

Changes and Continuities in the Labour Process on Commercial Farms
in Post-Apartheid South Africa:
Studies from Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces

Nomzamo Kheswa

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Department of Sociology
Rhodes University

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Supervisor: Professor K Helliker

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the agricultural labour process on commercial farms in post-apartheid South Africa with a particular focus on systems of labour control on these farms. Considerable literature exists about the labour process in capitalist society but the capitalist labour process does not exist in any pure form. Rather, different labour processes exist and the specific form they take depends on spatial and temporal conditions. Additionally, labour processes are often economic sector-specific. Because of variation in capitalist labour processes, differences in systems of labour control (or labour control regimes) also arise. Historically, up until the end of apartheid in 1994, the labour control regime on commercial farms in South Africa was marked by a paternalistic despotism of a racialised kind. This in part reflected the fact that commercial farms were simultaneously sites of both economic production and social reproduction and, further, they were very privatised agrarian spaces largely unregulated (specifically with regard to labour) by the state. Since the end of apartheid, commercial farms have been subjected to multiple pressures. Notably, the South African state has strongly intervened in labour relations on commercial farms, and commercial farms have been subjected to ongoing neo-liberal restructuring. This has led to the prospects of changes in the prevailing labour control system on commercial farms. In this context, the thesis pursues the following key objective: to understand changes and continuities in the labour process on commercial farms – and particularly labour control systems – subsequent to the end of apartheid in South Africa. It does so with reference to four farms in Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces.

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ACRONYMS

BCEA	Basic Conditions of Employment Act
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry
DoL	Department of Labour
DRDLR	Department of Rural Development and Land Reform
ECARP	East Cape Agricultural Research Project
ESTA	Extension of Security of Tenure Act
FAWU	Food and Allied Workers Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LRA	Labour Relations Act
LTA	Land Reform (Land Tenure) Act
MW	Minimum Wage
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SD	Sectoral Determination 13: Farming Sector
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The South African agricultural sector consists of 12.76 million hectares of cultivated land, of which 10.45 million hectares (or 85%) is used for commercial agricultural purposes (AGRISETA 2010: 3), making commercial agriculture a significant employer of labour in South Africa. The commercial farming sector in South Africa is also a very diverse sector comprising of – broadly speaking – field crop husbandry, horticulture and animal production, with numerous sub-sectors (such as citrus) (Vink and Van Rooyen 2009). Since the end of apartheid in 1994, there have been a number of changes to commercial farming including with specific relation to the labour process, labour control and labour conditions on farms. The thesis addresses these changes as well as continuities.

This introductory chapter is divided into the following three sections. The next section (section two) details the research problem and thesis objective, including the theoretical framework which informs this study. The third section discusses the research methodology used for the study, including the specific research techniques adopted and the challenges I faced while conducting the study. The fourth and final section gives a synopsis of the core chapters of the thesis.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND THESIS OBJECTIVE

Historically, commercial agriculture in South Africa has been characterized by the fact that farms were both sites of economic production and sites of social reproduction. More specifically, farm workers and their families lived on the farms and the farmer was in large part directly responsible for ensuring the social reproduction of workers and their families. This led to a distinctive kind of labour process and especially labour control on commercial farms which was also deeply shaped by the system of racial domination existing at the time. Since 1994, the post-apartheid state (led by the ruling party, the African National Congress) has sought to address the legacy of racial domination through historical redress, including incorporating farm labour into a nation-wide system of labour regulation and enhancing the tenure rights of farm workers and dwellers. At the same time, the new South Africa emerged

at the height of neo-liberal restructuring globally and in many ways the South African political economy (including questions around labour rights) has been structured along neo-liberal lines over the past two decades. The historical redress thrust along with the neo-liberal trajectory has resulted in a complicated and tension-riddled process of labour restructuring on commercial farms in South Africa.

The theoretical foundation that underpins this study on the agricultural labour process in South Africa is labour process theory. This theory, in relation to capitalism, is generally used to understand the means by which human labour is harnessed in the creation of commodities for capital accumulation (Marshall 1998), and therefore speaks to managerial strategies of organising, controlling and coordinating labour. The analysis of the labour process in contemporary capitalism, which emerged out of the seminal work of Harry Braverman, led to a number of controversies about the labour process (called the ‘labour process debate’) with regard for instance to the restructuring of skills and worker resistance. One of the critical arguments emerging out of the labour process debate is that managerial control takes on different forms historically and, even at one moment in time, it is open to variation in terms of for example the location of workers within the labour market (given the existence of labour market segmentation). This means that the capitalist labour process, in which managerial control is of great significance, is subject to variation both historically and spatially.

This variation is particularly critical to the thesis. Labour process theory has largely focused on work places in which the site of social reproduction is spatially removed from the work place. In other words, economic production and social reproduction are spatially separated. Commercial farms, as indicated, are vastly different from this, and thus any attempt to draw on labour process theory must be sensitive to the specificities of commercial farms in South Africa. Labour control on commercial farms in South Africa has taken on its particular character because of the close and indeed intimate linkage between production and reproduction and because of the racialised makeup of pre-1994 South Africa. This involved a privatised and personalised form of managerial control sometimes referred to as racial paternalistic despotism. With changes to labour legislation since 1994, particularly the entrenching of labour rights for farm workers (which involves a formalisation of labour relations) and with heightened competition in agriculture under neo-liberal conditions,

changes in the labour process are taking place on commercial farms in South Africa. But the changes may be sector specific and also specific to particular categories of workers.

The thesis examines the changes as well as the continuities pertaining to labour, the labour process and labour control on commercial farms in South Africa. It does this through a study of specific farms in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. The key objective of the thesis therefore is as follows: *to understand changes and continuities in the labour process on commercial farms (with a specific focus on labour control systems) subsequent to the end of apartheid in South Africa*. This is done with reference to studied farms in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. This involves identifying a possible shift from a paternalistic, personalised and despotic labour control system under apartheid to a post-paternalistic and more impersonal and structural labour control system in post-apartheid South Africa. To pursue this main objective, the following secondary objectives are considered:

- a) to understand the labour process that existed on commercial farms prior to the end of apartheid;
- b) to examine the effects on the agricultural labour process of post-1994 labour legislation and its implementation;
- c) to examine the effects on the agricultural labour process of neo-liberal restructuring;
- d) to identify any changes in the relationship between sites of economic production and sites of social reproduction with respect to commercial farms; and
- e) to determine variations in shifts of the agricultural labour process generally and labour control specifically in relation to different categories of farm workers.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section, I outline the research methodology used for the study, including research design, data collection and analysis methods, as well as research challenges.

1.3.1 Research Design

A research design refers to a solid research plan or strategy (Babbie and Mouton 2001). Given my thesis objective, which entails changes over time, the most appropriate strategy for my research is a 'longitudinal research design' as it collects data about two or more points in time (Ruane 2005), therefore allowing for a broad understanding of changes in the labour process before and after 1994. Investigating the labour process on the specific farms studied

both during and after apartheid did not take place directly, in the sense of an already-existing study of the selected farms during apartheid being drawn upon. Nevertheless, for historical comparative purposes, I was able to capture (broadly speaking) the agricultural labour process on commercial farms in apartheid South Africa based on the available (admittedly limited) secondary literature and primary documents as well as probing historical events on the studied farms.

In terms of internal and external validity of the thesis study, I note the following. First of all, external validity refers to the generalizability of study results beyond the farms studied. The farms studied were selected through non-random purposive sampling, primarily on the basis of accessibility to the farms. Commercial farms in South Africa are notoriously difficult to study because they are privatised spaces controlled by farm owners and managers and the latter normally refuse studies to be undertaken on their farms particularly with respect to the sensitive topic of labour and labour conditions. I therefore make no claim that the results emanating from my thesis study are in any way statistically representative of commercial farms in South Africa, particularly also given the variation between agricultural sub-sectors. However, the results are at least illustrative of possible changes and continuities in agricultural labour processes and labour control systems. Internal validity refers to causal analysis, where causal relationships are detected and elaborated (insofar as they exist). In this regard, I remain hesitant about adopting a notion of causality in this study. While it may be possible to speak of the labour process as the dependent variable, and for example neo-liberal restructuring and new labour legislation as independent or mediating variables, I would prefer to consider the independent variables not as causes but as conditions. More specifically, neo-liberal restructuring and labour legislation (and other factors, including managerial responses) are the conditions in terms of which changes and continuities to the agricultural labour process can be understood.

1.3.2 Research Techniques

The study was qualitative in character as I sought to investigate and examine qualitative shifts in social processes on commercial farms, notably the labour process. Qualitative research provides in-depth and nuanced descriptions and understandings of events and practices and facilitates the gaining of insight into the how and why of events and practices (and processes more broadly) without reducing these insights to a causal relationship. In this context, I conducted in-depth interviews (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2,) with a total of 19

respondents (see Table 1.1) initially between 18th and 30th April 2013, and I then re-entered the field briefly on 10th October 2013.

My units of analysis were farm workers and farm managers on the four commercial farms. The studied farms were Woodburns Estate, Oak Leaf Farm and Varnam Farm, and one pack house (Carisbrooke Valley Citrus) in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape.

Table 1.1: Studied Farms: Subsectors and Respondents

Farm	Location	Main Production	Owners/ Managers		Farm Workers				Tot.
					Full-Time/ Permanent		Seasonal/ Casual		
			M	F	M	F	M	F	
Carisbrooke Valley Citrus	Nokweja, Ixopo	Citrus (Processing)	1	0	0	4	0	0	5
Woodburns Estate	Nokweja, Ixopo	Citrus, Sugarcane, Timber	1	0	3	0	0	0	4
Oak Leaf	Alexandria, Eastern Cape	Dairy	2	0	3	0	0	0	5
Varnam Farm	Grahamstown, Eastern Cape	Vegetables	1	0	2	1	1	0	5
Total (No.)			5	0	8	5	1	0	19

The farms to be selected for the research were initially farms based in a particular agricultural sub-sector, namely, citrus (including agro-processing). However, because of difficulties and challenges involved in accessing citrus farms and agro-processing units, I had to diversify the study across sub-sectors. Thus, one of the farms is a fruit and vegetable farm, while another is a dairy farm. Once on the farm, farm worker respondents were randomly selected (so as to avoid farmers selecting ‘ideal’ candidates for inquiry); however, I attempted to obtain a representative sample, i.e. a range of seasonal, permanent, male, and female workers (see Table 1.1). In the end, the studying of different sub-sectors (as well as the studying of different categories of farm workers) had the advantage of facilitating the identification and understanding of variations in the labour process and managerial control in commercial agriculture in South Africa.

The specific research techniques used for the thesis are as follows:

a) Five farm managers/owners were interviewed; three were managers only – one Black male, two White males – and two (White males) managed and owned, or co-owned, the farms. The two managers/owners (Woodburns and Oak Leaf) were born on the farm and acquired their basic agricultural and managerial skills from the farm itself, though they also had formal qualifications in agriculture. The manager of the pack house (Carisbrooke Valley Citrus) had a variety of managerial experience including in a saw mill, manufacturing company and farming. The other farm manager (Varnam Farm) had a Diploma in Tourism Management, but was trained agriculturally through his brother who works on another farm in the area. All four farms were family-owned commercial farms.

Fourteen farm workers were interviewed in this study; there were nine (eight permanently employed, one casually employed) Black males and five (one permanently employed, four ‘semi-permanently’ employed) Black females. All were South African citizens. Their on-farm residency ranged from being born on the farm and having started working in the field in their early teenage years, to those who were not born on the farm but had worked (and lived) there for more than 20 years, and to those who only worked on the farm but lived in close proximity to the farm. Those born on the farm indicated having been employed by an elder family member (typically the father), who then passed down the business to his successors (usually the sons). The recruitment, especially with older staff, thus typically took this shape:

I was hired by ‘Mnumzane’, the father of this house...that was before he started using the boys as managers and stuff. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

I used to work in the main house and now I work in the farm workshop (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

The level of education of workers ranged from Standard 3 to Matriculation with no post-Matriculation qualifications; and worker experience largely stemming from the years worked on the farm or other farms where they were previously employed. All farm workers interviewed were chosen by me without any undue influence or interference from the farm owner and/or manager.

b) I also attended a meeting held on 25th May 2013 in Grahamstown (in the Eastern Cape), hosted by the East Cape Agricultural Research Project (ECARP), which involved primarily farm workers in the citrus sub-sector. Those present were: 5 ECARP staff, 2 representatives from an international donor, 1 Citrus Grower Association (CGA)

representative, 1 FruitSA representative and 16 (13 male, 3 female) farm workers. The workers came from areas near Grahamstown such as Langkloof, Fort Beaufort, Adelaide and Dunbrody.

c) Thirdly, on 14th June 2013, I was afforded an in-depth interview (see Appendix 3) with a Land Rights Facilitator from ECARP. ECARP has an on-going research programme on labour and land on commercial farms in the Eastern Cape. They also constantly interact with farm workers who form part of the 67 farm committees established by ECARP in the Eastern Cape Province.

d) Finally, I attended a conference (titled 'Land, Race and Nation in South Africa') in Cape Town from 19th to 21st June 2013. This was a non-academic conference, which advocated social mobilization for landless people, farm workers and dwellers in South Africa. During this time, I engaged with farm workers on a social level and also attended meeting sessions.

Data collected through these research techniques were recorded and transcribed. I carefully and systematically categorised and structured the data thematically based on my existing understanding of the agricultural labour process in South Africa and the reoccurring issues which arose during the fieldwork. This thematic arrangement is expressed in the format of my two empirical chapters, namely, chapters four and five.

1.3.3 Research Challenges and Ethics

I faced various challenges while conducting the research for thesis, including transport to the farms which were in remote areas. But there were particular challenges I encountered during the field work which I needed to address. These were:

a) Given that commercial farmers in South Africa tend to inhibit research on farms, I was aware that access to the field would be difficult. To gain access, I needed to go through the key 'gate keepers' which, in the case of commercial farms, is the farm owner or manager. But, even before approaching gate-keepers, I needed to establish rapport with individuals who could direct me to gate-keepers who may be willing to allow farm access. In the case of KwaZulu-Natal, this individual was a small commercial farm owner in Ixopo who I knew; and, for the Eastern Cape, it was a farm agent. Each of these two contacts gave me a list of farmers and contacted them on my behalf about the study. I then briefed the identified gate-

keepers on the study and liaised with them for interviews before engaging in the field work. However, even after such arrangements, access did not necessarily occur. For instance, one farmer made an appointment that he did not honour, while others wanted to know exactly what they were getting themselves into (such as requesting that “no political questions” were to be asked). In the end, out of the ten farms that were approached, I successfully gained access to the four farms which form the basis of the fieldwork.

b) When conducting my in-depth interviews, I used a digital tape recorder to preserve information. One of the respondents (a farm manager/owner who I do not identify in the following quotation), however, was not willing to be recorded, saying that:

I don't know who will be listening to my voice...I don't know where this will end up, you know, with all this legislation talk (19/04/2013).

As a result, extensive notes were taken in the course of this interview and these notes were written up immediately after the interview.

c) The language barrier was a challenge in the Eastern Cape as all farm workers there only spoke isiXhosa. I am a Zulu speaker, so I was able to communicate with farm workers in KwaZulu-Natal, as well as translate and transcribe the KwaZulu-Natal interviews into English. Although isiXhosa and isiZulu have some similarities, I had to employ a Xhosa-speaker to accompany me in the field and to translate interview questions with farm workers. She was also paid to transcribe the Xhosa interviews once completed.

d) Getting a cross-section of workers on farms (based particularly on the permanent/seasonal distinction) was difficult because interviewing seasonal workers was awkward. Seasonal workers are typically paid by the rate at which they work (for example, pickers may have to fill ten crates of oranges for a certain wage), so I met responses such as:

If you pay me the equivalent of what *umlungu* [the manager] would pay me for the day, I would agree (30/04/2013).

Indeed, some seasonal workers were not willing to stop or slow down during their work to answer my questions. In this regard, the ECARP meeting and the ‘Land, Race and Nation’ conference helped to fill certain gaps in evidence. For instance, the meeting hosted by ECARP had male and female workers who were seasonal, casual and permanent employees. After the meeting, I was able to have impromptu interviews with them and ask questions relating to my research.

In terms of ethics, it is important to abide by standards of professionalism and honesty in social research, particularly in gaining the trust of interviewees. In the process of collecting

evidence for the thesis, all relevant ethical considerations were taken into account. Participants had the full details of the study explained to them before they agreed to participate. They were also assured that should they wish to withdraw from the research interview, they could do so at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed unless individuals consented to be quoted. In the end, I have not used names in the quotations from the field appearing later in the thesis, though the owners and managers of the four studied farms permitted me to use the names of their farms. I also made it clear that my presence on the farm had no bearing on the formulation or implementation of South African labour legislation, and that no harm to interviewees would arise from the research.

1.4 THESIS OUTLINE

I now briefly outline the structure of the thesis.

Chapter two, which theoretically frames the thesis, gives an overview of theories pertaining to the labour process in capitalism. In doing so, it looks at themes such as the organisation and division of labour and the management and supervision of labour. Furthermore, the chapter examines the labour process in agriculture from a global perspective, and this discussion shows and highlights the specificities of the agricultural labour process and the particular form of labour control often embedded in this labour process – sometimes encapsulated under the notion of a traditional master-servant relationship which is said to be behind the times of modern industrial labour relations.

The following chapter (chapter three) specifically looks at the labour process in commercial agriculture in South Africa. It outlines the history of commercial farming in the country and the labour relations that arose from a racially-based and largely coercive labour market. Commercial agriculture in South Africa was historically state-subsidised and heavily state-regulated but, under the influence of neo-liberal restructuring, it has become increasingly de-regulated (or re-regulated) – at least in relation to commodity markets – from the 1980s and particularly subsequent to 1994. Simultaneously, though, it became subject to increasing state regulation with regard specifically to labour relations. This tension-riddled post-apartheid restructuring has had important implications for the agricultural labour process with shifts in the form of labour control on farms.

Chapters four and five are based on the field work I conducted for the thesis. Chapter four sketches the geographic areas of Ixopo (in KwaZulu-Natal), and Zune and Belmont Valley (in the Eastern Cape) and provides details about the four farms studied. Additionally, the chapter focuses broadly on the relationships between management and workers in light of the introduction of new labour legislation (particularly the state's sectoral determination for agriculture) and the responses of farm owners/managers in complying to this legislation (or violating it) given the traditional paternalistic micro-welfare system which existed on commercial farms historically. Chapter five provides a more detailed overview of the labour processes on the studied farms and this is broken down thematically by reference to for example management styles (including supervision and coordination of tasks), recruitment and selection, and working and living arrangements on the farms. In so doing, I seek to show the complexities and unevenness of post-apartheid management-labour restructuring (and labour control systems) on commercial farms and highlight variation across the farms studied. It would seem that, twenty years after the end of apartheid, changes in the agricultural labour process in South Africa are still 'in transition' such that a completely new and coherent labour process is not apparent.

The final chapter, chapter six, provides an overall synthesis of the thesis, drawing together theory and evidence in offering overall conclusions which address the main objective of the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: LABOUR PROCESS AND COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the thesis, namely, labour process theory. In using labour process theory, the more particular focus is on the question of managerial control within the labour process with specific reference to agriculture. Modern-day labour process theory arose from the seminal work in the 1970s of Harry Braverman, whose work led to what is called the labour process debate. This debate raised a range of critical themes pertinent to the labour process under capitalism including labour control regimes.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section outlines labour process theory and, in doing so, shows the linkages between the labour process, the labour market and social class in capitalism. I discuss a range of labour process themes, such as skills, mechanisation and remuneration, but the main emphasis is on labour control systems. There is however no one capitalist labour process, such that the labour process does not exist in any pure form. Rather, there are labour processes which vary across time and space, and also between economic sectors or branches of production. In this context, in section two, I discuss the labour process in capitalist agriculture or on commercial farms. I highlight the specificities of the capitalist agricultural labour process, notably the spatial connection between sites of economic production and social reproduction on-farm, and indicate the ways in which this production-reproduction nexus impacts on the type of labour control regime often found in capitalist or commercial agriculture.

2.2 LABOUR PROCESS (AND LABOUR MARKET)

The system of production and the social relationships that are affixed to the production process under capitalism are understood as the labour process. Production methods, employment relations, working conditions and wages are – in the end – all central to the labour process. In the capitalist labour process, under the control of management and using the instruments of production, the worker transforms raw materials into products for exchange on commodity markets.

The labour process in capitalism presupposes an employment contract which governs the conditions of sale of the capacity to perform work (known as labour power) by the labourer and its purchase by the employer (Braverman 1974). Therefore, the emergence and very existence of the labour process under capitalism necessitates a labour market transaction involving some degree of consensus around employment and working conditions. This agreement invariably benefits the employer (or capitalist) as the labour process is geared towards the maximisation of profit and thereby capital accumulation. The labour power sold on the labour market is transformed into actual concrete labour in the labour process thereby creating value for accumulation purposes.

For the worker, the employment contractual arrangement is the result of the social conditions of capitalism that leave him or her with no other way to pursue a livelihood, as the worker “lacks independent access to means of subsistence” (Littler 1982: 21) because of previous dispossession of these means of livelihood through the historical development of capitalism. This by necessity leads to a precarious position for all workers under capitalism, such that employment and work becomes the fundamental and only basis for life. The working class is “that class which, possessing nothing but its power to labour, sells that power to the capitalist in return for subsistence” (Braverman 1974: 378, Marx 2000) but without any guarantee that work and therefore subsistence will be forthcoming or, once attained, will be secure and permanent.

The capitalist employer enters into the employment contract with the worker in order to expand capital and to secure surplus profit, and this requires that the employer maximise the transformation of labour capacity into concrete labour by extracting more work from the labourer or increasing worker efficiency. The employer of course converts some capital into wages in order to purchase the labour power and expand his or her unit of capital. The labour process is thus set into motion by the exchange of labour power for wages, and the employment relationship is characterised by every-day negotiations around the ways in which labour power should be expended and successfully transformed into actual work. In this sense, labour power becomes consumed in the labour process, under the control of the employer or delegated managers.

For purposes of analytical distinction, it is clearly possible to demarcate the labour market from the labour process under capitalism. But, in practice, they are intertwined and mutually

dependent. The labour market, as a central concept in the analysis of capitalism, refers to the exchange or transaction focusing on the capacity to labour. It is distinct from the labour process which is located within the production process and where labour power is exerted. Labour power, therefore, has value in the 'market' where it can be bought and sold (as if it were a commodity), and it becomes transformed into labour in the workplace – through the labour process.

The distinction between the sale of labour power (in and through labour markets) and its consumption (in the labour process) allows for the assessment of the role of labour markets vis-à-vis production processes, including the ways in which labour markets involve the segmentation of labourers into different categories of workers with different market capacities (Edwards 1979), leading to a differentiated workforce. This segmentation leads to the possibility that the categorisation, recruitment and employment of differentiated labour (Davis and Marquis 2005) is utilised in facilitating controls over labour (such as divide-and-rule strategies) within the workplace itself. Thus labour market segmentation theory (Loveridge and Mok 1979, Wilkinson 1981, Rubery and Wilkinson 1994) holds that, in terms of its structure, the labour market is not homogenous and undifferentiated (as there are privileged and non-privileged segments). The labour market is experienced differently by different categories of workers, and this has knock-on effects for work and relationships within the workplace, i.e. how workers slot into and experience the labour process.

Drawing on the work of Marx, Braverman (1974) notes historical changes in the organization of labour under capitalism. For instance, he identifies a strong trend towards specialisation and de-skilling. Initially, the capitalist labour process entailed multi-skilled artisans involved in the production of entire products or commodities (from start to finish) with the artisan therefore performing a range of diverse tasks and often under minimum managerial supervision. Later, through processes of specialization and a deepening division of labour, the separation of specific operations or tasks took place as these became assigned to different – in large part, semi-skilled or unskilled – workers under stricter forms of managerial control in terms of the pace and quality of work undertaken. And, as Braverman stresses, the process of mechanisation (including assembly line and continual flow production) further facilitated de-skilling, notably during the 20th century under Fordism. Thus, work techniques, routines and procedures in the work place are significantly dependent upon the manner in which the capitalist organises and structures a specific labour process.

The organization and the division of labour in capitalist society refer to the means by which work is differentiated in the workplace as well as the specialization or otherwise of workers in performing tasks and roles in the process of production. Marxist scholars (notably labour process theorists such as Braverman) tend to be extremely critical of the division of labour, arguing that increasing specialisation of tasks leads to workers with undeveloped skill sets with concomitant high levels of work alienation and dissatisfaction. This critical approach goes contrary to the thoughts of other sociologists (such as Emile Durkheim) who argue that the division of labour is, in fact, a necessary and important element in the production process (and capitalist society in general) as every worker has a role to play and collectively contributes to increasing production to the benefit of all.

In offering a critique of the division of labour, labour process theorists highlight in particular the division between the functions of control and execution. As the division of labour became more specialized under capitalism, control over the labour process increasingly became the prerogative of a particular structure within the workplace, namely, management. The function of management always existed (notably, the function of control), but this became eventually embedded in a particular structure called management. A process of subordination therefore took place over time, and workers lost all control of the labour process and became reduced to mere executors of tasks within the workplace. There are, however, important variations in the forms of managerial control in existence, which are detailed later. In this regard, there is no pure labour process in existence, but labour processes which are contingent on historical and spatial conditions.

