

Diminishing returns: Circulatory migration linking Cape Town to the Eastern Cape

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During the second half of the twentieth century, circulatory migration was widely considered to be the norm for black South Africans with a rural background. Regarding the city of Cape Town as receiving area for rural migrants from the Eastern Cape, such migration streams are currently being replaced by gravity flow migration. This reflects a change in the nature of urban transition taking place, at least in that city and its hinterland.

Introduction

In a recent survey of disadvantaged households in the Eastern and Western Cape (comprising three samples: Xhosa-speakers residing in the Eastern Cape, Xhosa-speakers in the Western Cape, and Afrikaans-speaking coloureds), no case of Xhosa-speaking return or circulatory migration from Cape Town to the Eastern Cape was identified. The period under consideration covered the adult lives of adult respondents. Six percent of all recorded moves in the Eastern Cape Xhosa-speaking sample involved migration back to the original home, none from the Western Cape. Though sample sizes were not large, the result is nonetheless surprising. In the Afrikaans-speaking coloured sample, seven per cent of moves were of this nature and in an earlier related migration survey conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, the rate was nine per cent (Cross et al., 1999)

The purpose of this article is to consider whether circulatory migration, particularly that linking Cape Town to original rural homes in the Eastern Cape, is being replaced among Xhosa-speakers by permanent rural-urban migration, by gravity flow migration. At a national level, this question has recently been raised in a policy context (Todes, 1999) and is clearly of direct importance to the spatial allocation of housing as well as of both economic and social infrastructure.

Data used for discussion have been drawn from a number of secondary sources, from 1996 census data (StatsSA, 1998 & 1998a), and from two recent surveys - the one mentioned above (Survey 1)¹ and a 1998 survey conducted in the Cape Metropolitan Area (CMA) for the Cape Metropolitan Council (Survey 2)².

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The debate regarding circulatory migration in South Africa revolves around the nature of *urban transition* (Frew, 1997:8): As urbanisation takes place to what extent are rural people who migrate to urban areas settling permanently in their new region or new home -- a process here termed one way **gravity flow** (Cross et al., 1999)? To what extent are rural and urban populations separating, thereby weakening urban-rural linkages? Or, on the other hand, to what extent are rural people caught up in migration streams making essentially temporary movements which may be of long duration and which may take them to different places, but that ultimately return them to their starting point (Dewar et al., 1991:20) -- a process here termed **circulatory migration**? In this case, the nature of urban transition is more complex and sharp distinctions between rural and urban blur.

Mayer and Mayer (1974:19) conceptualised circulatory migration in the following terms:

"(Economic) expansion of East London ... has depended on a growing supply of Xhosa workers from the Ciskei and Transkei... Because the labour is migrant and because current policy aims at keeping it so, this increasing social traffic has to be thought of as a two-way traffic. The expansion of town carries the possibility of growing numbers of Xhosa learning to prefer the urban sort of life (even if not being able to live it permanently); of their going home and spreading its gospel through the countryside."

Wilson (1972:i) wrote:

"Oscillating migration occurs when men's homes are so far from their work that they cannot commute daily and can see their families only weekly, monthly, yearly or even less frequently... Most countries employ some seasonal migrants, particularly in agriculture: South Africa is unusual in the number of migrant workers in other sectors of the economy."

Both observations identified the widespread persistence of circulatory migration in South Africa during the second half of the twentieth century. They also identified the search for "work" as the

migration accordingly underlines the importance of kin ties established and maintained in the original rural home. This is because in the receiving area, it is typically kin who are the migrant workers and who remit home, while in the rural sending areas, it is typically kin who harvest and produce local resources for the rural home. The pull of "home" in this sense may be exerted on migrants throughout their lives.

Comparing relevant conditions in the Eastern and Western Cape

Decisions leading to the migration of a household relate to which resources members of the household expect to access at their destination. As Cross et al. (1999) put it:

"Migration decisions around where to go relate not only to immediate questions like site access or job access, but also stretch outward further to include the entire range of resources the household expects to access through its acquisition of a site. Both social and informational and environmental resources are locality-bound, and change with migration."

