has been made tellingly and repeatedly that development economics has used completely inappropriate and potentially ruinous male-centered models in misconceiving African agricultural systems (Nelsen, 1981; Bay, 1983). Jane Guyer (1982) has stressed that women's agricultural work as well as many other aspects of their economic position and general rights, shows a remarkably great variety throughout the African continent whose particularities deserve more respectful attention. Behind this, Jeanne Henn (1982), comparing women's work in parts of rural Tanzania and Cameroon, insists that there is absolutely no logic based either on reproductive biology or in productionist efficiency that justifies the sexual

division of labor. Far more than Guyer, Henn stresses the question of domination of men (or male elders) over women's labor. As such she returns to the general view of a "kinship mode of production" effectively exploited by a male gerontocracy so strikingly put forward by Claude Meillassoux. One may at this point suspect that the benign neglect of much development economists reflects not so much their ignorance of women's work as is implied by the Boserup (1970) model but deliberate policy aimed at intensification of the exploitation of women that must accompany increases in production.

Meillassoux's picture of African women as imbricated within a lineage and a household, exchanged in their lives between powerful men as part of a circuit, with their labor as both producers and reproducers exploited to the hilt, is intellectually compelling and, as Henn's work suggests, is far from the opposite of the truth in many cases. Internal inconsistencies, empirical realities, and lack of historical dimension, however, have led to attacks on Meillassoux's functionalism (Bozzoli, 1983) and, more ominously, attacks on the notion of a lineage mode of production or, indeed, the lineage as a social base in much of Africa. In some areas, lineage effectively amounts to more of an ideology than a social reality; in others, it is not even that. One of the big problems with the lineage mode, however, is that women are often far from entirely imbricated within it or, indeed, within a marriage. They have various social channels to deploy, various economic possibilities of independence, and they themselves are to be differentiated to such an extent that it is frequently senseless to lump them together as an economic or social category. Sam Jackson (1979), considering rural Hausaland, has suggested that women should be treated as a class since their relations with men are generally overtly formed through cash relationships and they can operate quite autonomously from a supposed male-centered household. This seems most unsatisfactory, since classes require a consciousness and an economic and social distinctness that women as a category in this region lack if we systematically assess their relation to men, their children, and to one another. There are, though, elements of truth in Jackson's polemic. Deborah Bryceson (1980) has recently contributed a more sophisticated formulation. In her general view of Tanzanian women, she sees an equally generalized struggle against patriarchy, a struggle waged in the context of an increasingly important cash nexus that begins to dissolve old patriarchal forms and brings a more and more significant number of women to town.

In the classic early colonial town there were few women, but this changed with time. One of the first writers to pay attention to this very important process, George Chauncey (1981), has stressed that there was a new lure in the requirement for a short-term daily urban reproduction of labor power, even when the more long-term process still occurred largely in the countryside. Chauncey sees women's labor as crucial but generally related to this basic reproduction process. The coming of women to the Copperbelt created a particular kind of urban culture and politics. He stresses also that the absence of women from the Zambian countryside was very important in rural decline. In most of the literature it has been assumed that the problem of underdevelopment (in family terms) is one of male absence and female-headed households alone (Stichter, 1975/76; Murray, 1981).

Chauncey's study is an excellent corrective to the type of earlier literature which simply considered women's wage work from the perspective of traditional and/or ignorant drudges becoming "modern" (Hochschild, 1967; Seibel, 1969).

One can criticize it, however, as overly functionalist. The reproduction model places too much weight on the stable and conflict-free household. What about the woman who flees her family to come to town? (Obbo, 1980). Indeed, an important factor in the most insightful available literature is that it senses that the older household was itself a problematic and often complex focus and that the social changes of the past half-century have often brought it deeper into crisis.

This crisis has never been more sharply delineated than in Claudine Vidal's (1977) beautifully written sketch of the war between the sexes in Abidjan. What Vidal adds particularly to an account such as that of Bryceson is the dimension of ideology. Her men seek through incessant struggles to impose on their women both forms of mental and material domination typical of older village ways *and* those imitative of the Western bourgeoisie (just as the Ivorian ruling class, in fact, tries to impose itself upon the population at large). The women maneuver between the two, dream of these roles in ideal form but also of an independence linked to business success in the informal sector. This in turn governs their relations with the men (and the CFA francs of the title). In this most colonial of West African cities, the ultimate female dream is to manipulate a European man.