2.2.1 Social Class

The existence of social classes is inherent to capitalism and the capitalist system of production, and is intimately linked to the labour process. As Carter (1995:51) notes, “analysis of the labour process is both informed by a structural analysis of class and helps to shape it”. Effectively, capitalism is built on a fundamental distinction between capitalists and workers, with the former owning the means of production and the latter having no such ownership (but only their labour power to sell). On the one hand, capitalists want to expand value and thus create surplus value and, given that labour is the source of all value, to ultimately cheapen the cost of labour. On the other hand, workers – at least in the short term – seek decent work and wages to live comfortably and, as a result, any improvement in their lives cuts into capitalist profit. Thus, a degree of antagonism is built into the relationship

between capitalist and worker (Spencer 2000). As Marx (1887:161) put it: “Hence it is that in the history of capitalist production, the determination of what is a working day, presents itself as the result of a struggle, a struggle between collective capital, i.e., the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e., the working-class.”

At the same time, there is a relationship of mutual dependence which implies a degree of cooperation, or the potential for cooperation, between the two antagonistic classes. For instance, it is not in the interest of capitalists to undercut the social reproduction of labour power by paying ‘starvation wages’. Labour capacity needs to be reproduced, replenished and revitalized, and therefore there is a threshold beyond which the extraction of labour becomes detrimental to the interests of both capitalist and worker. What takes place within the labour process, including the strategies of labour control in place, often impacts on the quality and extent of the reproduction of the workforce. For example, working labourers ‘to the bones’ so to speak through harsh labour controls may not be conducive to replenishing the capacity to labour on an ongoing basis.

The class relationship between capitalist and worker is regularly if not invariably mediated in some form by the state, as the state intervenes in different ways – it does this more so in direct relation to the labour market than the labour process as such, though interventions in the former have implications for the latter (Friedland 1994). The state leans towards the interests of capitalists and capitalism, but it does at times introduce labour policies and legislation of a social protectionist kind to moderate the power of capital over labour. It certainly never challenges in any fundamental sense the legitimacy and declared fairness of the employment relationship and its protectionist stance has been undermined under neo-liberal restructuring. Employers’ associations and trade unions also play a significant role in mediating the capital-labour relationship (Friedland 1994). Besides the fact that the capitalist-worker relationship in the production process is a power relationship and hence has a marked political dimension to it, the politics of the relationship is further reinforced by the role and functions of the state and the representatives of capital and workers. In this context, Buroway (1979: 8) claims that “there are distinctive political and ideological apparatuses of production which regulate productive relations”.

Clearly, in identifying social classes historically within capitalist society, Marx (Braverman 1974, Carter 1995, Grint 1998, Marx 2000) categorizes social class in relational terms. The

two main classes are understood – structurally – by the character of their relationship to the means of production (either ownership or non-ownership) and this by definition implies a distinct relationship between the two classes – of antagonism and cooperation, though Marxists tend to stress the former dimension (of conflict). Classes are examined in terms of the economy and specifically the production process, as production is the heart of the capitalist economy. Nicos Poulantzas (1973, 17 in Carter 1995:37), in this respect, claims that “the economic sphere is determined by the process of production, and the place of their agents, their distribution into social classes, is determined by the relations of production”. Because of ownership, the capitalist has decisive power over the physical means of production, capital investment, resource reallocation and labour power.

The dualist conception of social class is insufficient for making sense of the class system particularly under contemporary capitalism. Two points are important here, focusing on both the capitalist class and the working class. The capitalist class is characterized by ownership of the means of production as well as by conceptualizing and controlling the production (and labour) process. In the past, ownership and conceptualization/control were embodied in a single capitalist. But the development of capitalism has witnessed the separation of ownership from conceptualization and control, such that the typical modern-day capitalist is marked by ownership only. Conceptualisation and control (as managerial functions) have become embodied in a particular structure known as management, with managers regularly not having any ownership of the means of production. Like the labourer, managers are also employees and enter into employment contracts with the owner. The difference though is that managers exercise the function of control of the labour process, as control of production – through a lengthy historical process of dispossession and subordination – has been taken away from workers. This is because as “so long as the workers control the labour process itself, they will thwart efforts to realize the full potential of their labour power” (Braverman 1974:100). Workers therefore execute without any function of control. At the same time, the structure of management is internally differentiated, from senior managers to supervisors such that the character and extent of control varies within management. This raises complex questions about the class position of management in capitalism but it also suggests that there are different labour control strategies in place across specific management structures.

In the case of workers, though all workers do not have ownership and are subject to the controls of management, there is internal differentiation within the working class (sub-

classes) or even different classes of workers. There are different criteria for distinguishing between groups of workers, but market capacity is particularly important – in relation to the labour market, different groups bring different sets of skills, knowledge and experience to the market and are slotted into production processes on this basis. This relates back to the notion of labour market segmentation. Some segments of the workforce for instance possess qualifications and credentials that are inaccessible to the majority of the working class, therefore leading to a distinction between skilled and unskilled workers. There are also other distinctions within the working class worthy of note, particularly in the face of neo-liberal restructuring. Of critical significance is the difference between standard employment (full-time and permanent) and non-standard employment (such as part-time, temporary and casual). Historically there is considerable variation across and within economic sectors with respect to the extent to which these two categories of employment are evident. But, under neo-liberalism, it is generally recognized that standard (or typical) employment has been under attack through a process of casualisation whereby atypical forms of employment are on the rise. Insofar as standard employment entails higher wages and greater benefits compared to non-standard employment, this leads to further differentiation within the working class. As well, depending on variations across time and space, such differences may be overlain with social identities such as race, gender, ethnicity and nationality. Additionally, the forms of labour control prevalent often vary across these internal differentiations.

2.2.2 Labour Process Themes

Before focusing on the key labour process theme for this thesis, namely labour control, I briefly consider a number of other themes which I touch upon later in the thesis. These themes – in order of presentation, are skills, mechanization, gender (and social identity more broadly), remuneration and resistance.

Historically, with the original rise of capitalism, multi-skilled or highly-skilled artisans existed and they had significant control over the labour process in terms of both conceptualization and execution. In efforts to restructure the production process, capitalists sought to increasingly subordinate workers (including artisans) to the dictates of the managerial function. This involved deepening the division of labour in the formation of a less skilled labour force, setting off what labour process theorists refer to as the process of de-skilling. The ‘collective worker’ emerged with groupings of labourers all contributing in

different ways, by means of specialized tasks, to the production of specific commodities (Rinehart 2001).

This claim about de-skilling has not gone unchallenged. For instance, it is argued that the typical worker under early capitalism was in fact not the skilled artisan; indeed, a large mainly unskilled labour force emerged with the introduction of the factory system. The counter-claim also indicates that, along with de-skilling as a general tendency, new sets of required skills have emerged particularly with regard to the development of sophisticated technologies and the increasing dominance of new economic sectors such as the service sector (involving social, interpersonal and care skills) (Meiskins 1994, Thompson 2010). Also, Braverman tends to ignore the significance of tacit skills in the workplace. Zimbalist (1979, in Jaros 2005) argues that the history of skills under capitalism is cyclical in nature, with changing patterns of deskilling and re-skilling over time. It seems clear though that there are different skills-regimes across time and space (Clarke and Winch 2004). For instance, the Asian tiger economies developed by shifting from a low-skill regime to a high-skill regime, and some economic sectors are marked by lower-skill regimes than others. And variation in skill remains as an important signifier for labour market segmentation and stratification.

Technological innovation and mechanization has been part and parcel of the process of capitalist development and plays an important role in shaping the organization of labour at work and in re-constituting the labour process, including forms of labour control. Its effect on labour is evident from Braverman's work when he highlights the question: "In what way does a machine supplement man's muscles, mental processes, judgment and degree of control?" (Braverman 1974: 187). In this regard, it is clear that technological change is intimately related to processes of de-skilling and re-skilling. Forms of technology under capitalism have undergone numerous shifts, including assembly-line production under the influence of the Ford Motor Company, and now information technology-controlled machinery. There are numerous questions about the impact of technology, including the relationship between technological change and levels of employment given that machinery is seen as labour-saving devices. But it is clear that technology and its introduction is not always positioned as neutral; more specifically, technological innovation is not simply – or certainly not always – about maximizing economies of scale and efficiencies. Sometimes technology is more directly political, with technology used as a means of control over (and surveillance of) the workforce

or to limit the reliance on a labour force which is highly truculent and volatile. The presence of technology across economic sectors, and even within, is open to considerable variation.

Traditionally, the industrialized worker under capitalism has been thought of as a male worker, with women (because of patriarchy) assigned to the process of social reproduction within the domestic sphere as unpaid labourers. Women of course work directly within the labour process of the capitalist economy, though a gendered division of labour is readily apparent based on labour market segmentation. This gendered division is part of a wider issue pertaining to the linkages between social identities (not just gender, but also for example race and ethnicity) and work, with labour markets often being racialised and ethnicised. In this respect, certain segments are often feminized, racialised and ethnicised (and normally, these are less privileged segments). This differentiation along lines of social identity is related to both skills and technology. Skills are regularly socially constructed for instance through patriarchal ideologies, and male workers (sometimes through male-dominated trade unions) defend their privileged positions based on claims about the masculine character of certain skill sets. Likewise, certain technologies and technology *per se* is often linked to masculinity, such that women workers (because of their feminine qualities) are seen as suitable to particular technologies found within work spheres linked to tasks associated with the domestic sphere (such as the textile and clothing industry).

Overall, women are marginalised from mainstream economic production. This trend is seemingly justified by Braverman who bases his analyses on male notions of 'skill' (Meiksins 1994). The 'gendering of labour', as indicated, is socially constructed and serves to degrade 'female' skills, while 'male' skills are accorded higher status. Witz (1986:15) explains that:

Control over women's labour is exercised in a variety of historically specific institutional contexts such as the household and the labour market. Within the household, male control over women's labour power is clearly more direct.... In the labour market, however, patterns of male domination assume more opaque and arguably less direct forms.

Patriarchal control was initially maintained by denying women access into economically productive activities effectively limiting them to unpaid, domestic work in the sphere of social reproduction. But, by the beginning of the 1980s, women's participation in the formal, public arena had increased (Glasner 1987) as they were increasingly incorporated into the labour market but on unequal and uneven terms (Podmore and Spencer 1986), including less

earnings for the same work performed by males (as they were not seen as the primary breadwinner) (Crowley 2013). The sexual division of labour may at times be connected to labour control, but it is not reducible to managerial strategies focused on for instance divide-and-rule. At times, though, the employment of women is justified by management on the basis of their more complacent and compliant character compared to male workers.

Wages are defined as “the amount of money which the capitalist pays for a certain period of work or for a certain amount of work” (Marx 2000: 14). The relationship between wages and labour is an exploitative one, insofar as the capitalist extracts unpaid labour from working people in the creation of surplus value (Rinehart 2001). In order for the capitalist to remain ahead of his competitors, or to remain afloat in the face of competition, he has to continue extracting labour from workers at a rate which maximizes productivity and profitability. This could entail focusing on absolute surplus value, for instance by increasing the length of the working week or increasing the pace of work while technology remains constant; or even by converting from hourly wage rates to piece-rate wages or (at least in part) to wages-in-kind. Alternatively, it could involve maximizing relative surplus value. One way of doing this is by shifting increasingly from variable capital (labour) to constant capital (machinery) for, as Marx (2000:36) argues, “the productive force of labour is increased above all by a greater division of labour and by a more general introduction and constant improvement of machinery”. The overall cost of production per unit produced is thereby decreased by the increase in the scale and intensity of production. Either way, capitalists constantly seek ways and means of reducing labour costs as a proportion of total production costs or ensuring that the real costs of labour do not increase over time.

Wages though are critical to workers and their families. As Marx (2000:6) argues:

The labourer’s cost of production consists of the sum of the means of subsistence (or their price in money) which on the average are requisite to enable him to work, to maintain him in his capacity for work, and to replace him in his departure, by reason of age, sickness, or death, with another labourer that is to say, to propagate the working class in required numbers.

This is effectively all the capitalist wants, namely, the reproduction of the workforce to ensure long-term profitability. But this should not undermine the importance of wages for workers. Indeed, wages are the most contentious dimension of the employment contract and considerable industrial conflict exists because of disputes over wages and related issues. Since the rise and consolidation of neo-liberalism the worldwide trend has been a fall in real

wages for workers (even amongst privileged labour market segments), or increases disproportional to rises in capitalist profits.

The cost of labour (in the form of wages) compared to the overall cost of production varies across economic sectors. Some sectors, and these are often labour-intensive, are historically based on a low-wage regime. These low-wage sectors find it difficult to make significant upward adjustments in wages because the very structure of production critically depends on this regime. Further, in the context of neo-liberalisation and the opening up of the global trade regime, sectors which are highly dependent on imports for production inputs and are export-focused become subject to indeterminate fluctuations in global commodity prices. When these fluctuations are detrimental, it is not unusual that the cost of labour is cut to absorb the effects of increased costs (of other production inputs) or of reduced profits. And central to this are often methods and strategies of labour control.

The last theme is that of worker resistance. The labour process under capitalism, though controlled by the capitalist, is contested terrain (Edwards 1979) because of the conflicting interests between capitalists and workers around for instance wages. Ultimately, the power of workers is their collective power (as embodied in their existence as the ‘collective worker’ or socialized collective labourer). By working together and enduring the same conditions of work and control under the capitalist or manager, workers potentially form a cooperative grouping, with common interests. It is this collective labour that allows them to express a unified and organized resistance to management and capitalists alike, which is regularly manifested in the formation and activities of trade unions. At times, capitalists (or their delegated managers) deploy strategies which seek to divide the workforce to inhibit worker unity and mobilisation. But the relationship between capitalist and worker, in terms of tension and conflict, is regularly mediated by the state in the form of corporatist or tripartite arrangements, involving capital, labour the state. In this sense, conflict becomes institutionalized and moderated through formalized rules of engagement based on collective bargaining.

The workplace is always a ground for disputes and it is almost inevitable that resistance (either passive or aggressive) will be an integral part of any space that produces commodities, involving what Storey (1985) refers to as the dialectical interplay between labour resistance and managerial control. Indeed, on occasion, new managerial strategies of control or

modified strategies emerge in direct response to a phase or period of heightened worker resistance or to inhibit the emergence of heightened resistance. These strategies may entail a complex mix of outright coercion, enacting compliance and consensus-building (Buroway 1979). But inevitable as resistance may be as a general trend, there is significant variation in the extent, scale, duration and very form of resistance. Indeed, some economic sectors are almost devoid of a trade union presence or are comparatively 'thin' with regard to union organization. This may arise for different reasons, including the banning of trade unions or difficulties in organizing within a particular sector. In this respect, a common distinction made is between 'unorganised' forms of action (such as absenteeism) and 'organised' forms of action (such as strikes, often but not always by established unions) (Klerck 2008).

2.2.3 Management and Labour Control

The central theme of this thesis, with regard to the labour process, is managerial control. Though there are a variety of managerial functions, labour control is central to the management function. This is not to suggest that control over labour emanates purely from within the labour process, as it also arises because of labour market conditions. For instance, at times of high unemployment, employed workers are unlikely to engage in activities which may lead to dismissal and hence they may readily consent to the forms of labour control which exist. Once a particular labour control regime is in place, its continued existence depends on a variety of mechanisms which cannot be reduced to managerial coercion. Thus although control in the labour process is governed by relations of domination and subordination, it is difficult for the capitalist to treat labour as if it were a commodity (which would be tantamount to reducing the worker under capitalism to a slave-like condition). Because of this, even when it comes to labour control systems, "the capitalist(s) must to some degree seek a cooperative relationship with labour" (Littler 1982: 32, see also Spencer 2000). In this way, compliance and consent on the part of the worker also play an important part in ensuring the reproduction of labour control systems (Storey 1985). Hence, workers may be complicit in their own exploitation and subordination. This also implies that control over workers is not necessarily at the expense of cooperation with workers. Any consent from workers may, as Buroway (1979) argues, mask an underlying antagonism, with workers simply playing by the rules of the game to maximize their own specific interests.

Some form of managerial control is critical by virtue of the very character of what the capitalist purchases on the labour market. Workers sell their capacity to labour and the actual

labour expended during the labour process by workers cannot be determined or predicted by management in and through the recruitment, selection and hiring process. Labour has the quality of indeterminateness and labour power must be converted into actual labour in a manner which maximises productivity and profitability (Thompson 2010). For this reason, systems of effective labour control must be erected and implemented in the labour process (Littler 1982, Davis and Marquis 2005). To emphasise a point made earlier, this function of management has increasingly been placed in the hands of the structure of (non-owning, salaried) management.

In focusing on labour controls, the thesis is not speaking directly to the (economic) relation of exploitation (the fact that workers produce surplus value) or to the fact that this relation remains hidden and mystified; it speaks rather to the (political) relation of domination and subordination in the workplace through labour controls. In fact, these two relations are two dimensions or moments of the same overriding social relations of production (Poulantzas 1975, Carchedi 1977). Management advances the interests of capital (namely capital accumulation) by carrying out the delegated managerial functions, including controlling labour. And, to reiterate, managerial control systems are often resisted and sometimes subverted by worker resistance and struggles. Alternatively, management and workers may reach an implicit compromise with regard to labour control systems and the employment contract, as in the Keynesian deal whereby workers received social protection but at the expense of almost unbridled management control of the labour process.

It is critical to recognize the absence of any overarching, monolithic, coherent and systematic system of labour control and that labour control systems are not necessarily consciously and explicitly devised as strategies by management to subordinate labour (based on some conspiratorial theory). Sometimes labour control systems (or labour control regimes) are marked by inconsistencies and tensions, and sometimes a particular system of control arises as a by-product or unintended consequence of some other factor. As well, a diverse range of labour control strategies and tactics are identified in the labour process literature and – even from the perspective of management – there is no one best way to control labour (Spencer 2000, Thompson and Broek 2010). At the same time, management is hierarchically organized from senior managers down to supervisors, such that there are layers and circuits of control (Storey 1985); with the former responsible for overall control and supervisors responsible for very limited and specific control functions.

There is a diversity of control strategies. Historically, early forms of labour control were based on simple hierarchies of control (with very minimal layers of management) of a very direct and personal character. This gave way, as a general trend, to more structured, indirect and impersonal forms of control. This includes bureaucratic control based on complex hierarchical arrangements of management in which management was bound by set rules and regulations, and control based on technology which initially took the form of assembly-line and continual flow production systems which controlled the character and pace of work. Technological control has become highly sophisticated because of information technology leading to surveillance as a key element of labour controls today. This shift from personal to structured labour control regimes is a broad tendency only and both regimes in fact continue to exist. For instance, it is not unusual to find direct and personal labour regimes in place in certain branches of production or in smaller enterprises within a particular branch. Additionally both regimes can exist in one workplace and be applied selectively to different segments or categories of the labour force (with less privileged workers subject to direct and personal control regimes). At the same time, it must be recognized that the two control regimes identified are ideal-typical types and, in practice, there may be hybrids in existence; or, perhaps, a particular economic sector or firm may be undergoing a complicated transition from one form of labour regime to another. This last point is of critical significance to the thesis, as it examines possible shifts in labour control regimes on commercial farms in South Africa during the extended period of transition away from apartheid.

2.3 LABOUR PROCESS IN AGRICULTURE

In the context of the previous section, in which I examined the labour process in capitalist society with a particular focus on systems of labour control, this section looks more specifically at the labour process in commercial agriculture. This sets the context for the even more specific analysis of commercial agriculture in South Africa in the following chapter. I do not claim that there is one capitalist agricultural labour process across time and space; nevertheless I seek to identify and discuss some of the key issues pertinent to labour in commercial agriculture.

Pfeffer (in Mize 2006, see also Sachikonye 1987) identifies three systems of agricultural production: i) the family farm (i.e. subsistence farming), ii) sharecropping and iii) agribusiness (i.e. commercial farming). Commercial farming, like all capitalist enterprises, is diverse, from small family-owned commercial farms without hired labour to large estates and

plantations owned by multi-national corporations and with a vast labour force, to agro-processing ventures. In the end, though, they all entail capitalist methods of production and are geared towards producing commodities exclusively for profit. There is a particular uniqueness to commercial farming which differentiates it from other (but not all) economic sectors, namely, the integration of working and living spaces on-site. In other words, the site of economic production (and the labour process) and the site of social reproduction (the domestic sphere) are not spatially separated as they exist together. This has led to an employment relationship which moves beyond the typical waged employment contract and it also impacts on and defines the specificity of the agricultural labour process. This section unpacks and elaborates upon this specificity with particular focus on the labour control regime.

2.3.1 Employment, Working, Living and Women on Farms

Commercial agriculture has increasingly adopted an agro-industrial model of farming as part of the broader restructuring of the global agricultural production and trade regime. This has led to an increasing concentration of land holdings as well as centralisation in land ownership, with many smaller mainly family-owned and -run farms going into liquidation. Along with this has been increasing technological innovation and mechanisation in capitalist agriculture (Parry et al. 2005), though this trend is uneven across agricultural sub-sectors (with for instance, mechanisation more prevalent in the field crop sub-sector and less common in vegetable and mixed livestock/cash crop farms) ((Hall and Mogyorody 2007). The character of the labour force on commercial farms is often specific to sub-sectors, in part depending on levels and kinds of technological change.

In many agricultural sub-sectors, though, the organisation of labour is characterised by small numbers of permanent (or core) employees and large numbers of seasonal and casual workers employed for periods where labour demand is high, such as planting and harvesting (Wilkinson 1981, Friedland 1994). Contemporary agricultural industry has a pronounced differentiated or segmented labour market based on categories of employment – from the comparatively privileged permanent workers who regularly live on the farm, to casual and seasonal (and sometimes migrant) workers who may have temporary residence on-farm and normally work on a piece-rate system. A process of casualisation of labour is in fact taking place under neo-liberal conditions, with commercial farmers increasingly reliant on casual rather than permanent labourers.

Remuneration of labour in commercial agriculture takes on a variety of forms, dependent quite often on the category of employment. Core employees regularly receive payment by set wages. Non-core employees may receive payment by time-rates (which are paid daily or for work done over a longer period of time) or by piece-rates (which are measured by the unit of area in which work is done) (Ramachandran 2012). Payment received is not necessarily entirely in the form of money or cash, as there is also payment-in-kind or a combination of both of these. Payment-in-kind is particularly prevalent amongst non-core labourers, and refers to payment in the form of basic goods or commodities.

There is also a marked tendency to employ foreign nationals (such as Mexican citizens in the United States of America) as agricultural labourers. In fact, it is estimated that, in the early 2000s, 81% of field crop workers in the United States were foreign-born (Oxfam 2004). And adolescent (and even child) farm workers are prominent, many of whom travel great distances to secure temporary agricultural employment. Employing these more vulnerable groups entails an attempt at reducing labour costs (Farm Systems Management Series 1997). Indeed, the evidence suggests that agricultural landholders seek explicitly the benefits of employing the most marginalised workers to labour in their fields. These workers find themselves marginalized from wider society, and working for poverty wages under very hazardous and difficult conditions (Oxfam 2004).

The employment of vulnerable groupings as agricultural labourers has at times been formally institutionalised by governments. For instance, the Bracero Programme was a labour agreement from 1942 to 1964 between the United States and Mexican governments which facilitated the free flow of cheap agricultural labour to the United States. The programme demonstrates how forms of labour control exist beyond a specific farm and include sector-wide regulation of labour on even a national basis. With respect to agricultural labour and the labour process, this programme sought to accomplish two objectives: to maintain control over labour and to ensure a steady oversupply of labourers (Friedland 1994, Mize 2006) and thereby reduce labour costs.

The externalisation of labour is also prevalent within capitalist agriculture. This entails the use of labour brokers as a method of recruiting and organising farm workers. Instead of the farm labourer being directly employed by the capitalist farmer, the labour broker (as a third-party) employs the worker and, in this way, the capitalist farmer often by-passes existing

labour legislation regulating agricultural labour. It is not uncommon in countries such as the United States to witness the transportation of workers – sometimes daily – to farm worksites in overcrowded, poorly-maintained vehicles provided by the farm labour contractors (Oxfam 2004). This externalisation of the labour force through labour broking heightens the insecurity, vulnerability and exploitation of the agricultural labour force, with labour brokers regularly paying labourers at wage-rates well below any minimum wage existing in the agricultural sector (or not paying them for extended periods). At times, labour brokers recruit foreign migrants outside the national boundaries and, in this way, they are replacing the traditional social networks used in the past to locate available farm employment.

The commercial farm, as indicated, is typically a site of both economic production and social reproduction, and this has an impact on the agricultural employment contract. Access to a house (or some other sort of accommodation) is typically attached to the employment agreement. Housing on farms is generally available for workers who are employed full-time in year-round positions (Oxfam 2004). Seasonal workers tend to reside permanently in one location off-farm or temporarily on-farm in a labour compound or camp. Housing thus becomes a marker of employment status, with permanent workers having access to better housing conditions. However, even for these core employees, sub-standard housing is often a problem for workers and their families, along with unsanitary facilities such as the unavailability of fresh and clean water. As the NGO Oxfam indicates: “Farm workers are among the worst-housed groups [in the United States]...because of their poverty, farm workers suffer from the entire gamut of housing problems: low ownership rates, overcrowding and substandard housing quality” (Oxfam 2004: 29).