Improved access to such resources, or at least expectations in this regard, forms a primary explanation for migration. If such resources are moreover

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Human Development Index 1992* | 0,826 | 0,507 | 0,667 |
| Functional urbanisation level 1996 | 89,4 | 43,3 | 54,4 |
| Labour force 1995('000) | 1 734 | 1739 | 14 355 |
| Unemployment rate 1995 | 18,6 | 41,4 | 29,3 |
| Real GGP per capita 1994 (R) | 9 104 | 2 626 | |
| Real GGP per worker 1994 (R) | 31 322 | 24 770 | |
| % children living in poverty 1993 | 22,2 | 55,9 | 54 |
| Infant mortality rate 1994 | 26 | 57 | 42 |

Sources: DBSA 1998a: 210,211

Similarly, substantial provincial differences in the state delivery of economic infrastructure, housing, and social infrastructure are displayed in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

Table 2 Economic infrastructure- per province

| | Percentage of houses with access to - | | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|--------------|-------|-------|---------------|-------|
| | Electricity (1996) | | | Water (1993) | | | Sanitation (1 | |
| | Tot | Urban | Rural | Tot | Urban | Rural | Tot | Urban |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| WC | 83 | 89 | 50 | 94 | 99 | 64 | 88 | 98 |
| EC | 33 | 71 | 12 | 69 | 93 | 56 | 29 | 75 |

Sources: DBSA, 1998a: 210-211

Table 3 State-funded housing delivery within the one million housing programme per province

| | Actual number of houses to be built in the 1m housing programme Number ('000) | Total number of houses built or under construction March 1994 to April 1998 | |
|--------------|--|---|---------------------|
| | | Number ('000) | % of target reached |
| Western Cape | 114 | 24,7 | 21,7 |
| Eastern Cape | 152 | 6,2 | 4,1 |

Source: DBSA 1998a: 204

Table 4 Social infrastructure - Western and Eastern Cape (1995)

| Education | | |
|--|------|------|
| Total number of pupils ('000) | 857 | 2333 |
| Primary pupils as % of total pupils | 67 | 75 |
| Pupils per educator | 25 | 40 |
| Health | | |
| Doctors per 1000 of the population | 0,76 | 0,22 |
| Number of hospital beds per 1000 of the population | 3,7 | 3,6 |

Source: DBSA, 1998a: 210-211

These social and economic indicators identify differences in the two provinces for their resident populations in general. To specify differences in access to resources within the disadvantaged Xhosa-speaking populations, a series of results from Surveys 1 and 2 will be summarised.

If mean per capita monthly incomes in the EC and WC Xhosa-speaking samples within Survey 1 are compared (though none are located above a reasonable poverty datum line), variance between the WC and the EC is striking. In the EC, within different settlement areas, per capita incomes ranged from R100 per month (on white-owned farms) to R248 per month (in peri-urban tribal authorities). In the WC, means began (on black-owned farms) at R170 per month and ranged up to R400 per month (on white-owned farms) (Cross et al., 1999). In short, in terms of these raw income statistics, virtually any receiving area in the WC appears preferable to those in the EC.

Regarding opportunities for employment, the variance is similar and equally striking. Again, whilst the situation in the WC and in Cape Town is far from full employment, formal unemployment of household heads in the WC was 20% whereas in the EC sample, it stood marginally above 60% (Survey 1). Since household sizes in both samples are small, most households rely on the head for cash income. This difference in access to employment is, accordingly, critically important in explaining migration streams from the EC into the WC. In addition, though recent migrants from the former Transkei in Cape Town reflect a higher unemployment rate than blacks born locally.

These rates are approximately half comparable rates in the Eastern Cape (Cross & Bekker, 1999).

Accordingly, from an EC point of view, it appears that there is currently in the WC superior access to

- Employment;
- social infrastructure (education and health);
- economic infrastructure (transport, electricity, housing infrastructure); and
- higher levels of income.

Access to a *site* and to *lodging* in locations where these other resources are available in the province also appears to have been comparatively good over the 1994-1998 period. State housing projects launched during this period, as displayed in Table 5, were spatially located along the well-endowed eastern and southern coastline of the Western Cape, as well as in the Winelands district close to the Cape Metropolitan Area (CMA).

Table 5 State housing projects approved by districts - April 1994 to February 1998

| District | % of housing approved | % of provincial population |
|---------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Cape Town | 34 | 65 |
| WineLands | 5 | 7 |
| Southern Cape | 20 | 7 |
| Breede River | 15 | 7 |
| West Coast | 13 | 6 |
| Overberg | 6 | 4 |
| Little Karoo | 4 | 3 |
| Central Karoo | 3 | 1 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100 |
| Number | 94 941 | |

Source: Bekker, 1999

Non-metropolitan provision is disproportionately larger than that in the CMA, reflecting growing demand in disadvantaged communities along the east and south coast of the WC (Bekker, 1999).