However complex and significant the dreams and ambitions of the African working woman, there can be little question that her laboring is largely to be understood in terms of necessity (Belgraïd-Hassine, 1967; Karoui, 1976). Naïma Karoui's Tunisian research considers a type of woman worker in the "formal" sector who is employed for a certain phase of her life but is not by and large independent of the broader household. By contrast, Francine Kane's (1977) study of "femmes proletaires" in Dakar reveals a quarter where women outnumber men and women factory workers, domestics, and petty merchants often support unemployed husbands. This tends to destabilize the marriages and create further pressure on women to produce goods and services for cash. Iris Berger (1982) has emphasized this point particularly for South Africa where, by and large, the more than one million African women who work for wages in urban areas are supporting not just themselves but have other dependents. As Murray (1981) shows for Lesotho, it is the fortunate woman who can remain in the reserves and await her husband's remission of money from factory or mine. The harsh controls limiting woman's rights in the "white" areas merely serve to press her constantly to try to return there, forcing her to work at reduced wages.

Berger (1982) relates this specifically to the remarkable tradition of political militancy among South African women, although she barely begins to flesh out its specificity with its many pre-capitalist features. Resistance, specific or general, is particularly hard for the oppressed women domestics of South Africa, who may number 800,000 (Cock, 1980). They are frequently the sole support of children whom they can rarely even see while caring for the offspring of another family at wages that would be an insult to a man going down a mineshaft and for the most incredibly long hours. Cock calls domestic work the structural "Deep South" of South African labor. It is perhaps this complex diffuseness of oppression and the balance between household membership and participation in the generalized "state of women" (together with the pitfalls of discrimination and low pay) that suggests the particularities of the labor of African women.

Child labor, which frequently has a relation to women's labor, barely exists as a subject in the scholarly literature although deservedly it has long attracted the attention elsewhere of reformer and revolutionary alike. Morice (1982) places its significance in Senegal largely within the craft production and marketing sector

and uses it to demonstrate the cheap labor form of exploitation that governs the labor process within that sector. Enid Schildkrout (in Bay, 1983) takes a more specific instance to demonstrate how servicing within the informal economy can become a means through which some women tap back into men's extraction of surplus. In Islamic West Africa where women are secluded, they in turn need to exploit the time and efforts of their children to do this. On the work of children and far more so of women in its many facets, there is room for a large expansion of study and testing of ideas.

A NEW LITERATURE OF ENGAGEMENT

The final section of this essay focuses on the problem of scholarly engagement that underlies so much of the new literature that self-consciously seeks to avoid a managerial perspective. The Cohen, Copans, and Gutkind (1981) collection introducing African labor history to a wider public specifically called for a renewal of links between the militant worker and the intellectual as the heart of what matters in the literature. There is a powerful, eloquent call for engagement in a recent paper by Dave Hemson (1979: 26) on the Durban dockworkers which suggests that "a Marxist working class history has to move beyond merely retrieving workers as real and living people and also to engage in the debate about their ideas, the advances and retreats made by working class organization and to respect and advance the workers' critique of their traditional organizations." In more concrete terms, this has meant holding together three major elements (Hemson, 1979: 2):

the humanism of the social historian, the struggle to retrieve the collective consciousness of the workers, and the explanation of working class action in terms of the phases of capital accumulation.

The terms for doing this have come not from academic debate but directly from the critical thinking that goes on within a union, class, or popular framework. The third element, however, implies a very healthy respect for the best technical and scholarly literature on work and society in broadest perspective. Two bodies of literature suggest themselves for consideration along the lines that Hemson proposes, the investigation of workers' control in modern Africa and the analysis of the renewed black workers' movement in South Africa over the past decade. This material brings African labor literature closer than before seemingly to the classic European material assessed by Hobsbawm. It aspires to relate to a broadly defined workers' movement. How has this new writing shaped up?

The literature on workers' control may be said to suffer precisely because on this point have intellectuals laid so much weight for the purposes of socialist construction. Nowhere can one expect to find more readily an idealist criticism of "actually existing socialism" based upon deviations from utopian dreams. Nonetheless, it is through this too that one finds a compellingly interesting means of measuring the aspirations and capacities of African workers. Given the industrial backwardness of Africa, moreover, it is remarkable how many countries now have an experience either of state-directed schemes of workers' control over production or histories of worker seizures of control: Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Angola are all so far part of this experience.