It is not uncommon to read descriptions of the working and living conditions of farm workers and their families as if they worked and lived under conditions of modern-day slavery. Workers on agro-industrial farms and in the agro-processing industry for instance are normally subject to hazardous working conditions and unfair labour management practices (GRACE Communications Foundation 2013). But, under more extreme conditions, the Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers (2012: 2) reveals that farm workers work against their will for minimal or no pay at all, even facing conditions that meet the stringent legal standards for prosecution under modern-day slavery statutes. For example, based on an investigation, the state of Florida in the United States was dubbed ‘ground zero for modern-day slavery’. Limited state-regulated protection on the farms for labourers translates into the

persistence of inhumane conditions and poverty wages for farm workers (Oxfam 2004, Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers 2012, GRACE Communications Foundation 2013). Instead of diminishing over time, it seems that farm workers' economic, social and political rights may be eroding. In this regard, the working conditions of one group of farm workers are noted here, that of tomato pickers in Florida. These labourers often work ten to twelve hours per day under gruelling conditions of hard physical labour (including working with heavy machinery, pesticide exposure, sun exposure and inadequate sanitary facilities); and they earn sub-poverty wages without any benefits whatsoever (Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers 2012).

Farm labour is one of the most dangerous forms of employment as workers suffer higher rates of toxic chemical injuries than workers in any other sector of the United States economy, with an estimated 300,000 farm workers suffering pesticide poisonings each year (Oxfam 2004). The results from this United States-based study by Oxfam are consistent with more global studies. For instance, in relation to health and safety, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) asserts that workers in agriculture run at least twice the risk of dying on-the-job as workers in other sectors (ILO 1997). According to the ILO (1997), farm health and safety experts argue that millions of the world's 1.3 billion agricultural workers are – on an annual basis – seriously injured in workplace accidents involving machinery, or poisoned by pesticides and other agro-chemicals. Agro-industrial commercial farms employ capital-intensive farming techniques, labour-saving technologies and synthetic and engineered resource inputs (such as fertilizers and pesticides) in order to maximum profits (Farm Systems Management Series 1997) but this is done at the risk of causing serious health problems for agricultural labourers.

The agricultural industry has a gender-specific character in the organisation of work (Carney and Watts 1990). Women farm workers are often employed in the less privileged (seasonal and casual) employment categories, as they face discrimination in securing access to more desirable (or less undesirable), better paid and stable employment (Oxfam 2004). With the piece-rate system of pay in place for seasonal and casual labourers, women need to work longer hours to earn the equivalent of the wage-based income of permanent male workers. The role that female agricultural workers play in the labour process is largely determined by patriarchal ideologies and discourses and they experience the agricultural industry as sub-citizens because access to work (and residence) is often negotiated through males. While

employing labour on a farm typically means employing the whole family, it is the husband who ensures access to employment (and, by extension, any small plot of land available through the farm owner).

In addition, women have primary responsibility for much of the childcare and most of the household chores amongst farm worker families. According to Oxfam (2004), studies also indicate that women are more vulnerable than men to the unhealthy and unsafe working conditions prevalent in agriculture, and are further subjected to sexual harassment in the male-dominated agricultural workplace. The fact that women are frequently supervised by men reinforces the barriers presented to women in the realm of agricultural work. The overall power of men over women farm workers limits their access to employment on farms, increasing the reluctance to report incidences of sexual harassment as ‘gatekeepers’ into the farms are unsympathetic labour brokers, farm owners and even husbands.

2.3.2 The Farm Identity and Labour Control

I now turn to the more central concern of the thesis, namely, the labour control regime on commercial farms. In doing so, I speak to the existence of a tension-riddled farm identity that speaks to commercial farms as a family (or community) and a profit-centre. Though this identity may not be prevalent universally, the existing literature indicates that it does have considerable resonance in the agricultural industry. A brief discussion of this identity underpins the identification of a particular kind of labour control system existing on capitalist farms.

The commercial farm regularly exists and operates as a site of economic production (i.e. work) and social reproduction (i.e. residence) and this spatially integrated work-residence nexus allows for forms of labour control which extend beyond work and the labour process. To work on a farm is not merely to be subject to an employment or labour relationship, as it also entails living on the farm and, for the farmer, entails obligations vis-à-vis the sphere of social reproduction of farm workers and importantly their families. In this context, at least in terms of farmer-driven discourses about the commercial farm, the farm is said to constitute a family or community and takes on this identity based on relationships of loyalty between farmer and workers (Farm Systems Management Series 1997). In employing a worker, the farmer is effectively (at least implicitly) employing the worker’s family or at least can call on family members to work on a temporary basis when necessary. Additionally, the farmer is

expected to provide for the basic social reproduction needs of the worker and family, for instance housing. Because of this setting, it becomes difficult for farm workers to make spatial demarcations between work and home as work-related issues (as indicated earlier) also relate to the site of social reproduction.

The portrayal though of the farm as a community involves a recognition only of the common interest and mutual dependence of owner and worker, and denies the reality of the antagonism and conflict between farmer and worker. In the end, particularly given the increasingly industrialized character of commercial farming, the primary goal (and abiding identity) – as indicated – of commercial farming is productivity and profit even if this means undermining the well-being of farm workers and their families. In fact, as shown above, commercial farms are notorious globally and historically for their low-wage regime and harsh working conditions and for workers and their families living on the very edge of any respectable and decent conditions of social reproduction (GRACE Communications Foundation 2013). Nevertheless, as I discuss below, the double identity of the commercial farm, as a loving family and brute profit-centre, leads to a distinctive type of labour control.

This is linked to the fact that commercial farms exist under private freehold title or tenure and are dispersed throughout large swathes of the countryside. The state tends to disclaim responsibility for these privatized rural spaces in terms of the provision of basic services and facilities, and traditionally farmers themselves have been held responsible for such provision. As a result, not only are commercial farms privately-owned spaces but they are also privately managed and regulated with minimal state intervention (as if farmers are substitutes for local state structures). As sites of economic production and social reproduction, the existence of this privatized (and ultimately personalized) space has facilitated the emergence of distinctive labour control regimes which speak to the double identity of ‘family’ and ‘profit’. The privatised character of authority in commercial agrarian spaces has been labelled as “domestic government” by Rutherford (2001) in his examination of commercial farms in Zimbabwe in the 1990s. He argues: “The government is ‘domestic’ in two senses: by officially promoting ‘the private’ over public domain – the rule of the farmer over that of state officials – and by administratively valuing paternalistic relations between ... farmers and ‘their’ workers” (Rutherford 2001:14). The paternalism which Rutherford speaks to relates to the identity of the farm as a family, with farm workers seemingly belonging to the

farmer or farm. Of course, at the same time (as Rutherford recognises), the capitalist farm exists for profit-maximisation.

Farm relations between the owner or manager and the worker are described as ‘paternalistic’ or benevolent (Parry et al. 2005, Riley 2012) in the sense that the farmer takes on the role of a parent and the workers as children. As a parent, the farmer adopts a caring attitude toward the workers and the workers reciprocate in kind. This is expressed in a range of farm-based practices which go beyond the typical employment contract found elsewhere. For instance, the farmer may arrange for a worker’s pregnant wife to be taken to the nearest hospital late at night, and workers on their day off may fight fires which threaten the farmer’s homestead. This farmer-worker relationship also entails discipline when necessary (particularly to ensure profit-maximisation) and, hence, linked to paternalism is a despotic form of control (combining to form a despotic paternalism). This despotism borders on an autocratic style of management by the farmer owner and manager.

This despotic paternalism is made possible by the fact that capitalist farms are privatised agrarian spaces often unregulated (or inadequately regulated) by the state. The farms so to speak are private fiefdoms ruled as domestic spaces under the authority of the farm owner. Paternalism and despotism combine in shifting and uneven ways such that a range of hybrid forms of paternalistic despotism exist in practice. Certainly, organisations which monitor human rights abuses on capitalist farms tend to highlight the massive power differential which exists between owner and labourers and argue that brute discipline rules on commercial farms (Oxfam 2004, Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers 2012). And direct farm owner control over both economic production and social reproduction may lead to a totalising form of domination bordering on unilateralism and coercion, along with a complacent and subservient workforce.

This is often manifested in the practices of farm owners in relation to farm worker mobilisation (Griffin, Kahn and Ickowitz 2002). Major difficulties arise in organising farm workers and for a variety of reasons, including the dispersal of work sites over vast agrarian terrains and the increasing prominence of (highly mobile) seasonal and casual labourers on farms (who are notoriously more difficult to organise than permanent workers). There are however examples of farm worker movements if not always in the form of a traditional trade union, such as the Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers and its Anti-Slavery Campaign

(Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers 2012). This membership-led farm worker organisation attempts to establish a sector-wide code of conduct in order to improve wages and working conditions for farm workers. But farm owners and managers are often hostile to such organisations, sometimes banning the presence of unions organising on their farms and any farm-based collective bargaining as this is seen as interfering with their privatised space; in so doing, they often claim that worker organisation is unnecessary as – in paternalistic language – the farmer looks after the labourers.

Domestic government or paternalistic despotism, but of a distinctively racialised kind, existed historically on South African commercial farms as the crucial labour control regime. This regime, as indicated, is privatised and also highly personalised given the character of the socio-space constituting commercial or capitalist farms. Management under domestic government involves simple hierarchies rather than complex management structures, and managerial decisions are often arbitrary rather than systematically ingrained in a more structured form of control system. For this thesis, the key question which arises is whether, under post-apartheid conditions, there has been a shift in the labour control regime on commercial farms in South Africa (to a more structured and impersonal regime) and, if so, it would be necessary to identify the underpinnings which mediate any such shift.

2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on the capitalist labour process and, in particular, the capitalist agricultural labour process. The understanding of specific labour processes, and changes to these processes, cannot be derived from a generic analysis of the capitalist labour process (Davis and Marquis 2005). A more general examination, as outlined in this chapter, does provide an understanding of general trends in capitalist labour processes but the agricultural labour process has its own historical specificities and contemporary conditions of existence. In discussing the labour process under capitalism I raised a number of sub-themes (such as remuneration and resistance) which were also addressed in the particular discussion of the agricultural labour process. But the main focus of the chapter, as with the thesis as whole, was the labour control regime and its significance to the labour process. Labour control regimes come in different shapes and sizes and they are subject to change over time. In focusing on the agricultural labour process I identified a particular kind of labour regime regularly found within capitalist agriculture, which I referred to alternatively as domestic government and paternalistic despotism. In the following chapter, I examine commercial

agriculture in South Africa in which domestic government has prevailed in the past. And I examine, based on the prevailing literature, if any shift away from this form of labour regime is taking place in South Africa. This is elaborated more following in chapters four and five, which focus on my farm case-studies.

CHAPTER THREE: COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines South African commercial agriculture with a particular emphasis on the agricultural labour process. As such, questions around control of labour in agriculture come to the fore particularly in the face of broader changes to the South African economy since the end of apartheid. Under apartheid (and even before the beginning of apartheid in 1948), the racially-based state actively intervened in supporting (almost exclusively white) commercial farmers, including a range of legislation, policies and institutional arrangements strategically used to protect and further the interests of white farmers. This included policies which restricted the movement of blacks to urban areas (therefore ensuring a supply of cheap black labour for commercial farms) and agricultural commodity markets and market prices which ensured commercial viability and profitability. This is the agricultural past inherited by the new government in 1994 and (in many ways) the post-apartheid state has simply continued to serve white commercial farmers such that they continue to dominate the South African countryside.

This chapter analyses the economic and political conditions under which commercial agriculture has been shaped and reproduced in South Africa up until the current setup, with labour themes prevailing in the discussion. Section two provides an historical overview of white commercial agriculture in South Africa, and details the kind of labour control regime which historically existed on commercial farms. The following section examines post-apartheid commercial farming, looking at de-regulation of a neo-liberal kind with reference to commodity markets but also at state regulation of labour. Section four looks at commercial farms as a site of economic production and, on this basis, the following section raises important questions about possible labour control restructuring on farms under post-apartheid conditions. The last section (section six), before the conclusion, discusses commercial farms as sites of social reproduction.

3.2 THE PAST: SEGREGATION AND APARTHEID

Agriculture, though geared to the production of food, also shapes social relations and landscapes in important ways (Greenberg 2010), including labour relations in the countryside. Due to a variety of environmental, historical and economic conditions (including water scarcities), the South African agrarian landscape falls short of ideal ground for broad-based agriculture (Keegan 1988, Marcus 1989). For white agriculture in particular to bear fruit, economic accumulation necessitated the “dispossession of the African population and their social, economic and political marginalization” (Greenberg 2010: vii). In this regard, during the early years of the segregation period (from 1910 to 1948), the South African government used legislation such as the notorious 1913 Natives Land Act to force black people into designated regions of the country (called ‘reserves’ initially), essentially dispossessing ‘the native’ and transferring most of the land into the hands of the country’s white minority. The migrant labour and pass law systems, which emerged and became consolidated over a number of decades, served to inhibit movement out of the reserves into white urban spaces and contributed to the growth of a black rural proletariat on white commercial farms. In the context, the agricultural sector in South Africa began to exhibit extreme dualism and inequality, with the concept of ‘two agricultures’ sometimes used to depict this: white commercial farmers – a modern market-oriented commercial farming sector using hired farm workers; and small-scale black farmers in the homelands pursuing subsistence farming (but often without much success).

The history of the white agricultural sector in South Africa displays all the standard characteristics of ‘accumulation by dispossession’. As Ndlela (2004: 3) so aptly puts it, “the process of dispossession and impoverishment was systemically structured and driven by the state to ensure dominance by its racial and economic partner, i.e. commercial farming”. This history (from 1910 to 1994) is rooted in two main relations. First of all, there has been a mutually-beneficial relationship between white farmers and the state. The state obtained electoral support from white farmers and, in return, white farmers acquired land and labour and the necessary legislation to maintain control over land and labour. Simultaneously, and this is the second relationship, there has been almost absolute dependency and subordination of the farm worker vis-à-vis the farmer. This relationship has been embedded in a system of oppressing and over-exploiting the black labourer as a citizen in his country and as a worker on his land. This is a relationship involving ‘racial paternalism’ whereby “[w]hite farmers demanded respectful and uncomplaining service from their workers, while workers expected

farm owners to provide support and protection of various kinds” (Schirmer 2004: 7). I examine these two relationships in turn.

The foundation of the commercial agriculture industry in South Africa is attributed to ongoing, forceful and intensive state intervention which reached its peak around 1980 with a host of laws, ordinances, statutes and legislation. Besides a guaranteed pool of cheap labour, this intervention included heavy subsidization in terms of for instance guaranteed producer prices and easy access to significant levels of credit (Marcus 1989, Vink and Kirsten 2000). The Land Bank and the Agricultural Credit Board (as parastatals) allowed for loans (and thereby capital financing) by which “government sustained its commitment to keeping inefficient, uncompetitive farmers on the land” (Schirmer 2004: 6); these loans were at interest rates significantly lower than market rates. The state also protected white farmers from competitive pressures in product markets (including, in the early years, competitive pressures from well-off black peasant farmers). Product sales and prices were state regulated through twenty-two commodity-based marketing control boards (for example, for maize) in a ‘single channel’, fixed-priced monopsony serving in fact to redistribute resources from other sectors of the economy to the commercial farming sector (Hall 2009). Hence, viable agricultural profit margins were guaranteed through state marketing boards which set annual commodity prices and protected farmers from the vagaries of the national and global markets (Vink 2004).

State intervention affected all aspects of agriculture including “prices of, access to and use of natural resources, finance, capital, labour, local markets, foreign markets and foreign exchange, etc” (Vink and Kirsten 2000: 2). And it was this “elaborate structure of support” (Hall 2009: 122) that not only sustained the industry, but was the nucleus for economic advantage and profit within the sector. This argument is reiterated by Vink and Kirsten (2000) when they argue that, in spite of the deficient environmental character of the country for agriculture (such as drought-prone conditions and volatile and erratic rainfalls), South African commercial agriculture effectively defied nature and succeeded in producing surpluses of all the important staple food commodities over extended periods.

The success of the “commercial farming fraternity” (Vink and Kirsten 2000: 4) and indeed its very existence was a product of state support, infrastructure and services. The development and consolidation of white agriculture came at a severe cost though for the dispossessed black

majority, for both those confined to the reserves (or homelands) where food production plummeted and for the super-exploited agricultural workers on white farms. Under segregation and later apartheid, the labour composition on farms became deeply stratified along racial and gender lines from white male managers to part-time or seasonal black female workers. Besides a strictly-defined rural proletariat on white farms, a labour tenant system also existed in certain regions of the country as a supposed basis for ensuring mutual benefits for farmers and labourers: “Africans were prepared to supply labour in return for land, and farmers were willing to accept this” (Schirmer 2004: 8). This system slowly but surely was undermined or done away, though unevenly.

Understanding the farmer-worker relationship on white commercial farms in South Africa necessitates recognizing the spatial integration of economic production and social reproduction on white farms. More specifically, the farm is both a place of employment and residence for farm workers and their families. Therefore the labour process on commercial farms has always been particularly complex (involving economic, political and social arrangements), with obligations ingrained in the labour process normally exceeding the standard labour-wage nexus (Schirmer 2004). In most cases, for the farm worker, to lose a job is to lose a home as farmers control almost every aspect of farm life “from movement on the farm to the labour power of male workers’ wives and children” (Du Toit 1993:316, see also Wisborg, Hall, Shirinda and Zamchiya 2013). This arrangement implies that commercial farms entail the convergence of questions around labour and land (including tenure rights on farms and access to housing). It also provides the foundation for the kind of labour controls which have historically existed on white farms; indeed it rationalized the system of control involving a kind of privatized despotic paternalism.

The history of labour relations and the character of the labour process on white farms have been described by Kritzinger and Vorster (1996) as ‘traditional paternalism’ and, similarly, as ‘racial paternalism’ (Schirmer 2004) which depicts agricultural workers almost as children who are dependent on the farmer as the father figure. This relationship, like a parent-child relationship, is governed by a caring ethos but, additionally, by outright discipline (despotism) or “unchallengeable authority” (Du Toit 1993:315) on the part of the farmer vis-à-vis labourers. Workers are treated as belonging to the farm or even to the farmer, and this ‘belonging’ is not pure discourse or ideology serving simply to legitimize or mask super-exploitation and despotism, as it has a real foundation in the material practices of the labour

process. In the end, of course, the micro-politics of the farm has been marked by vast power differentials (despotism) which ultimately benefits the white land-owner. Nevertheless, there is a paternalistic dimension to the farmer-worker relationship with the farm ‘as a family’ and with farmers assisting workers in a manner which goes far beyond what owners/managers undertake in situations where the site of reproduction is spatially removed from the site of production.

Prior to 1994, the agricultural industry fell outside the nation-wide labour legislation and hence state regulation of labour regulation was almost non-existent. This meant that white farms, as owned under freehold title, were largely privatized spheres of governance – or what Rutherford (2001) calls ‘domestic government’. Labour control was left to the whims and wishes of owners/managers without any formalities guiding or structuring farmer-labourer relations. From the instigation of the (typically verbal) employment contract, decision-making on farms unilaterally involved the farmer. Klerck and Naidoo (2007: 113, see also Klerck 2010) argue that there was a “unilateral managerial style” with no opportunities to bargain collectively (or often even individually) in the absence of trade unions. Payment of workers was regularly made in-kind (rather than by cash), with the level of labourer earnings solely determined by the farmer (irrespective of the grueling nature of agricultural work and frequent overtime, especially during the harvesting season). This has prompted historians such as Scully (1986) and Ross (1990) (in Du Toit 1993) to point out parallels between the conditions of work and life of farm workers and dwellers and those of slave estates.

The world of the farm bound workers and farmers together in a complex and intimate relationship, but one heavily weighted in favour of farmers. Clearly, there were massive advantages to farmers in maximizing access to and control over full-time labourers (and the seasonal work of workers’ families) given their on-site accommodation. The possible benefits for workers, however, have been largely ignored. But, for workers and their families, dependency, subservience and vulnerability sometimes seemed a small price to pay for farmers’ familial obligations that are attached to this relationship, referred to by Solomon and Devereaux (2011: 7) as an informal “micro-welfare system”. The ‘micro-welfare system’ was a complex and unwritten relationship which amounted to an informal social protection system where the farmer substitutes for the state in providing for the basic needs of farm workers and dwellers (Solomon and Devereaux 2011). However, as pointed out by Du Toit (1993), the farmer’s obligations to his workers became institutionalized in the form of a ‘gift

relationship' and were not formalized or enforced in a contract and, therefore, simply resulted from his generosity and goodness (which would also be contingent on various factors). The responsibility felt by the farmer towards his workers was therefore embedded in mutual obligations of responsibility and respect that embody the paternal relations on farms.

The 'dop system' is an illustration of a personalised form of labour control of farms, by which farmers went so far as avoiding the payment of wages, or at least paying wages at a bare minimum. This system institutionalized the payment of farm workers, especially those working on wine farms, with alcohol. In this way, alcohol became a tool of social control on farms and played a key role in the recruitment, retention and reproduction of agricultural labour (London 1999). Dependence on alcohol necessitated dependence on employment and, by extension, the employer. Additionally, farmers gave extended credit to farm labourers for basic commodities at the farm store (owned by the farmer), such that labourers were coerced into maintaining their farm employment because of the ongoing farm store debt.

Whether this type of labour control continues to exist on white commercial farms in South contemporary Africa is explored below (in this chapter) but also forms the crux of the following two chapters (chapters four and five).

3.3 POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

To frame this discussion of white commercial farming in post-apartheid South Africa, I provide the following key statement: "From being one of the most highly protected and regulated sectors in the South African economy, agriculture has experienced almost total liberation and state deregulation in the post-apartheid period" (Mather and Greenberg 2003: 264). In many ways, this is an uncontroversial claim about the influences on commercial agriculture which continue to this day. At the same time, though, as will be shown, there has in fact been a regulation drive by the state with regard to labour on commercial farms.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that South African agriculture has been marked by de-regulation as propelled by neoliberal market forces. This de-regulation entails a shift from state regulation to a more society-based regulation hence it is more appropriate to speak about re-regulation; and the state itself played a key role in facilitating this shift. Additionally, neo-liberal restructuring began before the end of apartheid and indeed dates back to the early 1980s. Certainly, under the post-apartheid state, the pace of this restructuring has quickened,

as the state has taken on – broadly speaking – a less interventionist role with regard to commercial agriculture (AgriSETA 2010). I say broadly speaking because, with respect to labour on commercial farms, the shift has been in the opposite direction – from a de-centralised society (or farm-based) regulation to more centralised state regulation. Hence, the restructuring has involved tension and competing tendencies, and it has impacted on the two relationships spoken about earlier, between state and farmer and farmer and worker.

Since democratisation (in 1994), there has been an attempt to formalize agricultural labour relations by incorporating the agricultural sector into labour legislation as well as offering state-sanctioned social protection for farm workers and dwellers. But ‘de-regulation’ on other fronts has proceeded apace. Commodity marketing boards for example have been done away with, commodity pricing is now subject to market forces (and no longer unilaterally influenced and set by the state) and farmers increasingly borrow money from commercial banks at un-subsided market-driven interest rates (Mather and Greenberg 2003). In spite of these changes, agriculture has not been high in the list of priorities for the post-apartheid government (Greenberg 2010). Continued marginalization of the sector, in relation to other sectors, is evident for example in state expenditure on the sector, with budget allocations for agriculture lower than they were in the late 1980s (AgriSETA 2010). But, as indicated, important changes have taken place, as well as noticeable continuities.

3.3.1 Neo-liberal Changes in Commercial Agriculture

In preparation for the inevitable post-apartheid dispensation, ‘organized agriculture’ (i.e. commercial agriculture) in South Africa began to reposition itself (Bernstein 2013) in the years leading to the transformation of South Africa’s political system. It strategically made changes intended to safe-guarded the interests of capitalist farming (Ewert and Hamman 1999, Hall 2009, Bernstein 2013). These changes were driven by more corporatist farming enterprises (sometimes integrated into other key sectors of the economy) such that the ensuing ‘de-regulation’ (guided by the apartheid state) was to have differential impacts within commercial agriculture (with some winners and some losers). The neo-liberal changes included the removal of the following: state subsidies, subsidized credit and bail-out programmes, state marketing boards, trade protection and other forms of engineered support including water provision and access (Hall 2009). Effectively, it led to greater global integration of South African agriculture into the global food commodity regime dominated by

multi-nationals. Of significance also are the growing agro-processing industries which are often driven by retail corporations.