Simultaneously, informal settlements have developed rapidly in urban areas located along this coastal route. In the towns of George and Mossel Bay, municipal officials estimated in 1997 that 28% of all households were living in informal settlements, one third of whom were in backyard shacks (Bekker, 1999). In the CMA, the total shack count is estimated to have risen from 28 300 in 1993 to 59 854 in 1996, and to 72 140 in 1998 (Abbott & Douglas, 1999). In effect, using a mean size estimate of four for households in these settlements, some 40% of the black population of the CMA reside on a site and in accommodation located within these freestanding informal settlements.

These two trends - state-driven housing delivery for the disadvantaged and the development of

migrant heads make up 93% of all heads of household (Cross & Bekker, 1999).

Circulatory migration between Cape Town and the Eastern Cape

Social and kin networks

Migrating households consider their social networks, and their kin networks in particular, as important resources. Members of these households accordingly continually invest in the maintenance of these links, in the caring of this social capital.

In a recent study of three informal settlements in Cape Town in which four out of five household heads had recently migrated with their households from the EC, it was found that these heads typically visited their rural homes once a year (Lohnert, 1998). Writing some years back on the changing composition of black households in Cape Town, Spiegel *et al.* (1996: 9) refer to:

'(a)nnual and bi-annual movements of Cape Town-based migrants to visit rural kin, intermittent movements of rurally-based wives and children to visit husbands in Cape Town, trips by school children from the Eastern Cape to visit kin during school holidays, visits between the widely separated African residential areas of Cape Town.'

homesteads in rural sending areas have also been widely reported over the last decade. In 1990, in Khayelitsha, one third of households owned land in such areas, of whom some three-quarters remitted (albeit not always regularly) (Seekings *et al.*, 1990:51f). In 1995, in a sample covering both formal as well as informal settlements in the CMA, 13% reported owning land in such areas, of whom less than 1 in 10 invested in such property (Mazur & Qangule, 1995:21). In 1998, 3 out of 10 households in the informal settlements and slightly more than 2 out of 10 in the formal townships owned and/or contributed to a second homestead. For migrating households, with few exceptions, these households were in rural sending areas.

Residents in these second homesteads were kin, together with children of Cape Town parents in one half of cases in the informal settlements and in 40% of cases in the townships (Survey 2). Results of Survey 2 as displayed in Table 6 suggest that one in four migrating households in the townships have maintained ties of this nature over time with rural sending areas whereas these ties within the informal settlements diminish as length of residence in the CMA increases.

Table 6 Household head owns and/or contributes toward a second homestead

| Period of entry into CMA | Formal township residents | Informal settlement residents |
|--------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| | % within each cell (numbers in brackets) | |
| In CMA since age 18 | 15,2 (45) | 16,7 (12) |
| Before 1984 | 34,0 (48) | 14,2 (32) |
| 1984-88 | 35,1 (18) | 18,7 (53) |
| 1989-93 | 29,6 (27) | 33,2 (89) |
| 1994+ | 22,2 (18) | 29,8 (47) |

Source: Survey 2

Children in homesteads in rural sending areas

As identified above, a number of children of migrant parents in the CMA have remained in rural sending areas. In 1998, this was found to be the case in 14% of households in informal settlements, and in 10% of households in townships (Survey 2). Ten years earlier, the main reasons given by Khayelitsha residents for this separation of parent and child were inadequate schooling in the CMA as well as violence and disruption in the city (Seekings *et al.* 1990). In the light of improved social infrastructure delivery in the CMA and in the WC (relative to the EC), it is significant to note that there appears to be a recent in-migration of children joining their parents' households in the CMA some time after the household has established itself. Twelve per cent of all children in black households (surveyed in 1998) joined their parents after the household has been established in its present location. Moreover, this trend has picked up strongly in the 1994-1998 period, particularly in informal settlements. In addition, though sending for children is sometimes a local affair within the CMA - particularly for township households - the majority of cases are from rural sending areas to the CMA.

In short, it would appear that migrant parents frequently move to improved accommodation so as to be able to arrange that their children who stayed behind join them (see Table 4.10, Cross & Bekker, 1999). An increasing number of households in the past four years have been able to find such accommodation and have thereby accommodated their children in these new homes.

Intentions to return

Numerous studies over the past decade have revealed that a large proportion of adult black Capetonians intend to return to their rural sending areas, albeit sometimes given particular conditions (Seekings *et al.*, 1990; Mazur & Qangule, 1995; Spiegel *et al.*, 1996). As a generalisation, the proportion expressing such a preference ranges from one third to one half of household heads. Suffice it to say here that in the CMA 1998 survey, as displayed in Table 7, the proportion expressing an intention to retire to rural

sending areas was significantly higher among households in informal settlements than in townships, and diminished significantly as the period of residence within the CMA increased. It appears likely that expressed intention reflects both a general wish to return to rural kin as well as a sense of duty, possibly obligation, to maintain these kin links.