The richest material available is on Algeria, where the regime promoted *autogestion* in the middle 1960s into a symbol for the new society that was being constructed out of the ruins of French colonialism. Several committed socialist

writers have provided substantial discussions of *autogestion* (Laks, 1970; Clegg, 1972; Chaulet, 1971). The most sustained account in English by Ian Clegg is a classic critique of "utopian" (if perhaps very pragmatic) socialist practice from a Marxist point of view. For Clegg (1972: 186), "the Algerian revolution was unfinished in the sense that the working class never seized the state and that the party was an appendage." From his perspective, there was little genuine reality to self-management of enterprise in Algeria.

All accounts stress that *autogestion*, whatever it became, arose spontaneously in response to massive desertions of property by French agricultural and industrial proprietors on the eve of independence. It thus bore little relation to any political intentions of the FLN fighting or in exile. Nor did it connect to the union movement (Weiss, 1970). Within the Algerian economy, the self-managed sector was a stepchild, consisting largely of small workshops or farms. From this heritage of second-best, it never seems to have emerged fully. Claudine Chaulet (1971) provides a very well-realized account of a self-managed estate in the Mitidja which explains operations on the ground level. For the workers, *autogestion* lacked the essential social or educational programs necessary to bring it to life. Workers remained passive, illiterate, and divided, as in French times, along the lines of skilled, unskilled, and migrant. While they achieved some security and dignity through the new dispensation, their grindingly low living standard at best remained on a par with what it had been before independence. Indeed participants aspired to get ordinary industrial worker's jobs. By contrast, it was in the state industrial sector that militant workers could be found; here there were big strikes against the regime in 1963–64 demanding *autogestion*! The relevant point in the paradox is that *autogestion* was always a top-down policy operated by the bureaucracy with little if any popular *gestion*. When the real thing emerged, the state saw it as a threat.

Sketchley and Lappé (1980) have recently provided a far more enthusiastic and supportive account of the Mozambican equivalent. Here too workers' control was not an initial FRELIMO principle but a practical measure inaugurated to respond to the desertion of Portuguese industrialists from the newly free country. One is also struck in Mozambique by the extent to which initiatives have depended on the party which in principle strongly backs worker awareness and self-conscious management. The main emphasis as the state views it, has lain in overcoming colonial habits of authority and restoring discipline and productivity. The successes in this direction have relied entirely then on the morale, political purpose, and effectiveness of state officials. In other words, a certain paternalism exists, which has apparently gone through good and bad phases. It appears to be too early to give much of a verdict on how well self-managed projects will survive in Mozambique, but there are other African comparisons to be made, for instance with Nasser's Egypt (Tomiche, 1971).

Only in Tanzania has a literature, indeed a highly critical one, considered these issues rather more strictly from a worker perspective. Pascal Mihyo (1975) provides an important account of struggles from the opening of the 1970s in which "instead of laying down tools, the workers have picked them up and made them sharper" (see also Mapolu, 1976). Here there was substantial worker initiative with a profound rift breaking open between the young industrial working class in Dar es Salaam and the Tanzanian state. The Tanzanian radicals Mihyo, Mapolu, and Shivji (1976) write enthusiastically about the workers' initiatives. Nowhere is there a sharper divide than in the Tanzanian literature between those

socialists whose commitment is above all to a working class as constituted and those committed to a state directed towards socialist (or public sector) development.

If the present conjuncture in Tanzania appears less hopeful for workers' advances, it is nonetheless likely that similar conflicts and intensification of conscious struggle on the part of workers with the state and capital will come to mark the African scene. It is likely to become of greater importance for those who see the African worker as the vanguard of a new Africa and seek engagement with him or her. This will require a greater effort than is characteristic in the relevant literature so far to retrieve more of the general history of the working class of the region and period. The original and complex history of the Algerian working class, for instance, is neglected in the studies considered above and requires a great deal of attention.

Over the past decade, South Africa, following a lengthy period of labor peace—which one might consider the peace of the dead—has witnessed important bouts of industrial conflict and the rise, amidst considerable adversity, of an independent non-racial trade union movement.²³ One result has been gradually to bring more of a labor perspective into the nationalist and liberal mentality which has tended to predominate among those in the West opposed to apartheid. The more traditional, liberal approach to disinvestment, for instance, has rested on two approaches: persuading foreign businesses to operate as a functioning pressure and lobbying group on Pretoria, and on issues of retraining and promotion aimed at creating a color-blind management rather like U.S. affirmative action programs (a phrase now used widely among South African liberal managers). Desaix Myers (1979) shows that the corporate-backed Sullivan principles only very late took up even the minimal issue of union recognition. Indeed, Myers notes, American companies in South Africa often have outstandingly poor records on wages and union recognition, giving up far less to workers than the law permits. These two issues have received relatively little attention in U.S. disinvestment literature; from a socialist perspective, however, they are precisely the ones that count, given the realities of capitalist management that Myers so well exposes (Legassick, 1975). Unsurprisingly activist concern in South Africa internationally is gradually shifting towards a greater interest in solidarity with the more radical elements in the trade union movement (Fine and Welch, 1982).