The process of de-regulation and the abolition of the state's institutional apparatus for supporting white farmers did not entail the undermining of the agricultural sector as such but sought to place it on firmer ground in the context of global competition. For example, "the conversion of the biggest agricultural co-operatives into companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) ... [enabled]... them to reinvent themselves as private agribusiness corporations" (Bernstein 2013: 24). Though the traditional support structures were dismantled with the demise of apartheid, the new arrangements were put in place to inhibit market distortions through excessive state intervention. In other words, restructuring sought to prevent undesirable state interventions or to enable selective interventions under specific conditions (Vink and Kirsten 2000). This entailed, as indicated, opening up South African agriculture to the global economy of agriculture along neo-liberal ones, on both the input (such as seeds and fertilizer) and output (agricultural products) sides. This means that commercial farm revenues are now strongly influenced by global conditions (including price fluctuations) and exchange rates (O'Laughlin et al. 2013).

This restructuring has had differential impacts between agricultural sub-sectors and within sub-sectors. In relation to a particular sub-sector, some farm operations have been able to respond favourably to the new arrangements while others have not. In the case of the citrus industry, for example, larger operations have remained competitive despite the more porous trading of agricultural commodities across borders and they have done so often with significant foreign investment. In this respect, Vink and Kirsten (2000) speak about favourable conditions for foreign investment in the deciduous food industry as a result of deregulation and the liberalisation of agricultural trade. Other citrus farmers have had to diversify into other agricultural sub-sectors or convert their production entirely, while some have gone bankrupt. In addition, the agricultural sector is extremely diverse, comprising several main branches, namely field crop husbandry, horticulture, animal production, dairy farming, fish farming, game farming and agro-processing (AgriSETA 2010). Post-apartheid changes in commercial farming often have sub-sectoral specificities based on the form and extent of integration into the global economy of agriculture, with some sub-sectors for instance more heavily dependent on imported inputs such as fertilisers and herbicides. The

same is true with respect to labour specifically, with some sub-sectors (such as dairy farming) more prone to mechanisation and other labour-saving devices.

Table 3.1: Gross Farming Income, Expenditure and Debt for Selected Items for 1993, 2002, 2007, 2010 and 2011

Item	Year				
	2011	2010	2007	2002	1993
Farming units (numbers)	-	-	39 982	45 818	57 980
Gross Farming Income (GFI)	131 540 723	122 550 225	79 543 813	53 329 052	19 620 180
Field Crops	25 544 470	25 505 562	16 002 038	16 476 933	4 771 471
Horticultural Products	32 345 669	29 552 231	19 014 544	14 228 909	4 493 681
Animals and Animal Products	71 830 353	64 609 979	43 738 602	21 222 618	9 314 413
Other Farming Income	1 820 231	1 882 453	788 627	1 400 592	1 040 616
Expenditure	147 729 151	132 166 922	54 072 587	45 038 908	16 377 145
Farming Debt	80 513 050	65 471 423	37 090 712	30 857 891	15 95 001

Source: Statistics South Africa – Agricultural Survey (1993, 2002, 2007, 2010, 2011)

Based on surveys conducted by Agriculture Statistics South Africa between 1993 and 2002, Hall (2009) summarises branch trends for field crops, horticulture and livestock. In these years, the field crop branch experienced a real gross farm income increase of 66% with considerable increases in areas planted and output for some crops (including sugarcane, sunflower and soya) and declines in others (notably maize and wheat). In horticulture (such as apples, apricots, grapes, pears, plums, figs and strawberries) farm income increased by 53% with significant levels of exports. As well, there was a growing domestic demand for certain vegetables. Farm income in the livestock branch rose only by 10% in the context of significant imports of beef. And consumption of pork and chicken grew by 71%, rapidly

making South Africa a net importer of these products (Hall 2009). Such trends indicate the variation in effects of neo-liberal restructuring on different branches but, at the same time, they also mask the internal reconfiguration of sub-sectors.

In this regard, since the analysis presented by Hall (2009), a comparison of the years 1993, 2002, 2007, 2010 and 2011 (StatsSA 2007, 2011) illustrate a sectoral decrease in the sheer number of farming units, but an increase in gross income (see Table 3.1). A variety of reasons could be used for explaining the reduction in farming units, such as the purchasing of farms by the state for land redistribution, but a critical reason is the increasing corporatisation of South Africa agriculture (implying centralisation of farm ownership) and land concentration (which is particularly evident with the emergence and consolidation of game farms and reserves). Further increases in mechanisation coupled with the introduction of new technologies and farming practices (i.e. automated irrigation, mechanical harvesters, trellising) (Ewert and Hamman 1999) – again sub-sector specific – in part explain increases in levels of production. The latest analysed year (2011) generally shows a growth in gross farming income of 7.3% in commercial agriculture, but with a decline in field crops and animal products of 3.6% and 0.2% respectively (StatsSA 2011).

3.3.2 An Endeavour to Formalise Farm Labour Relations

Studying specifically South African wine farms in post-apartheid South Africa, Ewert and Hamman (1999) argue that deregulation and increasing access to export markets have created a profoundly new (and beneficial) environment for major players in the wine industry. For the 1990s, they note a massive expansion in plantings of grapes, and in domestic sales and exports of wines between 1992 and 1996 (Ewert and Hamman 1999). Despite this success, though, they go on to argue that workers' wages and living conditions on wine farms have improved very little, if at all, prompting the authors to remark that farm labourers are “not sharing in the fruits of globalisation” (Ewert and Hamman 1999: 207). This sub-section focuses on labour restructuring on commercial farms in post-apartheid South Africa.

Commercial agriculture in South Africa (still largely dominated by whites) is an important employer of labour (Newman 1997) and the sector largely remains labour-intensive – it employs eight to nine per cent of the national labour force (O’Laughlin et al. 2013). Agricultural records on employment show that the Western Cape is the biggest employer of labour on commercial farms (in 2007), but with the majority of employees being casual or

seasonal labourers (AGRISETA 2010); the Eastern Cape employs the least number of commercial farm employees. There has however been an overall decline in employment since 1994 and a noticeable move towards more capital-intensive methods of production in some sub-sectors (Ewert and Hamman 1999, Hall 2009, Greenberg 2010). The increase in gross farming income and overall expenditure (see Table 3.1) and in salaries and wages (see Table 3.2) is overshadowed by a 5.1% decrease in employment between for instance 2010 and 2011, with full-time and casual/seasonal employment being reduced by 6% and 4.2% respectively. But Table 3.2 also shows, over the 2007 to 2011 period, that insofar as there are any increases in the size of the agricultural labour force in South Africa, this is taking place in non-standard forms of employment, namely, casual and seasonable labourers (Hall 2009, Greenberg 2010).

Table 3.2: Number of Paid Employees, Salaries and Wages

Year	Item			
	Full-time Employees		Casual and Seasonal Employees	
	Number	Salaries and Wages (Rands)	Number	Salaries and Wages (Rands)
2011	430 848	15 577 443	391 119	2 368 807
2010	458 380	12 597 744	408 075	2 622 440
2007	431 664	7 173 389	365 142	1 437 843

Source: Statistics South Africa – Agricultural Survey (1993, 2002, 2007, 2010, 2011)

The agricultural sector in South Africa has always been marked by a significant degree of casual and seasonal labour, given the very character of commercial agriculture and the annual agricultural cycles. But, under conditions of neo-liberalism, there is no doubt that a more flexible labour force is being introduced, with even the traditional core permanent agricultural labour force being converted to non-standard employment, in many instances as a means of cutting labour costs. In other words, casualisation of the agricultural labour force is taking place. In addition, externalisation (or the outsourcing of agricultural labour through labour brokers) is increasingly prevalent. This externalisation (also called labour contracting) refers to the buying and selling of labour power (or capacity) by a third party (broker) who is then responsible for bringing workers onto the farm (Ewert and Hamman 1999, du Toit and Ally 2003). The employment relationship is not directly between the farmer and the hired

labourer; the farmer has a business contract with the labour broker, and the latter effectively employs the labourers.

This on-the-farm restructuring of the labour force is taking place simultaneously with attempts by the post-apartheid state to protect farm labourers through labour legislation, including the Labour Relations Act of 1995 and the Basic Conditions of Employment of 1996, which both incorporated farm labour into national labour legislation. In this light, the post-apartheid state introduced the ‘Sectoral Determination: Farming Sector’ in 2003. Such determinations are enacted in economic sectors where no collective bargaining between employers and unions exist. By implication, this means that – because of union inactivity in the agricultural sector (except in agro-processing and large estates) – farm workers did not provide significant input into the new labour regime (Weideman 2004). Nevertheless, this particular determination applies to the employment of farm workers in a vast array of agricultural activities – that is primary and secondary agriculture, mixed farming, horticulture, aqua farming, animal husbandry and field crops (but excludes labourers in the forest industry) (Government Gazette 2006). It also defines a farm worker to include domestic workers and security guards employed on a farm. The determination, in conjunction with the two pieces of legislation, sets the Minimum Wage rate and generally seeks to formalize the employment relationship on the farm. It would seem to follow that farmers would have to significantly adjust their labour practices in terms of the way in which labour is recruited, paid, organized and managed if they were not to act contrary to the legislation.

It may be that on-the-farm neo-liberal restructuring entails an attempt by farmers to by-pass or escape the directives emanating from the new legislation. Certainly, there is significant tension between increasing state regulation of farm labour (which goes contrary to broad neo-liberal trends) and farm-level neo-liberal restructuring. But the state’s determination to inhibit or counter this farm-level restructuring is clearly thwarted by its own neo-liberal leanings (Solomon and Devereaux 2011) and its desire to maintain a globally-competitive agricultural industry. This is witnessed for instance by its refusal to ban labour brokers despite repeated and vocal calls for this banning by the major trade federation in the country. Thus, while the post-apartheid state advocates and pursues protectionism for agricultural labourers, its commitment to this is left in doubt as it is caught between two apparently contradictory objectives.

Even without considering such tensions and contradictions, though, it is questionable to what extent the new legislation fundamentally shifts the labour process and labour relations on commercial farms. Fourteen years into the new labour regime, Ewert and Hamman (1999:202) state that labour relations in South Africa's commercial agriculture sector can still be viewed "as one of 'neo-paternalism' – regulated to some extent by state legislation, but still imbued in the spirit of paternalism". More recently, Greenberg (2010:viii) supports this thought, claiming that "the paternalist power structure on farms was *partially* replaced by a regulatory regime that established a formal labour relations framework, which sought to modernize labour relations on farms" (own emphasis). The existence of the new legislation however potentially has significant implications for commercial farms in terms of modernizing the labour process and undermining the paternalistic and despotic labour control regime of the past, which this thesis seeks to explore.

Besides neo-liberal restructuring by both farmers and the state (as noted above), and though the new labour legislation itself seems progressive and protectionist, the actual implementation of the legislation – in terms of the sheer capacity of the state – also clearly impacts on the form and extent of on-the-ground labour restructuring. More specifically, enforcement of the legislation may be problematic because of deficient state resources. The state department responsible for enforcement is the Department of Labour (DoL), which has approximately 600 labour inspectors monitoring not only all farms in the country but also factories, retail outlets, mines and so forth (Solomon and Devereaux 2011: 22). Particularly given the significant dispersal of farms throughout the countryside, incapacity exists within the DoL with respect to conducting rigorous and consistent labour inspections in the agricultural sector. This absence of necessary labour inspector capacity means that the state fails ultimately to enforce regulatory protections for workers, thereby allowing for the prospect of ongoing labour conditions contrary to the legislation. This must also be understood in relation to the massive power differential which exists on commercial farms, with farm-level power being almost entirely within the hands of farm owners and managers (and in a traditionally despotic manner). In such a context, farm level negotiation and bargaining on the part of farm workers is a major challenge in the pursuance of labour legislation enforcement. Farm owners also have internalized over a number of decades a particular labour-regime mindset (based on despotism) which may make them disinclined or resistant to receiving a reformed labour regime in a favourable light.

3.4 COMMERCIAL FARMS AS A SITE OF ECONOMIC PRODUCTION

As noted, commercial farms in South Africa are sites of both economic production and social reproduction. This section investigates commercial farms as a site of economic production, with a later section (Section 3.6) focusing on social reproduction on farms. In this section, and in drawing on the labour process themes discussed in chapter two, I examine the organisation of labour on South African commercial farms, including categories of employment, work tasks and skills, the gendered division of labour, and remuneration and wages. This contributes to a more focused examination of labour control on commercial farms (in Section 3.5).

With a more market-oriented agricultural regime, in which farmers are no longer heavily supported and subsidized by the state, it follows that production methods would be subject to change. There are indeed increasing market pressures on farmers to intensify and increase production levels and to remain competitive locally and internationally. In increasing production and ensuring ongoing profits, the agricultural sector in South Africa has used standard practices found elsewhere (and as theorized about by Karl Marx – Marx 2000). These have included replacing labour with machinery where possible (i.e. mechanization and capital-intensification), intensifying workloads, and cutting labour costs by maintaining a smaller permanent labour force through casualisation of labour (van der Burg 2008). The use of increasing mechanisation by farmers involves a substitution of machines for labour while supposedly increasing levels of skills; but, in the end, the farmer is able to shed labour while increasing productivity.

The question of categories of employment in South African agriculture is critically important. Labour market theory regularly speaks about labour market segmentation, notably a differentiation between a ‘core’ workforce employed on a full-time permanent basis and non-standard employment including part-time, temporary, contractual and seasonal labour. Sometimes this entails a difference between categories of employment across sectors or work organisations but sometimes it relates to a distinction within a sector or organisation. Either way, the more privileged segment (the core workforce) normally has more secure employment, and higher levels of skills, remuneration and benefits, compared to the non-standard employment segment. This distinction between labour segments is often overlain with distinctions along lines of social identity such as gender and ‘race’. The agricultural industry in South Africa has always been marked by significant labour market segmentation,

with a core workforce and a multiplicity of non-standard employment notably seasonal labourers (e.g. during harvest time) and daily casual labourers. Historically, as Naidoo (2011) notes, the bulk of permanent, full-time workers have been black African men, while black African women have tended to dominate atypical employment (seasonal, temporary and casual); though, in the Western Cape, coloured men and women have also been strongly represented in the agricultural labour force. Additionally, quite often, atypical employees have been wives (and children) of permanent workers.

Originally the Basic Conditions of Employment Act made a distinction between permanent employees and casual and temporary employees as categories of workers, but this distinction was subsequently dropped. Currently, any employee who works more than 24 hours per month is automatically protected by minimum standards set out in the act (Fourie 2008). There is, however, a way of subverting this arrangement. For instance, workers without employment contracts (and therefore effectively not recognized officially as employed), or workers without any substantive written record tying them to a particular place of work, tend to slip through the legislative cracks. And even though the national legislation does not define and recognize atypical employment (that is employment that does not conform to the standard model of full-time, permanent employment with a single employer), the agricultural sector does so at least in practice. Farm owners may in fact fail to register a casual labourer even though the labourer works all year round and meets the minimum requirement of 24 hours of work per month (Ewert and Hamman 1999: 205).

There is a notable shift away from the standard employment relationship on farms in South Africa, which is reflective of broader changes in the South African political economy. A permanent core workforce still exists but non-standard employment is increasingly prevalent, as saving on labour costs is seen by farmers as the easiest and most viable way of limiting increases in expenditure. Wage employment on commercial farms therefore remains categorized in practice into permanent and casual/seasonal/temporary (i.e. contract-based) farm labour (Chambati and Magaramombe 2008), but the number of seasonal and casual employees is notoriously difficult to estimate numerically given the fluctuating number of workers in this category (AgriSETA 2010). In terms of South African agricultural terminology, seasonal workers on farms are normally employed for the duration of a particular phase of the agricultural season, often on renewable fixed-term contracts (as many of them return year after year), and casual workers are inclusive of all forms of non-standard

work (but excluding seasonable labour). Both casual and seasonal farm employees are regularly employed at piece-work rates such that they often do not fall under the ambit of the new labour legislation. There are also an increasing proportion of foreign nationals employed as atypical workers (such as in the Western Cape and near the Zimbabwean border). The major fault line amongst the labour force on farms pertaining to skills and remuneration tends to be based on the distinction between core and non-standard employees.

The introduction of a national Minimum Wage for farm labourers in terms of the farm sectoral determination is seen as important in the shift away from core permanent workers, as well as in decreasing the sheer size of the farm labour force. Officially, payment of farm workers is regulated by the Minimum Wage as laid out in the determination. In addition, the Sectoral Determination regulates the agricultural sector by establishing employment regulations and specifying accountability mechanisms (Government Gazette 2006; see also Government Gazette 2009, 2012). Agricultural wages are set and revised under the Sectoral Determination, with recommendations emanating from the Employment Conditions Commission and legislated by the Minister of Labour. Farmers constantly claim that any further increase in the Minimum Wage will lead to significant farm bankruptcies, as articulated in the context of the farm worker strikes in the Western Cape at the end of 2012 and the impending wage increase. This indeed may be the case for marginal farming operations, particularly as historically the agricultural sector has been dependent on a low-wage labour regime. Shifting to non-standard employment is one way of countering or at least accommodating the Minimum Wage determinations.

There has been, and remains, some controversy and disagreement surrounding the level of farm worker wages, as shown during the recent farm worker strikes in the Western Cape. As early as 2001, in a study conducted by the Department of Labour (DoL 2001), inconsistencies have been noted with regard to wage and remuneration levels as claimed by farm owners and farm workers. This was attributed to confusion between take-home wages, remuneration as a whole (or the gross wage before deductions) and payments-in-kind. Payments-in-kind are officially recognized as a portion of a farm worker's remuneration but, according to the Sectoral Determination, any payments-in-kind to be received by the farm worker should be detailed by the farmer in writing before the worker begins working (Government Gazette 2006). Payments-in-kind is a popular method of compensation for farmers, but it causes confusion as "employers and employees understand remuneration in different ways". For

example, in the countrywide research conducted by the Department of Labour, some items mentioned by farmers as ‘benefits’ were cited by employees as ‘deductions’ (DoL 2001 Chapter 6: 45). Farm workers felt that their take-home pay was being compromised by unclarity around payments-in-kind.

With regard to work and wages, the gendered character of the agricultural workforce remains firmly in place. Overall, as in the past, the gendered division of labour on farms sees the allocation of heavy manual tasks to men while women are mainly used, for instance, for the picking, sorting and pruning of fruit on a seasonal basis. This gendered labour trend relates to the fact that agriculture (beyond being a site of production) is typically also the site of social reproduction, with women as the primary agents of social reproduction (O’Hara 1997) and hence more likely to be considered for seasonal-casual labour tasks. In addition, and because of this gendered division, women have borne the brunt of the repercussions of South Africa’s agricultural restructuring process as more burdens have been placed on their shoulders with the increasing shift to less secure casual and seasonal work (Greenberg 2004). This is sometimes articulated as due to the apparent gender-specific nature of non-standard employment tasks (van der Burg 2008, Greenberg 2010) and “blatant gender lines” (Kritzinger and Vorster 1996: 339) which characterize women and the female farm worker as particularly suitable to such tasks.

In fact, the gendered division of labour overlaps (though not entirely) with the distinction between core and non-standard employees. Thus, the tasks typically performed by women are viewed as less skilled tasks, justifying (to the farmer) why women are paid less. In this regard, the Department of Labour argues that “an indirect cause of gender disparities in wage [and remuneration] levels is the nature of contractual relations between employers and employees” (DoL 2001 Chapter 6: 44), as women are regularly contracted as casual or seasonal labourers and hence do not receive the wages and benefits of the core group of labourers. According to the DoL (2001), women are paid less on average precisely because they are women and farmers value their labour at a lower level than men.

The status of externalised labourers recruited through labour brokers (and employment agencies more broadly) is more complicated, because they are not employed as such by the farmer. Labour brokers (as third-parties in the employment relationship) recruit and hire particularly non-standard employees on behalf of farmers leading to a ‘triangular

employment relationship' including broker, farmer and labourer. Controlling and managing these agricultural workers ultimately becomes the responsibility of the supplier of labour (i.e. labour brokers) as opposed to the farmer. Competition to maintain productivity, as well as the subverting of the new labour legislation, no doubt has prompted this farmer-driven strategy. And it has led to remuneration and benefits for labourers which fall below the minimum standards set by the agricultural sector determination. Van der Burg (2008: 6, 7) argues that the "the outsourcing of labour to labour brokers is not a phenomenon that will disappear in the near future. It has become a new way of doing business" and provides farmers with an opportunity to "engage in a different manner with farm workers".

Hence, while agriculture has been incorporated into national labour legislation in post-apartheid South Africa, there have been concerted attempts by commercial farmers to undermine the applicability and effectiveness of this legislation by for instance labour shedding, the conversion of full-time agricultural labourers to casual labourers and the use of labour brokers. Insofar as the labour legislation involves restructuring the farmer-worker relationship by regulating, impersonalizing and formalizing it, these counter-tendencies may simultaneously inhibit the restructuring process. For example, non-standard labourers on farms are often managed in a more despotic and personalized manner than full-time workers, and labour broking may entail a new form of despotic power vis-à-vis commercial farms. Also, given state incapacity in ensuring farmer compliance to labour legislation, doubts may be raised about the existence of any significant change away from the despotic and paternalistic labour control on South African commercial farms.

3.5 LABOUR CONTROL

Central to the labour process is labour control (Sachikonye 1987), with the labour process under capitalism being characterised by the rise of the managerial function (and the structure of management) and management as the embodiment of conceptualisation. Management conceptualises and controls; and workers execute pre-assigned tasks as the dominated 'partner' in the labour process. Thus the rise and consolidation of the capitalist labour process has involved the formal and real subordination of labour, without workers having any meaningful input into key decisions about work organisation and work tasks. The labour process is effectively geared towards profit and accumulation. But the labour process takes on different and specific forms including across time and space, and also often in relation to the economic sector as well categories and identities of workers (for instance, standard versus

non-standard employment, or male versus female). The labour process in agriculture in South Africa has developed historically in a particular way with specific qualities and features. It is regularly argued that the agricultural labour process on commercial farms is un-modern and has ‘not kept up with the times’, such that the argument that a master-servant relationship still exists on these farms is often made. As noted, the new labour regulatory regime is an attempt to formalize and modernize labour relations in the industry (Greenberg 2004). This relates to questions pertaining to the labour market and labour market transactions.

The ‘standard’ employment relationship is a legal concept which underpins the operation historically of the labour market in countries worldwide. South African labour policies have been continuously criticized for having a ‘legislative gap’ by not clearly defining ‘an employee’ and thereby resulting in a legal problem of who constitutes an employee and who constitutes an independent contractor (van der Burg 2008), with an ‘employee’ recruited through a labour broker seemingly falling under the latter category. By extension, this has implications for remuneration and benefits, depending on whether a farm labourer is defined legally as an employee. A standard employment relationship typically entails full-time and permanent employment in a designated workplace with a written employment contract in place (van der Burg 2008). Anything short of this, involving externalization, casualisation and informalisation, falls outside this definition and would be labeled as ‘atypical’ (non-standard) employment.

The employment relationship on commercial farms in South Africa, prior to the end of apartheid, regularly never met the basic criteria of typical or standard employment, even in the case of full-time permanent workers insofar as they effectively fell outside the labour legislation existing under apartheid and often did not have proper legally-binding contracts. The employment contract for casual and seasonable labourers met none of the criteria for standard employment. In the end, the farm was organized and controlled as a local fiefdom, with the farm owner visualizing his farm (held under freehold title) as privatized space and acting as if he personally ‘owned’ the farm workers and not just the farm property. The post-apartheid labour legislation seeks to bring an end to these private fiefdoms by formalizing labour relations on farm and reconstituting labourers as employees – as subjects – with a set of rights as workers.

In doing so, the agricultural industry was integrated into pre-existing labour relations legislation which did not tailor its objectives to address the historical realities of agricultural labour. For instance, it did not take into consideration the following: a) the agricultural sector is characterized by a significant amount of casualised employment; b) even in the case of full-time, permanent employees, agricultural work is not necessarily continuous and ongoing (as even it is subject to seasonal conditions); and c) employment contracts are regularly verbal and un-standardized. The legislation potentially was able to address these problems but, in not being tailored to the specificities of the agricultural labour force, it facilitated a process whereby commercial farmers sought to subvert the formalization of labour relations. This was particularly possible for farmers because of the pronounced power differential existing between farmer and worker, with farm workers remaining unorganized.

The incorporation of the agricultural sector into existing labour legislation may have been a necessary condition for altering labour relations on farms and challenging the despotic labour control mechanisms existing. Certainly, though, modified and tailored legislation specific to commercial agriculture would have been more appropriate and effective (Lahiff and Cousins 2005). For farm workers, labour legislation should have a direct and almost immediate impact on their wages and working conditions, as well as their capacity to enforce the legislation. This though is the case only if the process of policy and legislative implementation is understood as unmediated. But it is not. Besides the on-the-farm power differentials which invariably moderate the process of implementation (as the legislation is contingent on compliance by the farmer), the effects of the legislation is dependent on enforcement by the state.