Table 7 Where would you like to stay after your retirement from work?

| Type of residence | Period of entry into CMA | | | |
|---------------------|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | Before 1984 | 1984 - 88 | 1989 - 93 | 1994+ |
| | % who selected option "return to original place" (numbers in brackets) | | | |
| Informal settlement | 54,8 (31) | 46,2 (52) | 44,3 (88) | 63,8 (47) |
| Township | 20,6 (34) | 23,5 (17) | 37,0 (27) | 50,0 (18) |

Cases of circulatory migration identified in the 1998 CMA survey

Two questions in the Cape Town survey attempted to probe the extent and direction of out-migration from the area within which the respondent head was living. As the two tables (8 & 9) below show, circulatory migration from the townships during the five years prior to the survey date was recorded as nil, whereas it did figure in the informal settlements. Its presence however was small: over a five year period one case of a neighbour-household returning to their sending area, and three cases of an elderly household member returning. It is significant to note that elderly kin were also recorded as moving to Johannesburg (also 3 cases) and into the Winelands (2 cases) during this period. All cases of the youth moving remained within the CMA and its immediate environs.

Table 8 Concerning the people who have moved out of this area during the last five years, where did the family whom you knew best, move to?'

| Type of residence | Number moved to | | | | | N |
|---------------------|------------------|------------|--------------|-----|------------|-----|
| | Elsewhere in CMA | Wine-lands | Eastern Cape | Jhb | Don't know | |
| Township | 43 | | | 1 | 116 | 160 |
| Informal settlement | 45 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 185 | 234 |

Source: Survey 2

Table 9 If family/relatives moved permanently out of this area during the past five years, where did they move to?'

| | Number moved to | | | | | N |
|----------------------------|------------------|------------|--------------|-----|------------|-----|
| | Elsewhere in CMA | Wine-lands | Eastern Cape | Jhb | Don't know | |
| Township | | | | | | |
| Oldest person | 36 | - | - | 2 | 120 | 158 |
| Youngest person | 10 | | | | 148 | 158 |
| Informal settlement | | | | | | |
| Oldest person | 20 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 193 | 219 |
| Youngest person | 9 | 1 | | | 209 | 219 |

Source: Survey 2

Return migration to the Eastern Cape: 1996 Census data

The 1996 RSA-census included one question that is of direct relevance to the question of circulatory migration between Cape Town and rural EC. These questions refer to each member of the household and are designed to establish the location of and date of departure from the previous residence. The greater the period between this move and the census date, the less reliable data about the extent of inter-regional migration becomes (since other moves, during the intervening period, cast increasing doubt on the sizes of these migration flows). Nonetheless, particularly for periods immediately prior to the census date, data are useful.

Table 10 reveals that some 80% of adult black residents who have left the WC to reside in the EC before census day, were former Cape Town residents. In the light of a number of recent sources (Seekings et al., 1990; Mazur & Qangule, 1995; Surveys 1 and 2), it is fair to assume that these migrants are returning to their province of origin. Less than half of these adult return migrants, however, returned to the former Transkei and Ciskei (Table 11), suggesting that these migrants have sought out new homesteads in or closer to larger towns and cities in the EC. Moreover, it appears, (at least with regard to that part of 1996 which preceded census day), that less than 1 in 1000 of elderly black residents in the WC returned to the EC (Table 12). This low return suggesting that the large majority of this cohort remains in or in the vicinity of Cape Town. Similar results for younger cohorts were also established.

Table 10 From where did you move to this Eastern Cape dwelling – Black respondents 18 years and over (1994-1996)

| | Moved from | | Total | |
|--------|-----------------|----------------------|-------|------|
| | Cape Metro Area | Rest of Western Cape | % | N |
| Male | 78,3 | 21,7 | 100,0 | 725 |
| Female | 81,2 | 18,8 | 100,0 | 714 |
| Total | 79,8 | 20,2 | 100,0 | 1439 |

Source: SSA unpublished 1996 census results

Table 11 Destination in the Eastern Cape of migrants from the Western Cape – Black respondents 18 years and over (1994-1996)

| | Destination in Eastern Cape | | | Total | |
|--------|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|-------|------|
| | Former Transkei | Former Ciskei | Other places in the Eastern Cape | % | N |
| Male | 22.9 | 21.2 | 55.9 | 100,0 | 725 |
| Female | 23.5 | 21.4 | 55.1 | 100,0 | 714 |
| Total | 23.2 | 21.3 | 55.5 | 100,0 | 1439 |