Black labor insurgency in South Africa has had a much broader impact, however, than just to introduce a labor perspective into the anti-apartheid movement. It has liberated an enormous amount of thought that the more narrowly nationalist perspectives prevalent in the 1960s had seemingly bottled up. The strength of the labor movement, in some cases through the active involvement of specific intellectuals, has been the major reason why labor issues have inserted themselves to the head of writing on South African issues generally and given that writing a vitality and excitement that casts an increasing general influence on African studies continentally and contrasts dramatically with the relatively moribund state of South African scholarship during the 1960s.

The simplest consequence has been a great quantity of new material available on labor in the country. Much of this has followed fairly traditional lines. Edward Feit's (1975) history of the ANC-linked South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) is a rather managerially-oriented study from abroad. By explaining the constraints on SACTU so largely in terms of state oppression, Feit makes it

difficult to understand how a new labor movement did arise a decade after the suppression of SACTU. SACTU is also the subject of a recent inspirational history, rich in detail but analytically conservative, and organization-bound (Luckhardt and Wall, 1981).

The force and complexity of the stirrings in labor have also evoked the need for work that considers the unions from a more wide-ranging political point of view. Richard Moorsom (1979), writing about the Namibian General Strike of 1971–72, calls it a “calculated political strategy” and raises the issues of worker consciousness in this context. Two strands worked themselves out particularly: a general desire to renegotiate the terms of contract labor in Namibia and the attempt to withdraw labor as part of the restoration of an idealized pre-capitalist Ovambo economy. These could not easily lead in the direction of unionization and in fact fed rather into the growing success of the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO), a nationalist organization that had taken up arms against the South African occupying authorities. For South Africa, Merle Lipton (1980: 139) has shrewdly suggested that “there seems to have been as much industrial unrest at firms instituting progressive labour policies as in those resisting change.” Indeed as the non-racial unions have gained strength and maturity, they have increasingly been groping for means to create a political workers’ power base that goes beyond classic syndicalist ideas (which not surprisingly find an historic resonance in South African conditions) on the one hand and “popular front” strategies on the other in which the trade unions can simply be one constituent element and labor find itself as subordinated as happened after independence in other African countries (Foster, 1982).

Such efforts lead those aspiring to be the “organic intellectuals” working within the South African working-class movement towards attempts to bridge the gap between economic and political militancy (Hemson, 1978). Dave Hemson (1979) emphasizes three aims in the production of labor history that seem particularly worth emphasizing: to establish the migrant worker as a specific type of proletarian rather than as a man or woman living with one foot in one world and one in another, to reconceptualize the trade union “as a revolutionary fighting movement rather than a collective bargaining unit,” and to restore to South African history the primacy of class analysis. He sums up the last point thus (1979: 31):

Working class history is most important in a country in which from racist, liberal and nationalist perspectives a working class as such does not exist, only fragmentary and racially constituted groups of workers.

For Eddie Webster (1981), this has meant the struggle to establish “working class hegemony” over the broad popular movement he sees developing in black South Africa. For Luli Callinicos (1980) it has included the construction of a beautifully illustrated people’s history of South Africa. Callinicos’ book is as important to consider in its own way as works of scholarly innovation. She proposes a general view of history as “struggle for survival of those whose hands made the wealth.” Her message is that “in the compound, in the townships, in the labour bureaus, in the reserves, the pattern created by South Africa’s early industrialisation is still with us—the present is our history.” She has produced an eye-catching history of capitalist initiative and of elemental struggles, that is, popular resistance, in its many forms.

There has been a good deal of new research into South Africa’s laboring past. Both Webster and Callinicos put great weight on an historical approach, as does

Hemson. Rob Davies (1979) has written a major study of the formation of the white proletariat set with considerable conviction along the line of changes in the structure and dictates of South African capital. Those changes have long since involved as a prime element the de-skilling and "relocating" of white labor, often to the accompaniment of fierce, if often unsuccessful, resistance. There must be few studies in the field this paper surveys that are as resolutely unsympathetic to the workers discussed as is Davies to his subjects. A recent article takes up Davies' and Johnstone's discussions of white miners and very astutely brings it up to date in explaining why their struggles of the 1920s failed to repeat themselves half a century later despite the appeals of the miners' Afrikaner nationalist leadership (Sitas, 1979).