In this vein, Naidoo (2011:6) recently argued that “labour laws focus on conditions and terms of service, not on directly changing relationships between farmers and workers”, thus insinuating that the incorporation of the agricultural sector into labour legislation in-and-of-itself does not necessarily impact on the sector’s archaic and privatized labour control system. Ewert and Hamman (1999) made a similar point in the late 1990s with respect specifically to wine farms, in claiming that power relations on farms are not altered by labour legislation. Intriguingly, they further predict that farmers’ decisions, backed up with enforcement by the state, to comply with the legislation would either result in a more formal, business-like labour control arrangement – which might run the risk of worker alienation or industrial conflict – and/or a greater involvement of workers in decision-making (with a consequent loss of the

sole managerial prerogative) (Ewert and Hamman 1999: 214). Involving workers in decision-making processes was haltingly and tentatively attempted on Western Cape farms in the 1990s, but this has not been a major trend. This thesis explores and analyses the former option, of abiding by the legislation – which also entails indirectly subverting its applicability (for example, through labour shedding) as well as a degree of straightforward non-compliance.

Although the existing literature on commercial farms in post-apartheid South Africa remains limited, there are suggestions of a shift from the traditional (i.e. paternalistic, despotic and privatized) labour control regime towards a post-traditional (or neo-traditional) regime without any clarity or clear identification of the form this new regime is taking (Kritzinger and Vorster 1996, Ewert and Hamman 1999). It is tempting to argue that ‘the more things change, the more they remain the same’ and, on this basis, to merely assert that a master-servant relationship prevails on commercial farms. Certainly, the historically-entrenched paternalism in South African commercial farming has resulted in a lagging behind of the agricultural sector in ‘democratizing’ labour relations and labour control (compared to other economic sectors in the country) (London 1999) and hence there is considerable catching-up to do in modernizing the sector. And indeed farmers presently seem to be resisting the labour legislation on a variety of fronts, including the use of labour brokers such that “farmers [choose] to remove themselves from direct employment relationships” (DoL 2001: 40). But, as this thesis seeks to show, there are changes in labour control taking place, irrespective of how obscure and multi-faceted these changes may be.

In terms of bringing about more far-reaching changes, a significant absence within the agricultural sector is trade union mobilization and organization. The presence of worker organization has always been central to analyses of the labour process, with the labour process understood as a site of conflict and as contested terrain between management and workers. The sectoral determination in the agricultural sector arose because of the absence of union activity and hence of collective bargaining. Repeated attempts to organize workers within the agricultural sector – such as the COSATU-affiliated Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) and other organizations such as NGO-inspired farm worker committees, specifically in the Eastern Cape – have not led to significant in-roads into the sector with regard to worker organization. Many reasons exist for this, including the pronounced and increasing presence of casualised labour on farms (with unions normally organizing amongst

full-time employees). At the same time, farmers deliberately make efforts to block workers from forming unions (Human Rights Watch 2011b). Another key factor inhibiting trade union organization on farms is the union model of organizing which posits a spatial separation of economic production and social reproduction. As repeatedly emphasized, no such separation exists on commercial farms. I now turn to the question of social reproduction.

3.6 COMMERCIAL FARMS AS A SITE OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

The labour process and labour control more specifically cannot be fully understood without discussing commercial farms as a site of social reproduction. Social reproduction is of course critical to all economic sectors (Fakier 2010) but, normally, social reproduction is spatially separated from economic production such that the employer – beyond providing workers a remuneration package – does not feel any further obligation to workers beyond the factory floor or office building. In the case of commercial farms historically in South Africa, this is not the case. This means that social reproduction on the farm, including access to housing for workers, is intertwined with processes of economic production such that the labour control regime extends into the sphere of social reproduction. The character and conditions of social reproduction for farm workers and families are significantly shaped by agricultural labour process relations and – by extension – by the farmer himself.

The close nexus between production and reproduction is closely linked to the paternalistic mode of labour control (and indeed the discourse of the farm ‘as a family’). This means that labourers are not simply farm workers but they (and their families) are also farm dwellers, and this therefore highlights the interconnectedness of labour and land issues with regard to commercial farms. Any post-apartheid changes potentially have a bearing on this nexus. This nexus is dramatically captured by the following statement by a farm dweller: “What will happen after my retirement from work? What will happen with my benefit and land rights? Will I be able to continue living on this land? Definitely no, because I am a farm dweller, an object” (Extracted from ‘Being a Farm Dweller by S. Mkhize’, AFRA 2007).

The concern expressed by this particular farm worker-dweller is typical of farm workers and dwellers in South Africa, both historically (Marcus 1989) and to the present. In the past, farm labourers (and their families) were subject to unrestricted eviction from the farm on retirement and regularly lost their on-farm accommodation due to loss of employment through dismissal or retrenchment. This occurred because of the absence of any kind of

tenure rights on farms. With post-apartheid restructuring, and the shedding of labour by commercial farmers for a variety of reasons, evictions have continued since 1994. In many cases, this did not entail shedding labour, but involved simply removing dwellers (including the elderly and sick) who no longer worked on the farm. Farm dwellers in most cases were therefore not workers. Often, they were rural families living on a commercial farm and had some historical attachment to it; for example, their grandparents were born there or they had family graves there (Ndlela 2006).

These post-apartheid evictions have occurred despite the existence of new legislation, in particular the Extension of Security of Tenure Act (ESTA) (Act 62 of 1997). The prime objective of ESTA was to regulate the relationship between private agricultural landowners on the one hand and workers and dwellers on the other hand. This was to include preventing illegal evictions, defining and protecting the tenure rights of farm workers and dwellers, and possibly making provision for the acquisition of land by farm dwellers. Thus ESTA contains provisions aimed at creating and supporting long-term security for vulnerable farm occupants and, at the same time, protecting them from unfair eviction (Government Gazette 1997). This piece of legislation though does not ban evictions, as it simply sets out the procedure to be followed by the farmer in evicting someone from the farm. The widespread prevalence of post-apartheid farm evictions has been documented by a number of NGOs, such as the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) based in KwaZulu-Natal and ECARP in the Eastern Cape. These and other organizations argue that the number of illegal dweller evictions (and evictions more broadly) have in fact spiked in post-apartheid South Africa (Cele 2004), thereby indicating that power differentials on commercial farms leave dwellers vulnerable to conditions of insecurity.

The ESTA admittedly does grant permanent tenure rights on a selective basis based on specific criteria, and of particular significance are the rights of non-working dwellers (unconnected to members of the current labour force) on a specific farm, depending in large part on their historical length of stay on the farm (Mostert and Pope 2010). It seems probable that, insofar as ESTA has encouraged commercial farmers to minimize the sheer number of workers and dwellers residing on their farms, it has contributed to the whittling away of the production-reproduction nexus on farms and, as a result, has been part and parcel of the process of restructuring the labour control regime on farms. Thus labour and tenure legislation have combined, in practice, to outcomes unlikely attended by policy makers.

The unintended implications arising from tenure reform are part of a broader shift of separating the site of reproduction from the site of production, and this also relates to processes of casualisation and externalization on commercial farms (Solomon and Devereaux 2011). An important trend noted by Greenberg (2004), even before the introduction of new labour laws, was a gradual movement of farm labour off the farms or, more specifically, living off the farms. For instance, in the past, seasonal workers unconnected in terms of kinship to any permanent worker used to live on the farm while they worked, but where possible they are now increasingly being transported onto the farms and back to where they live on a daily basis, living in a nearby township or informal settlement. This shift has also occurred in parallel with the rise of labour brokers in supplying workers – who live off-farm – to commercial farmers (Greenberg 2004).

This breaking of the production-reproduction nexus is noted by Greenberg (2004:17), who notes that “as work opportunities increasingly become fragmented and work becomes more precarious . . . , the identity of being a farm worker is also fragmented”. This process appears to be part of the response by farmers to the new labour legislation, as farmers seek to be responsible solely for the social reproduction requirements (for instance, housing) of their core workforce and wipe their hands clean (so to speak) of any social reproduction responsibilities for casual and seasonal labourers. In essence, it seems to be tit-for-tat: the state wishes to regulate labour relations in commercial agriculture in a way consistent with other economic sectors, and hence farmers will treat their labourers as mere units of production. On the surface, it would seem that labour and tenure legislation combined would by necessity enhance the position of farm workers and dwellers, but the evidence suggests that – in practice – counter-processes may be taking place which do the contrary. These counter-processes may in fact be leading to a shift away from ‘the farm as family’ to the ‘farm as a business’ pure and simple, and thereby altering the labour control regime accordingly.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined commercial farming in South Africa, with a particular focus on post-apartheid South Africa and the labour control regime within commercial agriculture. Historically, commercial farming (specifically white commercial farming) was heavily subsidised and supported unequivocally by the segregationist and apartheid states in terms of commodity markets but labour control was left unregulated by the state. This led to a highly

privatised, paternalistic, informal and despotic labour regime. Neo-liberal restructuring, with predated the end of apartheid, has brought about a process of state de-regulation (or, more correctly, re-regulation) with the withdrawal of significant state support for commercial farmers⁰. At the same time, as a form of historical redress, the post-apartheid state has sought to regulate labour relations within commercial agriculture (most notably, though the farm sectoral determination) and enhance the remuneration of farm labourers, as well as to provide a more secure form of land tenure for farm workers and dwellers. Commercial farms have responded to these changes in a variety of ways, including labour shedding, mechanisation, farm evictions, causalisation of the labour force and de-linking the production-reproduction nexus. In this context, the critical question for this thesis is the way or ways in which state-led initiatives and farmer-driven restructuring has altered the labour control regime on commercial farms. The evidence from this chapter suggests that there may be some changes taking place in this regard, although not necessarily in a uniform, coherent and even manner. The following two chapters, based on my four farm case studies, seek to investigate the character and extent of changes in the labour control regime on commercial farms.

CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDY FARMS – LABOUR LEGISLATION AND FARM RESTRUCTURING

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This and the following chapter discuss the labour process on commercial farms in South Africa with specific reference to the case-study farms in KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces. Commercial farms in South Africa have a pronounced reputation of insecurity and vulnerability for farm workers (and dwellers); with workers, even under post-apartheid conditions, remaining muted and unorganised as a social force for change. At the same time, agriculture in South Africa is a very diverse and multifaceted sector such that drawing any generalised conclusions from the case-study farms needs to be done with a degree of caution and tentativeness.

The current chapter examines the everyday realisation of labour legislation on the commercial farms and the social relations which arise from this, including challenges faced by farm owners, managers and workers in adhering to the legislation. In doing so, the chapter is divided into three main sections. The following section (Section 2) sketches the overall backdrop to the farm study areas. Section 3 profiles the key actors (notably farm workers and managers) in the study and serves to summarize their individual roles, as well as their contribution to the employment relationship. Section 4 speaks to questions about control and power on commercial farms, specifically with regard to the implications of existing labour legislation and compliance to it. These discussions lay the foundation for the following chapter.

4.2 FARM PROFILES

The South African commercial agricultural sector is a diverse sector, comprising several branches (Greenberg 2010). For this study, research was conducted in the field crop (specifically horticulture) branch, examining citrus and vegetable growers, as well as the dairy farming branch or sub-sector. The farms I studied fall under ‘Type 5: Large Commercial Family Farms’ (McConnell and Dillon 1997). These farms are similar to estates; however, primary owners are members of a family, as opposed to absentee owners or

shareholders. They are either mono-crop farms or mixed farms, organized along commercial lines including the use of hired labour, dependency on purchased rather than farm-produced inputs and adjusting farming activities according to commercial and market opportunities (McConnell and Dillon 1997). The key operating objective of these farms is profit or utility maximization through market sales. I outline the studied farms in turn.

4.2.1 KwaZulu-Natal: Ixopo

Ixopo is a town situated on a branch of the Mkhomazi River in the midlands of KwaZulu-Natal. Interviews took place in Nokweja located approximately 10km from the main town of Ixopo, and it falls under the Sisonke District in the Ingwe Municipality. It forms part of an important sugar farming and forestry area which has adopted a ‘variability for sustainability’ approach to agriculture.

This used to be a very big dairy industry, but a couple of years back they diversified and...
...so.... timber, citrus, cane were introduced. Those are the main ones. Some guys have a few
animals – beef animals. (Pack House Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013)

The Ixopo district consists of 201 commercial farms and three large timber plantations owned by Sappi, Mondi and Timbo. Timber and dairy predominate in the area and sugar is farmed in the southern part of the district. Two farms were studied in Ixopo: Woodburns Estate and Carisbrooke Valley Citrus Pack House (See Map 4.1 for location of Ixopo).

4.2.1.1 Woodburns Estate

The Woodburns Estate is a fifth-generation family commercial farm. The original settlers arrived in 1857 and the farm in the past was primarily maize and dairy. Presently, Woodburns is one of seven growers in the district who are growing sugar cane, timber and citrus for commercial purposes. The farm is 1,000ha, of which 350ha is for growing cane, 300ha for timber, 80ha for citrus and the rest is unused land. Farmers in the area typically have an agreement with a sugar mill (for the sale of sugar cane), citrus pack house (for the sale of citrus) and local or community buyers (for the sale of timber). The sugar mills open at the beginning of April each year, and more farm labour is needed for the harvesting of the sugar cane. Harvesting takes place from April to December; and even further labour is employed at the end of March and the start of April to ensure that the cane goes to the mill. The sugar cane is first burnt so as to get rid of the leaves, then hacked and transported to the mill.

Map 4.1: Ixopo, KwaZulu-Natal



Woodburns is very labour-intensive, employing 80 permanent workers and 20 seasonal labourers although the use of machinery is extensive:

We use trailers, all forms for citrus, cane and timber; and tractors of course. We aren't completely mechanised, we rely on labour as much as we rely on machinery. (Farm Owner/Manager, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Although there are three sets of agricultural activities (cane, timber and citrus) on the farm, the labour that is used for one section may also be used for another:

Well, the 20 workers that serve as seasonal labourers are generally flexible, so they move around the different operations. (Farm Owner/Manager, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

The permanent workers are typically labour migrants from other provinces or towns. Some of them are housed in compounds located on the Woodburns Estate and in the Carisbrooke area (about 5km from the farm). Those workers who live in the compounds usually get a lift home on a tractor after work; others have to walk approximately 5km home after a hard day of labour.

About 30 of them stay in the compounds. They're from areas such as Mzimkhulu, Umtata, Highflats and Harding...so they can't travel every day. (Farm Owner/Manager, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Other than these select employees, no other people (that is, family members of workers) live in the farm compounds. The compounds are designed for individual employees only, and this arrangement in fact forms part of the employment package. As one worker said:

I guess it [the compound] belongs to me as long as I am working here. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Workers at the compound use pre-paid electricity which they pay for themselves; they have access to running water and have pit latrines in close proximity.

4.2.1.2 Carisbrooke Valley Citrus Pack House

Carisbrooke Valley Citrus is a pack house in Nokweja, Ixopo (opposite the Woodburns Estate). It was established in 2003, and has had two managers since (one in 2003 and another in 2008). It provides a service to seven citrus growers within the district, and thus this agricultural activity can be explored on primary (production) and secondary (distribution) levels.

Fruit is grown on the farms and transported to the pack house where it is then sorted, graded, packed and distributed to local and international markets:

When the season comes, they [the producers] bring the fruit in and they've all got a code that specifies who the grower is, and that is traceable from their orchard all the way through to the overseas market ...And back to the orchard, so we need to know where that fruit is coming from, so it's got that traceability for international standards. (Pack House Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013)

The pack house though does not interfere in any way with the farm-based citrus operations:

Basically, I don't do anything directly with how he grows the fruit on the farm. I will go and have a look at the fruit from time to time...in the orchards...and, when his fruit is picked I handle the process from there. When the fruit arrives from the farms – the packing process, how it's packed, what's done with it, how it's sold, where it's sold...I deal with that. (Pack House Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013)

The pack house employs 10 female employees on a 'semi-permanent' basis (i.e. on an annually renewable contract) and plus or minus 30 seasonal/casual employees annually. In a full season, this number can go up to 120 seasonally-employed workers in the pack house.

The relationship between the pack house and farms is quite significant with regard to the process of recruitment and selection. For instance, employees permanently employed in the pack house claimed to have been recruited from one of the farms (specifically, Woodburns)

and then ‘transferred’ to the pack house. Workers who find themselves losing their employment for whatever reason on the farms also seek job refuge in the pack house. However, men do not constitute the permanent staff, as Carisbrooke Valley Citrus strictly employs women as permanent staff:

Well basically we employ mainly women...Where we can employ women, we employ women. If we need a job that is a bit heavy for a woman, we employ a man. But...there are women out there that are a bit stronger. Last year we got some bigger ladies...and they were quite happy to do the work, and they did very well. So... to be honest, it’s...the women who are more productive, they’re harder workers...I don’t know what it is. But the men just like to sit and drink beer if they can...not all of them – I’ve got some good men here that work hard and do a good job – but, generally [this is not the case]. (Pack House Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013)

All of the employees live in the local community of Nokweja (off the pack house property) and walk the 5km distance to and from work daily. This includes seasonal employees who are generally recruited from the community. One pack house employee highlights the transport problem workers face:

You see, when it’s off-season we generally walk, but when it’s on-season we find transport. Like now, we’re busy preparing to find affordable transport to take us to and from work, because we pay for it ourselves. (Pack House Employee, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013)

This was reiterated by a ‘junior manager’ who also stays in Nokweja:

When the season starts, we have transport that takes us to work and home (Pack House Junior Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013).

Other workers, who are also classified as employees in the pack house, are security guards. They help curb and control theft in the pack house. The role of the pack house security guards is particularly important as they supplement the supervision of staff if and when the manager has to leave the pack house especially during seasonal deadlines:

From time to time I will take a bin of fruit and put it there and say ‘ok, fill your bags...take this home to your kids and your family’. But the general rule is that you can’t take anything out. And we just have to put that rule in place to keep it covered, but we help from time to time...but they do eat fruit sometimes, they take their chances, but I don’t have issues with that. As long as it is not...major stuff they’re stealing...we [as the managers] have to control those things. So we have security cameras..., and we have security in the evenings...not in the daytime. ... They leave when the staff arrive and they arrive when the staff leave. (Pack House Junior Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013).

4.2.2 Eastern Cape: Alexandria And Grahamstown

The Eastern Cape is one of the poorest provinces in South Africa and agriculture remains an important source of employment and food security in the province. The province lies along the south-eastern South African coast and has over 70,000 farm workers employed on commercial farms. The Eastern Cape has more livestock than any other South African province, producing a quarter of the nation's milk (Eastern Cape Business 2007). Deciduous fruit (in Langkloof), citrus fruit (Addo/Kirkwood) and chicory (Alexandria) are important dimensions of the province's agricultural mix. Indeed, the province is South Africa's second-largest producer of citrus fruit. But a feature of recent years has been increasing diversification and changes in land-use (for example, to game farming).

The Alexandria and Grahamstown areas, in which I situated my studied farms in the Eastern Cape, are both in the Cacadu District Municipality (and either in the Ndlambe Local Municipality or the Makana Local Municipality). Two farms were studied: Oak Leaf Farm and Varnam Farm (See Map 4.2 for location of these two farms).

Map 4.2: Grahamstown and Alexandria Farm Sites in Eastern Cape



4.2.2.1 Oak Leaf Farm, Alexandria

Oak Leaf is a third-generation farm located in the Zuney area, about 30 km from Alexandria in the Eastern Cape. It has been operated by the Biggs family since 1980; and in 1986 the current farm owner/manager bought his father out of the business. Mr Biggs owns Oak Leaf Farm, and co-owns Fern Wood Farm (another dairy farm directly adjacent to Oak Leaf) with the state, although it is managed by his brother. The farm is a commercial dairy farm – with 800 milk cows and 550 heifers on 678ha of land. It is largely mechanized, employing 14 permanent male staff:

Milk machines have taken over a lot of labour. That technology hit us long ago, I mean it's been over 30 years already... (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

The labour force has shrunk slightly, but the amount of cows we're milking has more than...probably trebled. So we are using a lot less labour...rather talk about it this way – we talk of cows per labourer, okay, so we were probably 10 cows per labourer, now we're 50. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

One of the farm rules that were continuously stressed is that:

We employ a family – a husband and the wife, and if they have kids, the kids come and stay with them. (Assistant Farm Manager, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

However, it is strictly the men who are full-time employees on a permanent basis (see Photo 4.1). Women may be brought in to work on weekends or when seasonal or casual labour is needed on the farm. However, the oldest employee who was born and raised on the farm, working there since the 1980s, claimed:

I live with my wife and grandchild...No [referring to his wife]...she has never worked here. (Farm Worker Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

The staff members are all housed in the farm compound, which is about 600m from the main (farmer's) house. Another important farm rule is that only staff members (and immediate family) are allowed to live in the compounds:

They [dwellers] come in and I've gotta kick them out and keep turving them out. You know you've got the odd...sister...who, like, arrived from nowhere...you've just gotta keep control all the time. But...basically, I'd like to say 'No', but the odd one does sneak in and I catch them and I say 'listen, it's not the farm rule' and then they've gotta leave. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

Worker housing on the farm is in good condition and services such as running water and electricity are provided. The housing is equivalent to urban housing built under the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The arrangement in which the site of

production and site of reproduction are not spatially separated (with farm labourers living on the farm) however has its fair share of negative implications which affects the working relationship, both between workers themselves and between workers and management:

It's totally different on farms than it is in town – in town, they can go home and one lives on this side of town and another lives on the other side of town so they don't have to share their personal space beyond work. These people live with each other all the time; it's a totally different set up. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

It's because of issues at home that they bring into the workplace. So we've got to solve those issues, we can't separate them because they live and work together. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

One worker elaborated on this:

People are different...other people have a rude temperament at home [i.e. they talk down to their wife] and even here at work those traits reveal themselves. We have to withstand it. (Farm Worker, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

Production in the dairy industry is typically intense as milking is done on a daily basis; however, there are times such as July to October where there are peak workloads. During this period, seasonal labour (who are mostly women as noted above) may be employed depending on the specific need for it, or other methods of increasing levels of (or intensifying) work production may be pursued and implemented.

Photo 4.1: Oak Leaf Farm – Two Workers Getting Ready for a Typical Work Day



4.2.2.2 Varnam Farm, Grahamstown

Varnam Farm is a second-generation farm in Belmont Valley, roughly 10km from Grahamstown, Eastern Cape. The owner of Varnam farm has two plots of land, which are about 230ha each, alongside each other. The farm was previously a mixed farm, with the farmer owning and running cattle on one of the plots on the farm and growing fruit and vegetables on the other. However, the cattle proved to be a liability as they would damage the property, gaining access into one of the fields and eating the cabbages being grown. Vegetables and fruit were more profitable to the farmer and therefore he moved away from mixed farming. The farm now only grows these crops (fruit and vegetables) on 80 to 100ha of land which is under irrigation (see Photo 4.2). The farm is one of the 12 to 15 producers exporting pepper dews through a factory in Grahamstown (called Carara Agro-Processing) to Europe.

The picking season is from March until July, and seasonal workers are heavily recruited during this period, depending on the workload:

So what happens is we start picking these peppers in March, gradually the yield increases and then they peak about six weeks after that; and it peaks because we stagger our plantings, it peaks for about three or four weeks and then it gradually tails off. And what we find is that we hire and then ...we hire more and increase until we've got enough to get around the farm within 10 days to pick everything. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

In addition, in the “off-season”, the farm rotates the 100ha of land with cabbages (see Photo 4.3), olives, butternut, beetroot and pecan nuts which are all sold in the local markets. Their clientele involves local supermarkets such as Pick ‘n Pay and Fruit and Veg City; however, hawkers and traders also generally come onto the farm to buy vegetables for their stock.

Photo 4.2: Varnam Fruit and Vegetable Farm



(Clockwise from top left) (1) a farm worker's house in the distance, (2) some parts of the farm have been planted, while others remain bare, ready for soil testing and more planting in November, (3) some of the 230ha of land is unutilised and forms part of the farm's landscape, (4) a house (in better condition) on the farm owned by the farmer.

Photo 4.3: Cabbages (in October) at Varnam Farm



The farm has five permanent staff (four males, one female), and four casual males. All seasonal labour, employed during the picking and harvesting seasons, are females. None of the staff is foreign to the area, or externally recruited; that is to say, all of the labour is absorbed from the Grahamstown township of Joza, where massive unemployment exists. Male permanent and casual staff is typically born and raised on the farm or have lived there for more than 10 years. In the words of two farm workers:

He [farmer] never hires people who did not grow [up] here. Sometimes he takes some women from town, but simply tells the men [that don't stay here] that he doesn't have a job for them. (Farm Worker, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

I arrived on the farm in 1980 and then I started working [for the old man] in 1981. We only signed UIF [Unemployment Insurance Fund] in 1994 so in most ways I started working in 1994. (Farm Worker, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

There are about nine families who live on the farm, although many people share these houses. These houses were not built and provided by the farmer, and workers have to pay for renting the plot and electricity:

We built the houses ourselves...out of mud...and then we pay R80 for it every month...We buy it [electricity] from him...[and] we have a [water] pump, plus there are tanks around.. (Farm Worker, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

4.2.3 Brief Overview

From these descriptions of the four farm operations, it is evident that different sub-sectors within the agricultural industry in South Africa differ and therefore likely experience different labour processes based on the specificities of each sub-sector; even, though, within each sub-sector there is likely variation as well. As one farm owner in the dairy sector aptly summarized:

You know, I don't employ much labour...Labour is not a huge part of my expenses compared to a citrus or fruit farmer. There their wages...their wage percentage is huge compared to ours. So it [the Sectoral Determination] hasn't really affected us; no, we still farm in the same way that we did 10, 20 years ago. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

Thus, one cannot make homogenous and blanket statements about the industry as a whole based on one particular sub-sectoral observation. By and large, however, the evidence from the field reveals – as will be shown in this and the following chapter – commonalities within commercial agriculture including certain historical changes with reference to the paternalistic labour relationship which has traditionally predominated on commercial farms in South Africa. The linkage between this historical change and the post-apartheid Sectoral Determination for agriculture (particularly Minimum Wage regulations) are explored in this thesis. It will become clear that, because of new labour regulations and provisions, commercial farmers feel less and less responsible for the livelihoods of their workers. In this way, pressure exerted by the government onto the farmer is projected by farmers onto farm workers.