Source: SSA unpublished 1996 census results

Table 12 Direct migration from the Western Cape to the Eastern Cape (last move) – Black respondents 18 years in three age cohorts

| Year moved | Age range | | | Total |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------|------|-------|
| | 18-44 | 45-59 | 60+ | |
| 1993 | 273 | 51 | 31 | 355 |
| 1994 | 224 | 41 | 16 | 282 |
| 1995 | 428 | 58 | 34 | 520 |
| 1996 | 544 | 67 | 27 | 638 |
| As % of WC adult population | 0.12 | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.11 |

Source: StatSA (1998) and unpublished 1996 census results

Conclusion

For a number of rural Xhosa-speaking communities in the EC, the WC, and the CMA in particular, have become attractive destinations. They have been thoroughly explored and experienced and are accordingly well known to members of these communities. Attractions relate to comparative advantages in finding a site, in regular income, in jobs, and in accessing economic and social infrastructure. It is probable that the material resources in these destination areas for adults and children alike are not only widely known but also well understood.

Again in material terms, the rural sending areas of the former Transkei and Ciskei are declining. Migrant labour opportunities and related remittances continue to diminish (Hamman, 1996; Strauss Commission, 1996; Todes1999), unemployment rates are comparatively higher (Leibrandt & Sperber, 1997), water shortages are taking on critical dimensions, and deterioration in grazing land and the environment is widespread. These adverse conditions severely restrict the ability of households to collect and harvest food and medicinal resources to supplement their income (Cross et al., 1999).

The most important constraint on migration is the social obligation to maintain social and kin ties in one's community of origin. Where the new residence enables frequent contact to be maintained, and where the new residential community includes kin and members from the home community, this constraint may be partially relaxed. Accordingly, in the EC, the increasingly common development of two homesteads sharing familial ties variously called double rootedness (May, 1996), multiple homestead households, or the regionalisation of the household (De Wet & Holbrook, 1997) is interpreted as a resolution to the dilemma of social obligation and economic necessity. In effect, some members of a rural household set up a second homestead in a nearby town or city and maintain close and regular contact between the two homesteads. Social capital is extended rather than reconstructed.

In the minds of migrants, Cape Town as a new residence is probably perceived differently. In contradistinction to ten years ago, Cape Town is a known destination with extensive social and kin ties directly accessible to migrants from numerous rural communities. To access a site, to identify income opportunities, to find a school, all require such social capital. As was shown above, migrant households in the WC have invested heavily in constructing this social capital. Accordingly, the difference between Cape Town and towns and cities in the EC is not only one of distance, but also of greater investment in local social and kin ties and institutions. There is no accessible rural base where part of the social capital that may be drawn upon, is invested.

As a consequence, though newly settled households do express the intention to return, this expectation weakens over time. It also weakens as children left behind join their parents. It is clear that the obligation to maintain ties persists but the reality of distance and a new way of life weigh more heavily than they would if close and regular contact between the two homesteads took place. Barring a household crisis, which cannot be resolved in Cape Town, the chances of returning to the rural homestead diminish over time.

In so far as this interpretation is valid, it would appear useful to identify specific examples of return migration -- particularly from destination areas like the CMA -- and to seek reasons for the final move that completes the circle. Anchor factors at the rural end (Leibrandt & Sperber 1997), and crisis factors at the urban end may be relevant. In short, it may be time to ask why circulatory migration continues in particular cases rather than to continue to ask why it still endures as a general way of life in rural South Africa.

Notes

1. Sizes of samples were 283 EC Xhosa-speaking, 166 WC Xhosa-speaking, and 214 Afrikaans-speaking Coloured in the WC. Stratified samples were drawn on the basis of spatial regions and settlement types in the two provinces. The survey took place during the second half of 1997 (Cross et al, 1999) and was preceded by substantial qualitative work in the two provinces.
2. Sizes of samples in five settlement categories were 160 in former Black Group areas, 350 in former Coloured Group Areas, 199 in former White Group Areas, 234 in informal settlements, and 40 in hostels. A random sample of 25 (census) Enumerator Areas (EAs) falling within the CMA was drawn, and 40 households selected randomly within each EA. The survey took place in the second half of 1998 (Cross & Bekker, 1999) and was preceded by substantial qualitative work in the CMA.

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