Darcy DuToit (1981) has been perhaps most consistent in producing a long and informative study of the industrial conflict of the 1970s along virtually pure capital versus labor lines. His analysis almost entirely drops the question of contradictions within the capitalist community and the often complex, sometimes even antagonistic, relations between capital and the state. For him (1981: 116), the unions are poised between the "Scylla of state repression and the Charybdis of 'liberal seduction'." Reform attempts are more or less secondary defenses of capital when apartheid state repression fails.

This is a return for the anti-class analyses of the 1960s with a vengeance, but it can in its own way obscure much that the militant as well as the scholar actually need to know. Some of the new militant writing is so reductive, so determined to isolate out the industrial working class that it leaves out fundamental social phenomena that must be developed and returned to the analysis. Colin Murray's work on rural migrants and Jacklyn Cock's on domestics and much more that considers other themes than the union and the male, industrial working class so defined must be integrated with the approaches of Callinicos, DuToit, Webster or Hemson.²⁴ It is interesting to contrast Eddie Webster's (1978) important collection of pieces selected from the *South African Labour Bulletin* focused on labor (and largely union) history with another edited by Belinda Bozzoli (1979) organized by preference around the "social history of the Witwatersrand" and broaching a range of cultural themes. A more recent collection edited by Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (1982) has also deliberately tried to join up the economic formation of an African working class earlier in this century to broader linkages outside the class and to social and cultural phenomena of moment.

Charles van Onselen (1982) has recently presented two volumes of independent essays, *New Nineveh* and *New Babylon* which add up to a social and economic history of the Rand before 1914. These marvelously evocative essays highlight the struggles and adaptations of a rich range of Rand inhabitants: Jews, Afrikaners, Zulus, and others. Van Onselen generalizes little beyond giving the most important salient historical facts, but the heart of his collection is the interplay between structure—"the world the mineowners made"—and process. If his *Chibaro* was something of a muckraker's book on the Rhodesian mines, his new collection, while consistently anti-bourgeois, is more of a celebration of the delights of this strange city of gold and its kaleidoscopic inhabitants. Much attention is devoted to the numerous folk who did not get employed in the formal sector—cabdrivers, washermen, servants, prostitutes, and various types of criminals—and their attempts to evade or stop the multifarious attempts by capital and the state to apply forms of social control. Van Onselen's work will be criticized by some as politically disengaged. This is a definite tension in it between

reference to the tragedy of South Africa and van Onselen's delight in the weaving of his rich social fabric, his Nineveh and Babylon. It is a sign of this tension that he virtually leaves out racism and its impact from Rand society. He prefers, instead, to give particular weight to those interconnections that cross the racial fault-lines. While beautifully illuminating the theme of social controls in its complexity, van Onselen studiously eschews any theoretical discussion. His work shows strong affinities with the so-called New Social History in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere. Characteristically, one of his finest essays first appeared in the *History Workshop Journal*. There appears to be a considerable skepticism towards organizational forms but a deep commitment to the "inarticulate" and to voicing their history, already manifest in *Chibaro*.

Labor insurgency in South Africa has thus brought on both innovative forms of scholarship removed from traditional areas of scholarly concern and heightened and enriched doses of the old, still vital medicine. The current South African literature on labor, which still often reveals a breathless and unreflected quality, brings out two fundamental processes that highlight current thinking on labor and labor history in Africa: the continual search for relevance and engagement which has always lain at the heart of the most memorable writing on this subject and the arrival, with the decline of certainties about the union and party-political orientated "forward march of labor" internationally, of new approaches, ideas, and themes which are invigorating the literature. Engagement has not, however, eliminated manipulation or managerialism. Nor has it brought together all the committed; it is itself a catchword for intense intellectual debates that divides as much as it unites.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this essay has been to take a snapshot of African labor studies as they appear to my eyes at this time in order to establish some old and new connections rather than to insist upon portentous prophecies for where the field is headed. A few conclusions are, however, in order. One conclusion is that there has been a flourishing literature on African labor that has passed rapidly and sometimes confusingly beyond the boundaries conventionally set for the subject. For this there have been a number of causes: the declining vigor of African nationalism per se as an inspiration to progressive scholars, the increasing recognition (within a largely economically stagnant continent) of labor studies as important to broader development considerations and the example of labor studies, notably in the field of history, taking off in new directions elsewhere in the West. An important caveat that must here be made is that little of the literature even now emanates from Africans and, as a result, in unmediated response to African conditions. Labor has at the same time been given an unprecedented role in all kinds of subject matter in which it previously played little part. Thus, the definition of what constitutes labor studies, labor supply, or the labor movement perhaps, has been greatly widened and deepened. Furthermore, the boundary between managerial and non-managerial approaches has been obscured.