This is evident for instance when farmers do away with further 'privileges' with each increase of the Minimum Wage. As well, there are often unlawful deductions on farm worker salaries in order to compensate for the increases. As an illustration of this, one farm excluded health benefits in the revised employment contract after the Minimum Wage was increased in February 2013:

We used to provide health benefits, but with the increase of the Minimum Wage, we have had to do away with that. (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

The adherence to Sectoral Determination stipulations is thus an important indicator of the extent of government pressure and the farmers' responses to this pressure. This pressure is in turn transmitted onto the worker, thereby releasing the pressure on the farmer. It can be argued that the more commitment the farmer has to abiding to the labour legislation, the less 'loyalty' there is to the worker. In addition, the continued position of farm workers as an

unorganized sector of the national labour force is crucial in understanding the ways in which farm workers respond (or do not respond) to the changing conditions imposed on them by commercial farmers. This will become clearer later as we continue the discussion of the four studied farms.

4.3 MANAGEMENT AND WORKERS: POWER AND CONTROL

A farm worker is a person who is employed in farming (which may include ranching, orchard or other agricultural operations) and whose principal employment responsibilities consist of growing, raising, keeping, cultivating, propagating, harvesting or slaughtering the product of farming. In other words, the worker is employed in farming activities and contributes to the functioning of the farming operation – in exchange for a wage which, in the case of agriculture in South Africa, is not a living or decent wage. Under the Sectoral Determination (No. 13), a farm worker includes labourers directly involved in any aspect of agricultural operations but it also incorporates the following: (a) a domestic worker employed in a home on a farm and (b) a security guard employed to guard a farm or other premises where farming activities are conducted, and who is not employed in and by the private security industry (Sectoral Determination 13: Farm Worker Sector). This thesis recognizes that these two groups fall under the Sectoral Determination; however no interviews were conducted in any form with these kinds of workers on the four farms. This though does not have any bearing on the main outcomes of the study.

The term ‘management’ refers to two features: (i) its form or structure, that is, management as a distinct level in the structure of authority on the farm, such that any power attached to a manager in fact emanates from his or her structural position; and (ii) management as a function or the process of management (Klerck 2008). Farm managers command, control and coordinate the labour force. This means that they structure and organise the labour process. But, in acting on behalf of the farm owner (insofar as they are non-owning managers), they are also subject to controls by the owner (i.e. are managed) and are integrated into the labour process on this basis. However, in many instances in commercial agriculture in South Africa, the owner is also the manager – hence, there may not be a separate and discrete management structure but the managerial function still exists.

Typically, according to labour process theory, managers engage in control and workers merely execute. This is particularly the case if capitalism is examined historically, as

management ‘wrestled’ with workers and increasingly subordinated workers to managerial prerogatives (leading to real subordination). But there is evidence in relation to the four farms, at least from the perspective of farm management, that agricultural labourers provide input into the decision-making process if only on a consultation basis. In this regard, there is invaluable (tacit) skill and experience that is passed down from older farm workers such that the current workforce is not necessarily fully de-skilled in the sense portrayed by Braverman. As the Varnam manager indicates:

Very often I look at the soil condition and ask him [farm worker] what he thinks we should do – if we need to rip or if we can just ridge and plant. And I usually go with his recommendation because he’s been driving [on the farm] for 20 years. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

Consequently, the input of workers may hold some weight in the decisions made by farm managers/owners. However, beyond any doubt, the authority to make a decision and the function of control (and ultimately conceptualisation) remains with the manager.

Thus, the social relationships between manager and worker take place within the context of power and control. Managers, because of their structural position, maintain overall control of the labour process and exercise control over the rules of the game so to speak (De Jager 2006). However, pressures placed on farm owners and managers have led to different forms of managerial practices. As a general but halting trend, as will be shown, the structure of labour control is taking on a more formalized form as the character of commercial farms becomes more focused on ‘business’ pure and simple at the expense of any conception of ‘farming as a family’. This involves a move from personal and un-formalised forms of control to more bureaucratic and less despotic forms of control. Yet this change is transitional; it is by no means complete and shows signs of unevenness.

Though the relationship between farm manager and worker on commercial farms in South Africa is not officially or legally defined as a master-servant relationship, it certainly has had an inherent master-servant dimension:

One thing appears to be beyond dispute and that is the relation of master and servant cannot exist where there is a total absence of the right of supervising and controlling the workman under the contract; in other words, unless the master not only has the right to prescribe to the workplace what work has to be done, but also the manner in which such work has to be done. (van Staden 2003:44)

In the case of commercial agriculture in South Africa, the power of management (as master over servant seemingly) has existed in a context of acute racial oppression as well as ongoing land dispossession. Despite any shifts in the labour control regime (to a more formalised model), it does seem that a mind-set of ‘racial or traditional paternalism’ continues to prevail on commercial farms in some form, amongst both managers and workers as expressed at times in terms of subjective dispositions. In this sense, the past remains alive and is embedded in the present and it continues to configure the prevailing power relations on farms.

The post-apartheid state, in implementing notably new labour legislation applicable to farms, seeks to soften managerial power without necessarily altering the balance of power on farms. Due to the labour legislation, at least in theory (or formally), farmers no longer have absolute (or unilateral) power over labour and more specifically the employment conditions of farm labourers. This restructuring, though, has not been a linear process as tensions arise as a result of the – very truncated – redistribution of power. Certainly, the labour legislation of the state serves as a nation-wide and centralised control mechanism over labour relations on farms, but farm level dynamics cannot be read from national processes. Indeed, there remains some jurisdiction exercised by the farmer/manager as the employer has the capacity and flexibility to employ workers on his terms in a way which may deviate from national regulations.

At times, this occurs because farm workers are scattered throughout the countryside without any understanding of processes beyond the immediate farm environment. As one worker declared:

Because...we are in the rural areas, we generally do not know what's going on, and the way that work has changed...it's just, there's no value in this job.” (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Other workers noted a change, arguing that the instigation of labour legislation has to some degree protected the fundamental rights of a farm worker as it has become more complicated for the farmer to fire or retrench employees:

If someone does not do their work how they are supposed to...they are likely to be given a warning, they are not fired on the spot anymore. (Farm Worker, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

Given this difficulty, the farmer may rely on the current workforce to recommend someone:

Firing someone used to be easy in the beginning but now there is a difficulty. When he [the owner] wants to hire someone he usually asks us if we know of ‘*amaboy*’ we could

recommend and then we usually recommend someone we know. (Farm Worker, OakLeaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

In implementing labour legislation on farms, it is the government's responsibility to inspect farms to ensure adherence to the provisions set out in the legislation. Inadequate, or an absence of, inspections tips the scales of power in favour of farmers, and it leaves room for minimal compliance or even none at all. In terms of compliance, it is regularly the minimal wage which remains particularly controversial with regard to farm-level relationships.

4.3.1 Labour Legislation and Farmers' Control of Labour

In this sub-section, I discuss the significance of the new labour legislation with particular reference to farm-level relations and, in doing so, invariably raise questions around compliance and attempts to circumvent the effects of the legislation by farmers. The legislation, as indicated, is a social protection measure designed at best to redistribute power or at least to minimise the abuse of power on farms. The state, in pursuing the implementation of this legislation, presents itself as a mediator between management and worker. Though, in the end, it assumes and reaffirms the private property rights of the owner and the privatised character of the socio-space of the farm. The shift from a pre-1994 unilateral authority on commercial farms to a supposedly more enlightened and inclusive managerial arrangement does not in real substance exist in practice. For instance, decentralised mechanisms such as collective bargaining do not exist on commercial farms in South Africa, thereby essentially preserving the control and power of the farmer.

Most workers on the four studied farms spoke about a kind of management practice which has been labelled as pseudo-participatory. Pseudo-participation refers to a managerial tactic where workers are seemingly included in decisions on the farm, but managers already have a clear conceptualisation of agricultural operations and a strategy that they will ultimately implement in pursuance of this conceptualisation (Klerck 2008). In this sense, management uses participation as a way of persuading workers to accept the decisions they have already made. As two workers, on two different farms, noted:

Yes, it's management that makes a decision because even if they are under the illusion that we have a voice; when you do say how you think things should happen, at the end of the day they'll do what they were suggesting anyway. At the end of the day, it's their voice that matters. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

He does have control over us and he overrules us on many issues. He will say ‘I don’t want you guys to take this particular route’ without explaining why we couldn’t take that route.
(Farm Worker, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

It is only on one farm, Oak Leaf Farm, where a more levelling form of decision-making was practiced.

It must also be highlighted that this is the only farm (Oak Leaf) where workers and the farmer still considered themselves as a family unit. The workers at this farm expressed a close bond; and they engaged in trust and honesty with one another as well as with the manager. This was indicated by both workers and the manager:

In some [decisions we have to make] I have expressed my opinion and in others I do not...It all comes down to a vote. If the other workers have more people who support what they have to say then my opinion will be overridden. (Farm Worker, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

Our relationship is more like a father-son relationship...I can go to him [farmer] about anything. (Assistant Farm Manager, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

If I have to be honest with you, we have a civil relationship. If I have a problem, I usually go to their [manager’s] office and say ‘I want to talk to you’... If it is a long and complicated matter, he will tell me to close the door and grab a chair so that we can discuss the matter in detail. Before I leave he will always ask me ‘are you satisfied?’ (Assistant Farm Manager, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

The Sectoral Determination, in and of itself, officially erodes unilateral powers of the employer and redistributes power to the state and to workers. This though should not be understood in some sort of zero-sum theory of power such that labour legislation, in empowering the state and workers, undermines the power of the farm owner/manager to an equivalent extent.

Ultimately, the power of the state vis-à-vis labour relations on commercial farms is dependent upon the legitimization of this power through ongoing enactment of it (otherwise, it simply exists as a potentiality and not as an actuality). This ultimately requires farm-level inspections and audits by the Department of Labour. In this regard, it is important to recognise that labour legislation designed to ensure basic employment conditions on farms (the Basic Conditions of Employment Act) allows for regulated flexibility – that is, state regulation of core rights (or basic conditions) while allowing employers considerable flexibility within broad parameters set by the state. This further complicates the power relations between the state and farm owners.

The instigation of the Sectoral Determination in 2003 started with a two-tier wage system in which the payment of wages was differentiated on a geographical basis (with Area A and Area B). This distinction (between Area A and Area B) was eliminated as of 1 March 2008 such that all farms, irrespective of their locality, are now governed by a single wage system. Naidoo, Klerck and Manganeng (2007) claim, at least during the time they were writing, that a Minimum Wage of R1,000 per month could undercut 17.6% (or 158,000) of the existing full-time jobs in the agricultural sector. They argued that, subsequent to 1994, farmers have regularly – in response to wage increases – shifted away from full-time employment to casual employment and/or increasingly mechanised their agricultural operations where possible. As it stands, the Minimum Wage is set at R2,273.52 per month and the sheer size of the agricultural labour force has continued to decrease. The move away from full-time employment, and the prospects of this happening on a particular farm, weighs heavily on the minds of farm workers and inhibits their capacity to mount any serious challenge to any despotic managerial practices.

Before the incorporation of agriculture into labour legislation, farmers exercised unchallengeable authority and it is precisely this managerial control which has been under the political spotlight since the end of apartheid. Compliance by farmers to labour legislation suggests an acceptance of labour practices (as defined by the state) and – implicitly – the necessity to engage in a negotiation of power between farmers and the state. Insofar as farmers maintain significant leeway in managerial practices, and undoubtedly they do, then they maintain power at the farm-level in a fundamental sense. Conversely, any violations of labour legislation suggest the continued existence of apartheid-style labour processes and attempts to retain unmediated direct forms of labour control.

Of the four farms studied, Varnam Farm and Woodburns Estate had in particular a continuation of characteristics of old-style management, while Oak Leaf Farm had a more progressive managerial control arrangement. The least number of violations, based on interviews, in fact took place at Oak Leaf, while Varnam and Woodburns had a notably higher level of Sectoral Determination violations. All interviewed farmers indicated some form of interaction with the Department of Labour; however the level of violations on the farms suggest that these interactions are unreliable and that labour inspections – when they occur – are not done thoroughly. The degree to which labour legislation is violated or complied with indicates the degree to which labour practices have been formalized in line

with state regulations. The existence of violations, including their form and intensity, therefore is an indicator of whether legislation as set by the state has fulfilled its status and function as a mechanism of control. It would be expected that where labour legislation is enacted without hesitation and avoidance or because of the consistent vigilance of labour inspectors, then less despotic forms of labour control are emerging on commercial farms in South Africa.

Farmers retain extraordinary power at farm-level compared to more regulated sectors of the South African economy, despite the post-apartheid state's attempt to limit or reconfigure this power by formalizing labour conditions. My study shows that commercial farms are still largely owned and passed down to members of the immediate family. This (positively and negatively) contributes to the managerial style on the farm. For instance, while it could be beneficial for siblings to be in the same business, there is a risk of them eventually attempting to compete for power. As one worker remarked:

Even if you try to say something and voice yourself, someone [one of the co-owners] will come and interject... But no, what we're talking about is work and this has nothing to do with how far in line you are with the inheritance. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

The running of the farm as a business [with co-owners], none of us get involved there. Understandably so, but in terms of how to do the job...we tend to have a bit more experience in the field, and so we can get quite active in how to do the job practically and efficiently. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Again, any input from workers is within very narrowly-defined managerial parameters, except perhaps in the case of Oak Leaf Farm. The continuation of the often unchallenged power of the farmer is in part facilitated by inadequate labour inspections. Despite efforts to regulate conditions on farms, the South African government has largely failed to monitor and enforce legal protections guaranteeing wages, benefits, safe working conditions and decent housing for workers and dwellers (Human Rights Watch 2011b). In this context, Sectoral Determination compliance, devoid of labour inspections, is left at the discretion of the farmer.

Although farmers in my study generally argue that contemporary farming practices are more inclusive of the worker in terms of minimising power differentials, ultimate veto power clearly remains in their hands. A noted trend, which reiterates the logic of pseudo-participatory methodologies, was that regular meetings take place where workers are given an opportunity to make suggestions and forward complaints; however, in the case of non-

owning managers, a process of translating worker concerns takes place such that it is essentially the voice of the manager which is put forward. As the Woodburns owner/manager said:

Management makes decisions, [but] the worker's voice is taken into consideration *if it works*.

(my emphasis) (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

If it works, of course, is defined by the owner and/or manager.

One of the critical factors the farm owners take into consideration when determining manager/worker relations and when responding to any changes in the Sectoral Determination is that the farm must continue to first and foremost operate as a business. This factor is fundamental and is the top priority of the farm owners, because farming (particularly in the context of significant changes in the costs of inputs purchased and of outputs or commodities sold) can be a risky venture. In the end, the cost most easily controlled by farmers is the cost of labour. In the case of labour-intensive farming enterprises (such as fruit and vegetable farming) even marginal upward adjustments in the Minimum Wage might lead to labour force adjustments especially through utilizing more seasonal or casual labour (ECC Report 2012). In terms of increasing or maintaining adequate levels of production, my study reveals that stricter methods of control at work are put into effect as well as more shedding of the labour force. As the manager/owner of Woodburns describes it:

There are some places where I'm cutting jobs and I'm saying 'ok...you; there's only two of you in here...instead of maybe three or four'. And I've done the calculation that it's not...exuberantly...strenuous on them, but they can cope quite comfortably with the workload...and if we need more people, we'll get more people, but to start off with we'll keep it tight and very lean, and try and operate as efficiently as possible...We need to be productive and make it work. We've got some goals that we're aiming at, and then we got to keep going for those. (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

In some extreme cases, such as that of workers in Sundays River Valley (Eastern Cape), farmers resorted to selling off their farms or, to maintain productivity, using alternative employment practices such as hiring foreign labourers and deploying labour brokers in order to evade labour obligations emanating from the legislation (ECARP Meeting, 25/05/2013). As an ECARP Land Rights Facilitator plainly put it:

It's not easy because the law says if you can't carry on with your business then you can retrench, but retrenchment is the last resort. But you'll find out that farmers are claiming that their business is suffering as a result of the Minimum Wage, because initially farmers had to

produce their financial books if they made such claims. But now the Department of Labour is lacking in that because you'll find that people are getting retrenched without following proper procedure. (ECARP Staff, 14/06/2013)

For farms, such as Oak Leaf Farm, which are not labour-intensive (and do not depend on seasonal/casual labour), the Minimum Wage provisions have not seemingly negatively affected the running of the farm operation as a business. As seen before, the farmer specifically argued that wages do not substantially weigh on his expenses.

I think it's very successful [the farm], because I make money [laughs] and I continue to make money... [I] only [report to] the Bank Manager [laughs] (Farm Owner/Manager, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

However, Woodburns explicitly calculated farm labour costs as exceeding R10,000 daily which, with every increase in the Minimum Wage, negatively affects the farm business. Nevertheless, the farm was considered to be:

Functional...I can't really say we are 'very successful', we're still surviving, for instance the bank doesn't own the farm, but we are certainly not extravagant. (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

In light of the labour legislation, he continued to say:

Hopefully we don't lose too many jobs and hopefully we don't lose too many farms. ...Because there are some farms that are not gonna survive. It's just unfortunate...a friend of mine [referring to Mr Heckland] has just sold his [citrus and sugar cane] farm and...what does he do? He's been a farmer for 20/30 years and...he can only go and manage for someone else...if there's a farm out there that wants him. But he's kind of just broken even. You know, it's a family farm that's been sold. And they've paid off all the debt basically, so they start again. It's not easy to do that... (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Another manager exclaimed:

Before...there would be a person employed, and they weren't quite...up to scratch, they weren't that productive. You almost felt sorry for them, and you say 'ok, we'll just leave them...and let them...at least they've got a job'. Now unfortunately it's become...you can't carry that person. There are some places where I'm cutting jobs because I have to. (Pack House Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013)

The implication of this quotation – from the perspective of the manager – is that if the state wants to regulate labour on farms in a more interventionist style, then workers will pay the consequence (or price). State intervention, in this regard, has the effect of altering the labour process away from paternalism.

Compliance to the Sectoral Determination is thus shaped by how it affects the business and management responds to the pressures that come from the government on this basis. This also sheds light on the labour process as management seeks alternative methods of co-ordinating work in order to sustain the business.

4.3.2 Compliance and Violation

An on-going form of paternal relationship between farmers and workers is one of the factors that contribute to a lack of full compliance with the provisions of Minimum Wage regulations (Naidoo 2011). In other words, the existing character of the labour process impacts on farmer responses to the imposition of state regulations. At the same, this imposition impacts on the labour process. This suggests that the relationship between the agricultural labour process and the Sectoral Determination is reciprocal in terms of mutual impact. It stands to reason then that the degree or form of compliance to labour legislation would result in a change to any paternal relationships existing on commercial farms or the labour process more broadly. In this regard, a number of factors inhibiting compliance to Minimum Wage regulations have been noted by Naidoo (2011). She speaks of the following: the absence of a history of institutionalized labour in the agricultural sector; the dependence of farm workers on farmers for employment as well as other services (such as housing); and the absence of consistent labour inspections and law enforcement on commercial farms (Naidoo 2011: 81). Results from my study in fact highlight the significance of these factors in Minimum Wage non-compliance by farmers.

The lack of knowledge of labour legislation can be, at least in part, attributed to the absence of a culture of institutionalized labour in the sector. Farm workers in Varnam Farm, for instance, do not know (or understand) the function of a trade union and labour legislation. When questioned about union representatives, one worker responded by referring to something completely different:

Yes we do...we do have UIF. (Farm Worker, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

The ignorance of labour laws on this farm was therefore noted in the terminology used by the workers. The Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) is one illustration of what the workers generally perceive as social protection, such that social protection becomes very narrowly understood and defined. This lack of knowledge on legislation makes workers susceptible to violations. In factoring this into non-compliance, there appear to be three issues (not completely overlapping with Naidoo's points) underlying the ignorance of labour legislation.

First of all, farm workers are not an organized entity. Although they have common concerns, they have a mentality of individualism:

People have a tendency of thinking that as long as it is not them [getting fired] and it is someone else, then life can go on. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013).

Secondly, farm managers/owners are not involved in the process of mediating between government and their employees. Although it can be argued that unions should liaise with workers and government/employers, in the absence of these representatives in the agricultural sector, farmers presumably would be educating their workers if committed to the proper implementation of existing legislation. But this is not the case:

I would like to see a change in the way that farm workers are educated; that we are given talks and workshops alongside our employers, on our rights and a platform for us to express ourselves. And also how to manage and treat people, employers should go on that course...and the decisions they make, that they can't just take decisions without thinking them through. We don't have hearings here, we don't have disciplinary hearings, if he wants to fire you – you're out. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

What comes across is the attempt by farmers to preserve a secluded 'old boys club' where the most important thing is that they keep to their end of the bargain (paying the Minimum Wage) without any additional concern for the well-being of their employees. As an owner/manager proclaimed:

Look, I just stick to the laws. If they say that's the Minimum Wage, then that's what the Minimum Wage is gonna be. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

The third issue is the lack in the presence of labour inspectors on farms. A worker from Dunbrody farm (with which ECARP works) claimed that although he has lived and worked in Sundays River Valley for many years, he had never witnessed labour inspections and this made him feel hopeless with regard to the situation on the farms (ECARP Meeting, 25/05/2013). The significance of the active role of labour inspectors in undertaking farm visits is that it indicates some level of cooperation between government and farmers and, by extension, farm workers. Ideally, it ensures the adherence to legislation and promotes the awareness of violations. Nationally, the Department of Labour however does not have the administrative and logistical capacity to conduct rigorous and consistent inspections on all farms. And this lack of labour inspector capacity means that the government fails to enforce

regulatory protections for workers, thereby allowing for adverse working conditions. The extent to which labour inspections take place though is quite uneven across the country.

Pay slips are an important indication of farmer's compliance with the Minimum Wage provisions, as they ought to contain information on wages before as well as after deductions (Naidoo 2011). The farms I visited, as well as the observations I conducted, reveal – at a general level – a high level of compliance with the provision of properly-completed pay slips (and with the Minimum Wage and employment contract regulations generally). However, there are a variety of pay-slip violations with regard to the Sectoral Determination which, by extension, impact on working conditions. Corrupt labour practices were also revealed in Koukamma (Eastern Cape) where some supervisors demand up to R200 from workers with a promise of a job. In addition, unlawful deductions existed and these revealed absurd requirements such as 'paying to clock in' – a familiar practice by farm managers in Koukamma. This is where farm managers unlawfully deduct a portion of worker's wages for the number of days they actually attended work.

One of the factors – indicated by owners/managers of Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, Woodburns Estate and Oak Leaf Farm – which contributes to the compliance of labour laws, is the open communication lines which they claim exists between the Department of Labour (DoL) and the farmers. This is through consistent visits by labour inspectors. Farm owners and managers stressed how labour inspectors religiously performed audits:

Once, maybe twice a year. Generally ...the Labour Department will come and do an audit and see that we do UIF and PAYE and all of those, and contracts are in place. And they'll also speak to the staff and see that they're happy. And then report back. (Farm Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013)

They usually come in and audit about once a year. If there's a problem, they'll phone. (Farm Owner/Manager, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

They're actually coming next week, they come in here regularly...they come in every two or three months. (Farm Owner/Manager, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

However, these specific incidences of regular inspection visits were overshadowed by witness accounts that I heard amongst workers with whom ECARP works, as well as at the 'Land, Race and Nation' conference held in June 2013 in Cape Town which I attended. In these gatherings, farm workers from the Eastern Cape as well as the Western Cape shared a similar frustration in labour rights violations on farms which are exacerbated by inadequate

labour inspections. Farm workers from Koukamma argued that labour inspectors did not approach the workers when doing their audit reports; they do not go into the fields (or farm residences) to speak to workers but simply met the farm manager in his office. Meetings are only carried out with the employer, thereafter, the inspector leaves.

In addition, the peculiar agreement (between the DoL and the national commercial farmers union, the AgriSA) for labour inspectors to inform farmers in advance before inspecting farms – unless in the case of ‘reactive inspections’ (i.e. inspections with the goal of resolving complaints received) – gives way to devious methods of concealing Sectoral Determination violations on farms. Some methods that have become common for managers in Koukamma include the relocation of farm workers away from the proximity of the labour inspector. Workers are forced, for example, to relocate from the farm shed (where they usually have their lunch) during break times if inspections are taking place as managers do not want the inspectors to see and meet the workers. At times, the workers may even be moved to another farm during inspections. Other actions include the instalment of temporary toilets when inspections are due to take place (in contrast to the reality of having no toilets in the orchards on a daily basis), the ‘coaching’ of farm workers (i.e. telling them what to say to inspectors, under threat of losing one’s job) as well as giving the interviewed worker equipment and overalls for the day of inspection. These fabrications hide the evidence of mistreatment on farms and the violations experienced by workers, thus rendering labour inspectors’ visits ineffective. The glossy portrait of farmer-inspector relations and the effectiveness of labour inspections, as articulated by the three farm study managers above, should perhaps be understood in this light.