If there is a single issue that wittingly or unwittingly underlies all the relevant literature, it is the question of class—class formation, class history, class relationships, class consciousness. To what extent and from when and why can we speak of an African working class? The answers diverge markedly from

perspective to perspective, even where an apparent commitment of the type Hobsbawm suggests defines the best European literature has been espoused.

A friend in the field of American labor history suggested that this diversity, becoming inchoate, is increasingly promoting a sense of unease and crisis in his colleagues. Perhaps we in African labor ought to feel the same. Where labor studies head depends on extraneous and largely material factors rather than the arguments of intellectuals. In other words, the demands of western capital, the needs of intellectuals, and the actual course of political and economic change in Africa will primarily determine whether labor continues to be as seminal a subject and how research into it will proceed. My guess is that there is and will remain considerable vitality in labor studies both as more traditionally constituted and infused with new considerations, while labor will increasingly be taken as a *sine qua non* for comprehending broader social and historical patterns. There two trends are complementary and can continue to complement one another.

NOTES

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1. For a parallel discussion from an American perspective, see Gutman (1983).
2. See also Orde Browne (1932).
3. The "civilisation du loisir" idea is close to being resuscitated in Goran Hyden's "economy of affection" (1980).
4. For a critique of some of those influenced by Lewis, see Weeks (1971).
5. In addition, Hellman published her research in article form before the war in Britain.
6. For an impressive general study of African labor published during wartime, see van der Horst (1942).
7. For French colonial Africa, the most influential equivalent figure was the pioneer in African studies among French sociologists, Georges Balandier, who worked largely in Brazzaville and hypothesized the "colonial situation." Additionally Robert Montagne (1952), leading an impressive study of workers in Morocco, gave an excellent picture of the feeding, clothing, housing and general customs of his subjects, in work that is in many respects parallel to that in Northern Rhodesia.
8. John Commons, the real founder of academic labor studies in the United States, was essentially a corporate liberal confident that:

America's industrial problems could be solved at the bargaining table where third parties like himself could offer their expertise to help resolve disputes peaceably and thereby serve the mutual interest of both sides while promoting the welfare of the general public (Dawley, 1976: 184).

Our premier journal of labor history, *Labor History*, was after all inaugurated with a commendation from George Meany.

9. See however Ananaba (1979); Bentum (1967); Blay (1960); Cowan (1961); Lubembe (1968); Tettegah (1962); Wudu (1968).
10. This latter liberation, of course, has only advanced to a limited extent and is seriously threatened by the tight economic conditions and reactionary political climate of the early 1980s.

11. I have suggested elsewhere, with regard to theft by workers, that this is too simple and linear a view (Freund, 1982).
12. See also on Uganda, Grillo's valuable discussion of railwaymen (1972a; 1972b).
13. This is very much less the case in an excellent study Kapferer (1976) made of a Kabwe miners' strike because there he subtly integrates the overt and real reasons that motivate the workers. Here class relations are illuminated, not obscured.
14. See also Alverson (1978).
15. R. Joseph (1974) presents relevant parallels.
16. See Spiegel in Mayer (1980).
17. Fall (1976/77; 1983), in his work on the French Sudan, sees it decline largely in terms of the changing post-war needs of French capital, not merely as part of a beneficent evolution.
18. For Zimbabwe, see Clarke (1974), Harris (1975), and Thornton (1978).
19. See also Shea (1975).
20. Meillassoux (1975) develops the analysis of nineteenth century West Africa much further. See also Clarence-Smith (1979a).
21. Guyer would add the qualitative differences in those relations need consideration as well. A very useful survey of literature then available, rather bland on issues of exploitation and social control, is Cleave (1974).
22. For a defense of the "efficiency" of the sector, see Fapohunda and Lubell (1978).
23. The new labor movement is discussed in DuToit (1981), Hemson (1978), Institute for Industrial Education (1974), and Lachartre (1977), and it is documented in the *South African Labour Bulletin* published since 1974.
24. From a feminist perspective, see Bozzoli (1983).

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