Given the discussion so far, it seems clear that a significant portion of commercial farms (including the four studied farms) comply in many ways with labour legislation. At the same time, insofar as labour inspections are not done widely and consistently, the state’s capacity to ensure compliance with labour legislation – and ultimately to protect the rights of farm workers – is rather limited on a farm-to-farm basis and cannot be guaranteed. Indeed, nationally, non-compliance and/or violations of the Sectoral Determination in the South African farming sector is said to be typically high. But, intriguingly, civil society representatives indicate that a particular spike occurred recently owing to the most recent Minimum Wage increase (in March 2013) which happened in response to the Western Cape

farm strikes which took place from November 2012. This demonstrates state incapacity to protect the day-to-day rights of farm labourers. As ECARP claims:

In terms of our intervention...there is a lot of improvement in terms of the Minimum Wage. But now, I think things are kind of changing with the current Minimum Wage [from March 2013]. Because you find out that with this current Minimum Wage...farmers don't want to pay that; what they will do is introduce deductions that may be unlawful or they will deduct things they were not deducting before. (ECARP Staff, 14/06/2013)

One could argue that in order to combat this continued disregard for laws, farm workers would need to equip themselves with knowledge of labour legislation. Results from respondents on the studied farms show that knowledge of the labour laws was mostly restricted to the farm managers/owners. Farm workers tended to be unaware and/or uncertain of their labour rights; and only one respondent was relatively conscious about details regarding employment conditions as – on his own initiative – he read newspapers, watched the news and listened to the radio to keep track of employment conditions and labour legislation.

You see I think that we are at a disadvantage because we are in the rural areas and it's very scarce that Department officials will come in and tell us about our rights as workers. We are left in the dark with a lot of things. Even this wage increase, I think that was only implemented because the Western Cape farmers made a huge raucous about it. Otherwise things like that could easily slip through the cracks... I read the papers so I know (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013).

The next sub-section moves away from labour with specific reference to production and goes on to look more specifically at social reproduction on commercial farms, namely, the micro-welfare system which has historically existed as part of the racial paternalist labour system on farms. Insofar as the farm as a business, rather than as a family, is increasingly coming to the fore in the light of post-apartheid labour legislation, then it is important to examine how this impacts on the micro-welfare system.

4.3.3 Micro-Welfare System

It is widely known that farming areas are fraught with service delivery issues (such as education, electricity, water and housing). Service delivery, in terms of South African state responsibilities, has been delegated to local municipalities but often without sufficient logistic and financial capacity to bring about service delivery. In addition, for rural areas,

municipalities often claim that their service delivery function ends at the gate to the farm as commercial farms are private property (ECC Report 2012). Historically, because commercial farms are private spaces governed by farm owners/managers, the latter have been held responsible for delivery of basic facilities and services. In this regard, farmers have typically provided some of their workers (at least permanent workers) with additional services (sometimes outlined in their employment agreement), including housing and at times small plots for crops. Because in the main workers have lived on the farms, this means that the farm worker's dependency on the employer exceeds that of wages and enters into the realm of social reproduction. This has been bred and reinforced by paternalistic labour relations and forms of control. Solomon and Devereaux (2011), in describing the notion of paternalism on South African farms, refer to racial paternalism on farms as constituting a 'micro-welfare system'.

The 'micro-welfare system' is a complex and unwritten relationship which amounts to an informal social protection system where the farmer substitutes for the state in providing for the basic needs of farm workers and farm dwellers (Solomon and Devereaux 2011). As pointed out by Du Toit (1993), the farmer's obligations to his worker are institutionalized in the form of a 'gift relationship' and are not formalized or enforced in a contract and, therefore, result from his generosity and goodness. The responsibility felt by the farmer towards his workers is reciprocated by workers and thus there is a set of mutual obligations of responsibility and respect that characterise the paternal relations on farms.

However, paternalism is not cast in stone and is "not an unchanging structure" (Du Toit 1993: 9). One of the ways in which the beginning stages of a 'revolution' away from paternalism may be happening is in relation to farmers seeking to renege on their roles as welfare providers for workers and dwellers, because of the more interventionist stance of the state vis-à-vis labour relations on farms (notably, the Sectoral Determination). The general attitude amongst farmers is that since one aspect of the farm (namely, labour relations) is under the political spotlight, earning heavy criticisms from the state and others, then the state should likewise intervene in social reproduction such that welfare services should be rightfully relocated and put under the jurisdiction of the government. Therefore what was previously a mark of one relationship (paternalism) should be reorganized (and indeed done away with) as the foundations of a new farm-worker relationship based on formal and institutionalised labour practices. After all, socio-economic development responsibilities have been delegated

by the ANC government to local municipalities and hence perhaps municipalities should be taking the lead when it comes to social reproduction of farm workers and dwellers.

The right to housing, access to clean and potable water, education, health and so forth are (admittedly qualified) rights enshrined in the South African constitution as well as international law (Human Rights Watch 2011a). And the responsibility to uphold these rights formally remains within the domain of government and not farmers – whose sole responsibility, at least increasingly from farmers' perspective, should be employment. With respect to the studied farms in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, farm owners/managers felt that there were limitations to their social reproduction and welfare functions. Oak Leaf Farm though, as indicated previously, shows differing trends and this is the case once again with regard to social reproduction. Farm owners/managers on the other three farms saw their roles as caregivers and caretakers in an advisory role only. And even workers maintained that only a business (and not a social or paternal) relationship existed on the farm. Any personal problems they possibly encountered were reduced by the farmer to monetary issues where emphasis was placed on the farmer as the economic provider and not a welfare provider. When asked about the farmer's responsibility beyond the scope of work, for instance, workers generally responded in this manner:

My personal life should not be his responsibility. I don't think so. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

The responsibility is mine to take care of myself. It's not his job and it would be unfair for him to now care for me beyond work. Yes, there are some responsibilities, in line of work, which he is obliged to do; but he doesn't have to go beyond this. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

However, there were notably other views which differed from the general stream.

I think management should chip in. I think [it] would be a disgrace if I worked, but was unable to take care of my basic responsibilities. That would obviously mean that...clearly, something is missing at work, so they would have to chip in. (Pack House Worker, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013)

Other sources from my fieldwork reiterated the overall tendency of a shift away from welfarism within the realm of social reproduction, claiming that the aspects of personal loyalty and reciprocity in particular have been removed from the farm employment relationship (ECARP Meeting 25/05/2013). This though may only reinforce insecurity levels that are attached to being a farm worker in South Africa, particularly when the post-apartheid

state's attempts to protect the labour and tenure rights of farm workers and dwellers have not been particularly successful.

Upward adjustments in Minimum Wage levels without financial compensation for farmers, such as subsidies from the state or guaranteed minimum prices for produce, will only reduce profitability and therefore lead farmers to find further means of cutting labour or labour-related costs (ECC Report 2012). The most recent Minimum Wage increase places farmers in a position where thinking about the survival of the business supersedes any social relationship. As such, the structure of the business necessarily shifts from that which seemingly embraced familial ties to a purely economic one. This is not to suggest that farm owners/managers respond to wage increases or other rising costs simply by 'attacking labour' and doing away with social welfarism on farms.

Increasing labour costs have in fact prompted the use of alternative methods of production (or at least a search for alternatives), as a supplement to revising or seeking to hold down labour costs. Costs of production involve electricity (for pumping and irrigation), fuel/diesel, fertiliser, chemicals, and, to a lesser degree, transport to deliver the produce. In Varnam, the farm manager has turned to more efficient production methods so as to maintain (or reduce) the costs of production for a greater output:

I think that we're trying to be more efficient across the board...so in terms of electricity, for instance, we're fitting pumps that are more energy efficient. You know, without getting technical, there's a pump that we've installed which has a variable speed drive. So instead of running at full revs, it only runs to the area that you are irrigating...it adjusts accordingly, automatically. In terms of input costs, we're trying not to waste chemicals, or fertiliser. We're doing soil sampling, as we always have...I get a recommendation with soil samples and then I fertilise accordingly, so there's no wastage there. And then also in terms of pest control, and so on, usually I go according to programmes recommended by the companies that sell the stuff (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 10/10/2013).

In terms specifically of the Minimum Wage and its effect on production, it is seemingly seen even as positive:

I think it [the Minimum Wage] has caused us to be more efficient and to plant more...to try and push those margins, you know...so [we've employed] a tighter crop rotation...so basically if you've got 1 ha here and you plant peppers in one year, next year you can't plant peppers there, you've gotta plant another crop...so that your disease pressures and that sort of thing are quite different...so you're rotating every year so you don't want ground sitting and

going to waste. As you can see, we've started planting...come back in a month's time and there will not be any land left unplanted so that we increase production. I think that's one way we've managed to combat the increase of labour costs (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 10/10/2013).

Irrigation sprinklers at Varnam have also been set to adjust power usage at intervals which are regulated in accordance with the land under irrigation. This is done in a bid to limit water and electricity wastage (Photo 4.4).

Photo 4.4: Sprinklers at Varnam Farm



Other production costs emphasised by the farm manager at Varnam Farm are increasingly tighter international controls on chemical usage. According to him, this means that they have to enforce tighter minimum residue levels and maintain the prescribed levels of residue in the fruit that goes overseas. Without seeking to evade these controls, they are trying to find ways of minimising the cost implications of this; while simultaneously keeping labour costs down.

The continuation of a mutually-beneficial co-existence (between farmer and worker) inclusive of supplementary welfare and paternalistic benefits on the farm may be supported by farm owners/managers if the state were to provide farm subsidies or refrain from engaging in constant amendments to labour legislation. Or, instead – as some farm managers suggested

– a lower rate of adjustments in the Minimum Wage would be appropriate as a basis for maintaining some sort of micro-welfare system:

As a labourer it's getting quite expensive to carry that person. Whereas before, you actually felt...you worked with your heart so you could [employ more people]...because you felt sorry [for them] at R60/R70...you still let them carry on. Now there's a big jump [in Minimum Wage rates] between that and...you can't have all of those people. (Pack House Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 19/04/2013)

The labour legislation, among other pressures (such as dependence on the unreliable weather conditions in South Africa), corners farmers into reducing their labour force, restructuring control mechanisms (including moving away from micro-welfare and paternalism) and – in the extreme case – selling their farms in order to pay their debts. For instance, Mr Heckland was a commercial farm owner in Nokweja, Ixopo who would have formed part of this study. Unfortunately, with the latest Minimum Wage increase, he could no longer afford his labour and thus sold his farm to the government as part of the land redistribution programme.

The Government Strategic Plan for Agriculture for 2001 aimed to increase the trade and export of agricultural products, thereby cementing the neoliberal stance within the sector. However, this move affects the relationship between farmers and farm workers as more capitalist-intensive methods are pumped into the industry. As one farmer commented:

I think that farmers will fall by the wayside and you'll have these big multinationals owning these big lands...big tracks of land and there'll be no difference...instead of one person...one family farm...owning it, there'll just be a multinational with no relationship with anybody. The black guy who's got a historical bond with the farm, the white farmer who's got a historical bond with the farm...none of them will be there, those lands will be just be raped and when it's no longer profitable, they'll move off. (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

This would entail a complete undermining of any form of paternalistic welfare; rather, a cold hard business relationship would prevail with land treated simply as a commodity by all (rather than a place of belonging, often for both farmers and workers). In the meantime, farmers seek ways to cope with the ever-changing Minimum Wage regulations. Although labour legislation violations and shifting away from the micro-welfare system are harsh from the standpoint of agricultural labourers, in the light of the above discussion they make sense from the perspective of farmers.

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter, as the first of two chapters focusing on the four studied farms in KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape, has examined a range of pressures being felt by commercial farmers in the studied sites, pressures emanating from the state and from neo-liberal restructuring. It is clear, on the basis of the evidence examined so far, that something is afoot on these farms which seemingly suggest shifts in the kind of labour control regime existing in commercial agriculture in South Africa. At the same time, there is no uniform or systematic shift in the control regime and, in fact, there is considerable variation across the four farms based on their own histories, conditions and specificities. Nevertheless, there is evidence that a less paternalistic and more formalised system of control – not matter how incomplete – may be emerging, with farmers apparently adopting the position that if the state wishes to regulate labour on commercial farms then the necessary consequences must follow: namely, that paternalism and the micro-welfare system would be done away with and workers would be treated as labour units pure and simple. Though apartheid ended nearly twenty years ago, it is clear that a ‘messy’ transitional phase still exists with regard to the agricultural labour process and labour control systems on farms, with all four farms displaying (along a spectrum) a distinctive hybrid system of labour controls. Ultimately, this means that labour control systems are forged and reworked through on-the-farm processes and that practices on the ground (or on-farm) are marked by varying degrees of incoherence and fluidity. The next chapter furthers the discussion of labour control systems on the four farms and hopefully clarifies the changes and continuities in the agricultural labour control regime in post-apartheid South Africa.

CHAPTER FIVE: CASE STUDY FARMS – MANAGEMENT CONTROL, EMPLOYMENT AND LIVING CONDITIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a more in-depth discussion of changes and continuities on the four case study commercial farms in KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape in relation to the labour process and the labour control regime more specifically. On commercial farms, because of the production-reproduction nexus, labour control is all-embracing and hence all dimensions of the lives of farm labourers are subject to some form of labour control. The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section examines key dimensions of managing labour on the commercial farms, and focuses on themes such as categories of employment and casualisation, supervision of tasks, recruitment and remuneration. The second section examines working and living conditions on the four farms and thus moves into the realm of social reproduction of farm labourers and their families. Together, this and the preceding chapter (chapter four), provide the basis for coming to conclusions (outlined in chapter six) about continuities and changes in labour control systems on commercial farms in South Africa.

5.2 MANAGING LABOUR

Management of farm employees involves co-ordination and control of the tasks they perform to fulfil employment contractual obligations, no matter if these obligations are set through formal or informal means. Though there are variations between sub-sectors, the South African agricultural sector remains largely labour-intensive. Labour shedding is taking place, but this refers not only to the loss of jobs, but also to the reorganization of employment categories – for instance, the shift from one employment category to another (such as, permanent to seasonal/casual labour). A farmer involved in mixed farming pointed out that his staff consisted of labour where:

More or less 100 had become permanent, but [I] shifted about 20 of them to seasonal. We might go up to about 130 workers, but still maintaining the 80 permanent. (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013).

He went on to link this to the Minimum Wage regulations:

Considering the Minimum Wage, permanent workers can't be retained anymore. So, cane-cutters for example, would have to be seasonally employed. (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013).

The agricultural sector in South Africa has been shedding labour due in part to an increase in mechanization since the 1970s (Schirmer 2004, Naidoo 2011). Labour shedding intensified in the 1980s, and even more so in the post-1994 era – when agriculture became more and more re-regulated (along neo-liberal lines) and incorporated into the global market economy. Along with this shedding was increasing casualisation, externalisation and informalisation of the permanent agricultural workforce and intensified workloads for remaining staff. This widespread restructuring, though seemingly about the labour market alone, was also linked to changes in the agricultural labour process and types of management on farms. As the pack house manager at Carisbrooke Valley Citrus highlighted:

You've actually got to find money to be able to pay the people, and how do you do that? You increase their productivity and you tighten the belt...to make it worthwhile. Otherwise none of us have a job, if this place closes...or if the farms fail, we don't have a job. (Pack House Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013).

Increasing productivity therefore has emerged on farms and, with this, tightened forms of labour control.

5.2.1 Employment Categories and Casualisation

How workers on farms are organized on a daily basis is influenced or even constituted by the hierarchical order existing on the farm which regularly separates workers on the basis of employment categories which relates in many ways to skills, expertise and seniority at the workplace (Chambati 2013). The identified types of employment on interviewed farms in this study were (i) permanent, where the employee is one who works all year round for an indefinite period of time, generally lives on the farm and enjoys the benefits of the farm and is entitled to secure monthly remuneration; (ii) seasonal, where the employee is temporarily employed (usually for the season, from April to November); (iii) casual, where the employees work when they are needed by the farmer, get paid for each hour that they work, but only receive their wages fortnightly (sometimes, such as in the case of picking fruit, the payment is incentivised based on level of productivity); and (iv) what I call semi-permanent, in which the employee often enjoys the same benefits as a permanently-employed workers (though at the discretion of the farmer), but has an annually renewable contract with the farmer. In

accordance with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, the fourth identified category (semi-permanent) is officially not entitled to the same benefits as permanent workers and effectively falls under non-standard employment.

Casualisation in particular (as a non-standard form of employment) is of particular importance with regard to labour control reorganisation:

I think there have been some changes, because you'd find out that if the farmer was employing 5 permanent staff and maybe 10 casuals – you'd find that through the Minimum Wage there is now the issue of casualisation. Because when someone is now a casual employee, they will work fewer hours, you don't have to pay the Minimum Wage, and benefits are reduced. Then there is the issue of seasonal employment, so I think that in terms of the Minimum Wage there are a lot of issues that have arisen because you find that employers want to reduce the staff. (ECARP Staff, 14/06/2013)

Seasonal workers differ from casual workers in that the former worked at periodical seasons such as the peak of the harvesting period, while casual employees worked when they were needed at any point in the year:

Our picking season is from March until July, so that's when we have our peak, but we employ casual labour when we need it – to plant cabbages, to pick cabbages, to plant peppers...all that sort of thing, throughout the year depending on our needs. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

In terms of the number of hours worked and the type of work performed, however, casual and seasonal employees tended to be both flexible forms of labour. For instance, in cases where responsibilities or duties had to be integrated (such as chemical spraying, weeding and picking), it is the casual and seasonal employees – almost as a surplus labour force to be drawn upon when necessary – who carry the burden:

Well, the 20 workers that serve as seasonal labourers are generally flexible, so they move around the different operations. We've tried to keep the specialised employees as permanent. (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

The identification of suitable permanent and non-permanent workers is as important as knowing how to maximize the labour they can offer. For the manager (and owner), the best employee works consistently at the lowest wage rate. To improve productivity involves pushing the level at which the employee can perform. Because motivation for the worker usually involves an increase in their wages, this is a popular method of improving productivity:

Pepper season is absolute madness, and my main driver who does 5 trips to town with peppers and 2 with staff at the beginning and end of day...[therefore]...goes 9 times into town...you know, he'll get a bonus at the end of pepper season. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

And as a yardstick of wages received (even amongst permanent staff), seniority (in terms of length of service) becomes quite important:

I think what's happened is that the guys who've been here for longer have incremented over the years so they are naturally higher [in wages] than the other guys. And the guys that have come, sort of, last in, are probably on the Minimum Wage. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

The level of payment serves as an indicator of employment status on the farms, measured for example in terms of security of employment (with permanent staff being most highly paid), location in the permanent staff hierarchy (such as supervisor), and length of service. But a critically important characteristic of employment categories is the gender and ethnicity of the employees. While permanent staff members are typically black South African males, atypical employment is reserved for women, foreigners, migrants and sometimes children. Although technical qualities such as the level of skill remains significant in allocating individuals to particular employment categories, these demographic qualities feature in the segmentation of the labour force on farms.

The form of training of agricultural workers is one issue altered by non-standard employment. In the past, agricultural skills were passed down from one generation of worker to the next, based on the previous relative security of farm worker families. In contrast, now skills are learned on the job because the workforce is more fluid and unstable. This is also linked to increased farm evictions post-1994 and to the move away, on some farms, from on-farm accommodation (in which the site of social reproduction is on-farm) to off-farm accommodation for workers often in informal settlements or nearby townships. Off-farm accommodation, leading to dispersal of farm workers off the farm, does not neatly tie dependents of farm workers to future work on the farm, such that a new grouping of labourers is not now readily available for farmers. As the farm manager for Varnam notes:

The driver must definitely know how to drive. For the other workers, we just show them how to do the job and they learn on the farm. In most cases they do that...because we do training on the spot. We need to teach them how to plant the vegetables, how to top-dress and all that. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

Insofar as this entails a process of deskilling, it means that managers – in moving towards a standard farm business model – gain even further control of the agricultural labour process as they become less reliant on the tacit skills of agricultural labourers. It also means that recruitment and selection of new workers is less tied to the farm worker families traditionally living on farms, sometimes over a number of generations.

Management on farms has devised a range of tactics which have been implemented in an attempt to maintain productive business practices on commercial farms in light of labour legislation. Importantly, with the reduction in the sheer size of the labour force and permanent workers more specifically, managers strategically implement a dual internal labour market which involves maintaining some highly skilled workers (such as tractor drivers) as the core (or permanent) workforce and consequently adding value to these positions, while making other positions more flexible and insecure. Of course, the permanent/non-permanent divide in some form has always existed on commercial farms in South Africa historically (if only because of the seasonal character of agriculture).

But even what were once permanent positions have been at times subject to casualisation or externalisation. In the case of Woodburns Estate, for instance, casual workers now typically work in all areas of the farm (citrus, sugar cane and timber) and thereby learn the different functions of each job and on-the-job. Similarly, the same category of workers at Varnam Farm works in multiple divisions of the farm. Managers at these two farms pay these workers the Minimum Wage rate but simultaneously extract more labour from them without any work benefits emanating from a permanent contract. It was only at Oak Leaf Farm where a fully-specialised, although small and permanent, labour force existed.

Also, the division of labour on these farms is highly gendered though it does not always map neatly onto a permanent male/casual women divide. This division is shown in the photos below (Photo 5.1 and 5.2) with regard to Varnam Farm. While women at Varnam carry the cabbages from the shed to the truck, men load them for delivery under the watchful eye of the manager. This gendered division of labour was also noted, sometimes bluntly, in all visited farms. Managers tend to have a patriarchal streamlining of work as some jobs are specifically reserved for a certain gender. Oak Leaf Farm boasted a male-dominated working environment, while Carisbrooke Citrus was the exact opposite (with a female-dominated labour force).

Photo 5.1: A Varnam Farm Female Farm Worker on Her Way to the Shed to Load Cabbages



Photo 5.2: Men (at Varnam Farm) Pack Cabbages onto a Truck



5.2.2 Supervision and Co-ordination of Tasks

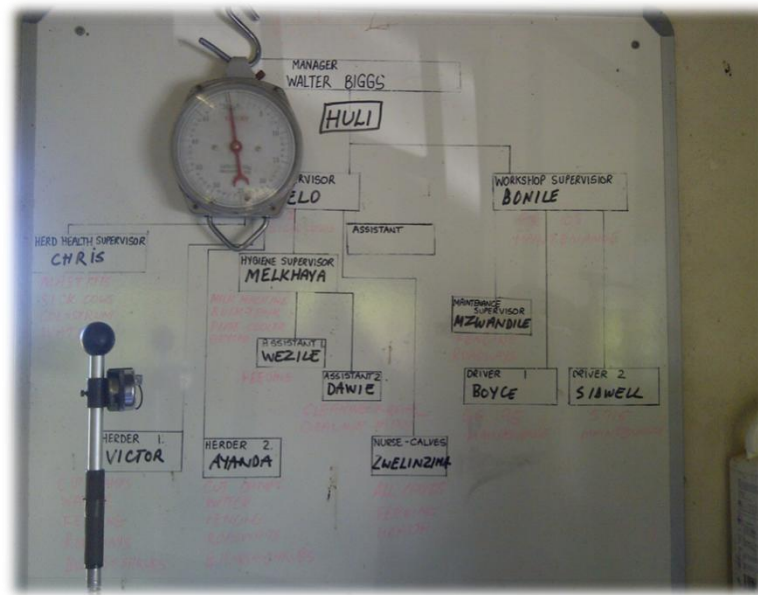
The formal appointment of foremen and supervisors is a way of distributing control on the farm (see Photo 5.3). Traditional corporate positions such as managing assistants, junior managers and supervisors were noted while conducting this study on the four farms. Although these positions are not completely new to the agricultural scene, contemporary agricultural line managers solidify their authority with educational experience as part of a process of professionalization linked to the business model of agriculture. All interviewed farm managers had a Diploma or Degree in Agriculture, with the exception of one who had a Degree in Tourism. Above all, it is this expertise (rather than any paternalistic father role) which now legitimizes their influence amongst farm workers and the authority of their decisions for and on the farm.

Anyone appointed under the manager seems to claim a glorified title as a manager, such as the ‘Junior Manager’ as Carisbrooke Valley Citrus and the ‘Assistant Junior Manager’ at Oak Leaf Farm. Aside from the minimal additional responsibilities, these employees are workers just as their colleagues in the field. The most important duty of the manager is to ensure that the farm makes a profit; thus any decisions made on behalf of the farmer (if the manager is not also the owner) are to ensure the success of his business. In all cases in the study, any non-owning managers were appointed by the farmer and they played an intermediary role between farmers and workers as their duties included reporting any grievances to the farmer from the workers, even though a direct line of communication to the farmer was sometimes emphasized:

[So] we’ve got three designated people [of] which Mbulelo is in charge and then Chris also does when Mbulelo is off duty. Huli as a manager also does this. But the buck stops at Mbulelo, and that’s the same with the udder health [of the cows] – the buck stops with Chris....But...they do come to me...the door is always open, they know it. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

A clear hierarchal arrangement exists within management on the farms, with line sub-managers or supervisors being permanent members of staff and relatively privileged vis-à-vis even other permanent farm labourers. But it seems that this formalised structure still is in tension with paternalistic modes of management, as even low-level farm workers continue to approach the farmer directly about farm issues when the opportunity arises.

Photo 5.3 Staff/Supervisor Board at Oak Leaf Farm



This of course beckons inquiry into the function of a farm manager as overseer of agricultural labourers if labourers are freely able to openly express their concerns with the farmer. The response in the findings shows that in cases where the manager and farmer was not the same person, the manager is supposed to act as an ‘unbiased’ middle-man. He is there to run the business and ensure that the work is done without the farmer having to ‘get his hands dirty’. In most cases, the farmer goes into the fields once or twice in a week and relied on the manager to ensure the day-to-day running of the work. The farm manager at Varnam expressed it in this way:

I think because I don’t live on the farm [so] I don’t see them over the weekend generally, unless we’re working over the weekend, so in an odd occasion they might report some personal issues or ask advice or something like that. But very seldom. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

I think that if they have a grievance, they’ll ask me to set up a meeting with my boss and then they’ll meet with him. But generally they’ll just come to me because I’m on the ground – my boss has got meetings and he’s all over the place so he’s often not here. So I’m the guy that’s around so they do come to me, naturally. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

Although control and supervision of work is allocated to managers and supervisors, power essentially remains in the hands of the farmer. Most of the farm workers indicated some involvement in the decisions made on the farms; however, the authority to veto strategies and

practices remained with the manager/owner. The character of supervision identified from interviews in the study leans towards 'direct control' rather than 'responsible autonomy'. The former speaks to strict discipline and detailed supervision where almost every aspect of the worker's job is tightly controlled and predetermined by management. The latter, 'responsible autonomy', refers to managers encouraging workers to be creative in their job and are given freedom, within limits, to control their own methods and pace of production (Klerck 2008). Workers on the farms studied are sometimes involved in some (minor) decisions made on the farm; however management has the authority to overrule decisions. Evidence from elsewhere indicates even more stringent forms of direct control; for example, farm workers from Fort Beaufort maintained that there is a complete absence of communication with managers and outright prohibition of engagement with management (ECARP Meeting 25/05/2013). Racial despotic management in the past was mainly characterised by direct control but the paternalistic component to it implied some sort of softening of the despotic character of direct control. As a general tendency, with the possible undercutting of paternalistic relations in many instances under the business model, direct control may shift towards a more structured form of labour control but the eventual outcome still remains unclear.

Furthermore, my study reveals that core (permanent, fully employed) workers may become subject to more responsible autonomy forms of control, while the absence of skills and bargaining power of particularly peripheral (casualised) employees makes them more susceptible to ongoing direct forms of control. For instance, in the case of casualised workers, one of the farm managers argued:

I think in the past there was a very traditional approach to farm workers where, you know, they've got to be told every step of the way. But I think now we've adopted a situation...like my spray guys, I'll tell them that by the end of the week I want A, B and C done and then they go on and do it...I come and check on where they are and how far they've gone so that I know where I stand, but it's no longer directly controlled where you have to tell the person exactly what to spray and to put so much into the chemicals. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

Though the farm manager claims that this is not direct control, in reality it is. The change pinpointed by the manager is in fact a shift away from paternalism: it implies that the worker is no longer treated paternalistically as a child but is recognised – under the business model – as an adult with the capacity to work independently of constant supervision. Intense control mechanisms though were noted on the Carisbrooke Valley Citrus farm, including workers

having to carry a yellow tag that indicates that they are allowed to go to the toilet outside allocated break times, and using the security cameras and a two-way radio as a means of supervision as well.

With a machine, you clock in...you can clock in and sit around the corner. I am having to tighten,...toilet breaks...because there are people who take chances. So I'm giving a register, tea break, when they have their break, that's their toilet time. If they need to go between that time, they report to their supervisor, they log the time so we can see who the person is. If I find them, and they'll have a yellow piece of plastic that indicates they're allowed to go to the toilet, it's almost like treating them like children...but we have to put those controls in place to make it more effective. So those are tools to help the supervisors, because the supervisors are quite busy in what they're doing, they have a role to play...but they're also there to see that the work's being done. (Pack House Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013)

Though the manager speaks about the toilet break system as treating workers as children, this method of control should not be interpreted as a simple hangover from paternalism. It is now couched discursively within a business model, to make the farm 'more effective'.

In fact, a more bureaucratic, profit-driven and professionalised system of farm control may be emerging in the context of state interventions around labour in the agricultural industry (and quite often particularly in those farms where labour legislation has been religiously and rigorously implemented). The emergence of this management system is not linear and it is highly uneven across farms. In other words, we are witnessing a transitional period in which an old paradigm of managerial control has yet to be replaced by a new paradigm, as owners and managers are grappling with developing a control system most suitable to their farm dynamics. But certainly there is a general discernible shift away from the farm as a family.

In this regard, farm management reacts to pressures emanating from the state and workers' unions (or other forms of farm-level worker organisation), and this has some influence on management controls vis-à-vis particular farms. Should there be no pressure coming from the state and unions, it can be assumed that traditional methods of labour control remain the foundation of the farm employment relationship. For example, in Sundays River Valley, where a high level of Sectoral Determination violations has been articulated by workers, decisions are made by the farmers without any regard for the workers. Management was alleged to have simply put up notices restricting certain foods on the premises in farm

compounds and any changes that occur on the farm are approached in the same manner (ECARP Meeting 25/05/2013).

5.2.3 Worker Representation and Farmer Organisation

Management controls, as indicated, may be conditional on pressures placed on farmers. The significance of state pressure has already been highlighted, and in this sub-section I focus on worker representation and farmer organisation. The discourse of paternalism tends to reject any possibilities of the farmer and worker being systematically opposed in an antagonistic relationship (Du Toit 1993). But the representation of farm workers and owners inevitably places the two parties with different and conflicting interests, thereby presenting cracks in the notion of paternalism. The Western Cape farm strikes brought this clearly to light.

As hired labour, farm workers should be legally represented by trade unions. Being part of a trade union would expand and enforce workers conditions by collectively bargaining on their behalf and it also may provide farm workers with greater input into day-to-day decisions on the farms (Klerck 2008). But unions are conspicuous by their absence on the farms studied:

No. At this point, we don't have one [union]. Yes, we do need a union because right now there is a lot that we go over and over; it would be much better if we had a representative who is impartial with respect to the relations on the farm, but simply voiced our concerns based on facts and the law. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

The Sectoral Determination in agriculture implies the absence of worker representation and collective bargaining in the agricultural sector and clearly is not a sufficient replacement for proper worker representation. The spatially dispersed character of commercial farms and the specific nature of the farm (namely, a combination of production and social reproduction) makes it very difficult for any union (and particularly those used to organising amongst the urban workforce) to mobilise agricultural labourers. The increasing casualisation of the farm workforce complicates this even further for trade unions.

Farm worker mobilisation, in many cases, has been driven by non-governmental organisations such as ECARP, leading to the formation of Farm Worker Committees (FWCs) which include both workers and dwellers and which address labour issues (like a typical union) but also land and tenure issues given the farm as a site of social reproduction. Through their interventions over a period of a decade, ECARP has formed 67 farm committees in various farming communities around Grahamstown, as well as farm area committees.

ECARP also recently (in March 2013) formed a social movement. Their work of mobilisation has enabled farm workers collectively to advance their struggle for better living and working conditions. Evidence of this is found in responses from ‘feedback sessions’ such as the meeting hosted by ECARP on 25 May 2013 in Grahamstown.

This meeting highlighted workers’ daily struggles, but also shed light on the growing importance of FWCs. For instance, one worker noted that by challenging the unequal power on farms, a more respectable relationship could be borne between management and workers and the rights of workers could be protected (ECARP Meeting, 25/05/2013). This was demonstrated for instance in a work stoppage by Dunbrody Farm workers (on the 16th and 17th of May 2013) about the following: the absence of proper toilets, the non-issuing of gloves for work and a purported unfair dismissal of a colleague. The strength of this new-found collective power, however, is limited at times by on-farm management discrimination experienced by farm workers who are a part of a workers’ committee and by the failure of some workers to join the committee leading to a divided workforce. These unaffiliated workers frequently act as the management’s transmitter of information; for example, one farm worker was told by his foreman (and former close friend) to stop speaking out about the conditions on the farm as it would potentially result in him losing his job. None of the four farms studied had any form of worker representation.

In the same breath, farmers have a strong voice through employer organisations. These organisations enable farmers as a body to lobby the state, but they also have farm-level implications for management-worker relations. During this study, I identified (amongst others) the Citrus Growers Association (CGA) and Cane Growers Associations as representatives for the studied farms. In fact, farmers tended (depending on their crop or livestock mix) to be members of more than one farmer association. Farmers, besides being part of employers’ organisations, also mingle socially through for example country clubs and golf clubs and they are known to discuss labour issues during these encounters. In the face of protests, as happened during the Western Cape strike, they can easily come together and take a united stance. The collective efforts by farmers contrast dramatically with the often individualised responses of unrepresented agricultural labourers. The South African constitution – which is the supreme law of the country – guarantees the right to freedom of association. Under the law, workers have the right to form and join a trade union, to participate in the activities and programmes of a trade union, and to strike (Human Rights

Watch 2011a). On farms, however, sometimes the farmer effectively supersedes that of the Constitution as workers affiliated with trade unions and other such organisations are discriminated against or, in extreme cases, lose their jobs.

Overall, though this study did not seek to address this as a central issue, it is highly likely that the differential power existing between management and workers (and the type of labour controls existing) is influenced by the presence or absence of worker organisation in the context of powerful farmer organisations. Certainly, evidence from farm workers and dwellers mobilised by ECARP highlight the significance of farm worker committees in defending labour and tenure rights albeit not always successfully. Insofar as this farm-based mobilisation does keep a watchful eye on farm management and its practices (including preventing violations) it may provide a further push towards a business-type agricultural model as an unintended consequence of mobilisation.

The following two sub-sections examine two themes that speak to how workers are ‘fitted into’ and organized – with regard to the division of labour – on commercial farms in South Africa. The first sub-section observes how recruitment and selection is arranged in placing individuals into positions on commercial farms, and the second sub-section considers how wages and remuneration packages are structured for groups of employees on farms. This will provide a lead-in to the following section (section three) on working and living conditions on the four farms.

5.2.4 Recruitment and Selection

Despite labour shedding, employment still remains significant in the agricultural sector of the South African economy (Human Rights Watch 2011a). The form or category of employment is clearly closely linked to the level of job security on the farm. A factor that arose with regard to the level of employment on farms was the manner in which recruitment and selection of employees took place and was administered. The recruitment and selection of employees is in fact conducted differently for different categories of workers. There are three main approaches that were exposed in this study: (i) “[formal] interview process”, (ii) social networks and word-of-mouth, and (iii) third-party agents, i.e. labour brokers. In one case, a farmer and the manager of a pack house had a joint agreement on the employment of workers. As pack house workers indicated:

They [farm and pack house] seem to be working together in all this, so if we need packers here now the employer may go into one of the grower's farms and speak to people instead of hiring random people. In my case, Mr Woodburns [of Woodburns Farm] was recruiting people for employment here [pack house]. So it's not like we were blind-sided. They just have this...alliance. (Pack House Worker, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 19/04/2013)

I had given my CV to another farm [Woodburns], [but] I was placed here. I was then told I would be a packer. (Pack House Worker, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 19/04/2013)

Permanent positions on farms are fast diminishing, being reduced to those that are essential for the running of the farm. For example, tractor drivers (see Photo 5.4) are particularly valued across the industry, whereas other positions – such as planters, weeders, packers and graders – are casualised with these positions easily filled and training minimal.

Photo 5.4: Driver at Varnam Farm Checking Cabbages



The value placed on certain positions directly influences the manner in which prospective employees are recruited and selected for the job. In the words of the Woodburns Estates' farmer:

We've tried to keep the specialised employees as permanent....I would do an interview...if someone is being employed for permanent; request a CV...and...go through that structure. On the seasonal contracts, it's based on the experience and ...expertise that the person has... (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013).

Similar points are raised by the pack house manager:

Basically we have our key staff, our supervisors, who we try and keep them on as a permanent, semi-permanent kind of operation...Just to retain them...and to keep the core people. Then the staff that are [causal]...we do training – some are packers, some are graders,

various – so if they’ve been here in the previous season we have an interview session; so if you were here last year and you want to work again in this season you bring your ID and you sign up. I like to give the people opportunit[ies] that were here first [from the previous year]... If you’ve dropped off [during a season because]...you have to go off for maternity leave...or whatever...I try and take that into consideration. I request that if you’re leaving before the season ends, you let me know if you’re coming back; just so that puts me in the picture and I know where we’re going. (Pack House Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 19/04/2013)

This, coupled with the conditions of employment under the Sectoral Determination (such as the provision of a written employment contract), means that a certain level of formality is expected at least in the case of permanent workers. Results from the study indeed indicate that, due to the expectations of the Sectoral Determination, employee selection for permanent vacancies in particular are conducted formally while atypical employees may be employed informally.

Employers request curriculum vitae (CV) and conduct semi-formal interviews based on the category of employment and the requirements of the job. This has reduced the level at which verbal contracts occur, thereby further formalising the employment process:

Yes, it [contract] has to be signed...we have files of them [permanent employees] on the computer. (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Despite the increasingly formal selection process of employees that are recruited particularly for permanent positions, the recruitment of labour is still largely informal on South African farms.

Generally, we inform the staff [about job openings]...so word of mouth plays a role...and they’ll bring people they know and trust. Occasionally, people arrive and they may be employed depending on the availability of work – especially if they’re skilled, [for] example drivers. Or if we don’t have work, we’ll keep their ID copy and their cell phone number. (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Other cases depict people approaching farms for employment before the start of the agricultural season. But social networking is important, whereby employers announce (to the current staff) that they are in need of a certain number of workers for the season and the workers, in turn, bring people they know and trust to the farm. As well, employers identify groups of labourers (usually seasonal) who then work for them each and every season:

We’ve got ‘gangs’ [of labourers] that we’ve identified...that have been working here for years and years, and we just let word out with the present gang that we’ve got, that we need

the other gang, and then word spreads and they come to work....[But] it's word of mouth, mostly. And then... in terms of casual work it's also pretty much word of mouth. We just say we're hiring and there are 300 people waiting for a job. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

Another farmer even noted that the integrated working and living arrangement (the combination of production and reproduction on the farm) also influences recruitment patterns:

My staff do it [recruit]...I don't do it...because at the end of the day *they've* got to get on with that person...*they've* got to live with him (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013, my emphasis).

Intriguingly, this farmer reiterated this point time and time again, in stressing the way in which the site of social reproduction (where workers and their families stay) can interfere detrimentally with production on the farm:

I will say to them 'right, guys the driver's just left...the milker's just left...we need to replace it'; they must find that person for me...because at the end of the day they've gotta live with that person. If he's gonna be up to no good with their wives, they mustn't cry to me. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013).

The migrant labour system also continues to some degree with reference to commercial farms in South Africa and it impacts on recruitment. Farm workers, farm committee representatives (from farms associated with ECARP) and farm owners identify the purchase of labour from both within and across the South African border. Farm workers from the Koukamma area were particularly vocal about their experiences with the Minimum Wage in light of their job security. They claimed that workers are fired and foreigners or migrant labourers are employed in their place. These workers are particularly vulnerable and desperate, making them easy targets for marginal wage rates. To transport this migrant labour, a third-party agent is usually available to supply the workers to the farmer. One farmer, referring to a labour broker and the sourcing of casual labour, said:

When it comes to casuals, we basically get from Alexandria...from town... But I've got a contact in Alex who will bring me...he won't bring someone who is not right...His role basically ends when I have the workers on my farm. (Farm Owner/Manager, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

In this case, reference is being made to local migrants which involves not the typical rural to urban migration but in fact the exact opposite.

From the discussion, it would appear that recruitment and selection is associated to a large extent with category of employment. Farmers consistently maintained that their recruitment approaches were not the same for seasonal or casual workers compared to permanent employees. But once employed, there is the possibility of shifts between categories, either a promotion or demotion. For instance, a common tactic used by farmers – to avoid legal hassles – is shifting a worker from permanent to seasonal status instead of dismissing the worker. It was also found, as introduced earlier, that the same group of employees could be hired on a seasonal basis on the same farm for many years. There is even a loyalty instilled in this uncertain and ambiguous relationship. As one farm owner expressed:

If someone leaves me, and I hear that they are working for [another farm owner], I won't accept that. I will retrench them [i.e. will not rehire]. (Farm Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Furthermore, there is an indisputable gender-based division of labour that is still prevalent on farms with insubstantial logic put forward by farmers for this distinction, such as:

We can draw on casuals when we need...I mean all the picking is all lady's work – I don't think men would be very good at that. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

Women farm workers are still in the deep end of the spectrum; and reasons for not hiring female workers range from economical to patriarchal. Most gender-based discriminatory practices relate in the end to employment categories of men and women, as one farm owner admitted exclusively employing males as permanent workers due to:

The nature of women...because they can't stop fighting with each other. No, listen, I've always had women...but I just got to a stage where I was like '*ek kan nie meer nie*' because otherwise they would have killed each other. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

This means that the recruitment and selection for employment on farms can be deliberately streamlined along gender lines. The same farm owner further urged that I – as the researcher – discuss this with employees in order to get a complete perspective on his claim. In doing so, he further profiled the job for a woman on the farm:

You can ask around what it was like, but I do bring them [women] in on weekends; but permanently, I'm sorry we've had huge problems because then this one's sleeping around with that one's husband, and that one won't work with that one...it's just a problem, and I know it's wrong but we've got to keep peace here. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

Another owner insisted that he had a 50/50 gender ratio for his permanent staff; however no females were available for interviewing, and neither were they seen on the premises or orchards. In fact, the housing (compounds) provided was only for men.

These differentials and inequalities are not restricted to the employment category and the manner in which workers are recruited and selected for employment, but extend to the benefits aligned to the type of employment. I now turn to this.

5.2.5 Wages and Remuneration

People working and living on commercial farms in South Africa are the poorest and most vulnerable group in the labour market. Wages from their employment in agriculture usually constitute their primary, if not only, source of income and therefore play an important part in their livelihood strategies. The workers interviewed for this study are not an exception to this, as most of their families depend on one salary for their livelihood which is supplemented by government grants – mainly, the Child Support Grant and Pensioners Grant.

The introduction of the Sectoral Determination in the agricultural sector was an attempt by the South African government to support the labour rights of these workers and positively contribute to their livelihoods.

Previously workers were exploited by farmers, and without government setting a structure for them, it would continue down the same path. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

As such, Section 6 (in Part B: Minimum Wages) of the 2013 Sectoral Determination outlines conditions in terms of which employers should present a statement of their employee's wages. Pay slips are thus a critical way of indicating whether Minimum Wage provisions have been violated, as they ought to contain information on wages before and after deductions (Naidoo 2011). All interviewed workers indicated that they received pay slips which reflected their wage rate, number of hours, earnings, deductions and the actual net amount paid to them. Farmers in the study even went as far as discussing deductions reflected in the pay slip with their employees:

Yes, he gives us a pay slip and then tells us that this is how much we have earned and the days we have worked. Before the Friday we get paid, we get our pay slips on the Wednesday and he tells us to check them so that if there is a problem somewhere it can be rectified in time. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Permanent staff members' wages were rated by the hour, and this was multiplied by the number of hours and days they worked to make their monthly wage. Seasonal staff was generally task-incentivised; that is, receiving payment in accordance with their personal level of production based for instance on a set rate for a crate (for the fruit pickers). Casual workers, who were only noted at Varnam Farm, were paid fortnightly at an hourly rate. There were other excluded benefits such as living on the farm premises, though not all labourers lived on-site. The method of payment was clearly used as a technique of increasing production levels at the peak of the agricultural season. Thus these workers were generally paid:

For work that's done... [Many] get a ...rate of R11.67 per hour but, for example, cane-cutters and citrus-pickers can get better than that. Drivers [are paid] much more. So add incentives [to this] and you've got more production. (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

This logic, however, was the reverse for farm workers at Koukamma, where many labour violations occurred. Typically, seasonal employees were forced to sign a warning if they are unable to meet certain production levels (such as 3.5 crates a day). In addition to this, farm managers in Koukamma placed workers in teams, paying them at piece-rates with a team target to reach. If workers did not reach the target, they each signed a warning; and if they did reach the target, they had to share the day's wages. Workers from Sundays River Valley made similar points claiming that, due to Minimum Wage increases, there were contractual violations on their farm, specifically regarding the wage rate. For instance, contracts specify that hours of work are 8am to 5pm; however, it is difficult to work on the orchards when it is wet, thus work under these conditions usually commences at 10am. As a result, workers are paid for the hours they work (10am to 5pm) as opposed to those instructed by the employment contract (ECARP Meeting, 25/05/2013).

There are further conditions set by the Sectoral Determination with regard to hours of work, and these reiterate the logic that the level at which workers receives wages is also dependent on their type of employment. Ordinary hours of work, under labour legislation, refers to workers who work (a) 45 hours in any week, (b) nine hours in any day if the employee works for five days or fewer in a week; or (c) eight hours in any day if the employee works on more than five days in a week (Basic Conditions of Employment Act 1997). Any work performed in excess of the ordinary hours is referred to as 'overtime work' and should be agreed upon by both parties (manager and worker) as well as respectfully compensated in accordance with

relevant labour legislation and regulations. Furthermore, the Sectoral Determination permits an extension of ordinary hours for farm workers; dependent on mutual consent. Agriculture as an industry is notorious for long and even socially-unhealthy hours. The existing state regulations are thus in accordance with health and safety guidelines and seek to enforce the rights of employees. Consent, however, is still a foreign concept on the farm as one worker claimed:

Saying no to overtime work is like saying you don't need your job anymore (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Although such dependency on work (and the housing that often goes with it) is still prevalent, the same farm worker continued to say:

But, then again, who would say no [to overtime work] anyway? (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Overall, as mentioned, farmers (at least those studied) tend to comply with the Sectoral Determination. However, even those who do comply on a regular basis have violated the legislation in some form at some time. Overtime work and/or pay in particular proved to be an infringement which was quite common. For instance, workers argued that:

He [manager] would act as though he is writing it [overtime hours] down, meanwhile he isn't so then when it's pay day, we realize that our money is short. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

It's [knock-off] supposed to be 5pm. But sometimes we finish after 5 (like something to 6). Actually, now that I think of it that has been one of the things I have been vocal about. I went to him and I said, 'my time ends at 5...whose time am I working beyond that'? He would surprise us with [supplying us] things like winter jackets just to compensate for the extra hours we sometimes put in. (Farm Worker, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

Farmers insisted that workers could follow a formal chain of managerial command to relay their grievances or even directly approach them:

Definitely, they definitely express their grievances to management. They're always shouting and swearing at us [laughs] they freely express their issue(s) (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Invariably they will talk amongst each other – that's natural – people will naturally, if they have a problem, find someone who will listen to their problem and share their concerns. But, yes they do come to me, definitely...the door is always open, they know it. They do come in...often. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

But farm workers find it very difficult to confront the farmer-worker power relations at the farm level (in part because of their often individualised responses). Because of the vulnerability of their jobs, and without any hope of alternative employment, their dependency on the employer exceeds their day-to-day on-farm existence.

The Sectoral Determination applies to the employment of farm workers in all farming activities in South Africa. And the conditions of the farm Minimum Wage are extended to workers who work at least 45 ordinary hours for the employer. In working with this arrangement, farmers shape and mould wages for farm workers in a hierarchical fashion – depending on the category of employment (permanent or seasonal) and the conceptualisation of skills (and the extent to which skills are valuable to the farm). In determining levels of skills existing on farms, the experience one has acquired on the job plays a crucial part. Because there is usually no formal education or training that is required, skills tend to be passed from one employee to the next or on-the-job training takes place. Workers refer to the history of involvement in labouring on a farm and how this has acted as a training ground for future work:

When we [were] growing up, we occasionally took ‘i-piece jobs’ here on the farm (Farm Worker, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

Sometimes, the nature of job training is in the form of ‘shadowing’ a senior employee or manager:

Well we show them...we don’t take them for formal training or anything, I’ll just show him...you know, I’ve been trained to use a chain saw so I’ll pass that on. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

With respect to skills and their significance with regard to wage levels, one farm manager remarked:

I think drivers and the guys who operate the spraying machine behind the tractor...that’s a skill that is invaluable to us. And then I think, you know, just the guy who operates the chain saw he’s got a skill there, we don’t just give it to anyone (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013).

Besides skill levels, wages are also based on worker experience and time on the farm:

I can assure you that no one gets Minimum Wage on this farm...well, maybe one or two – and those are the real youngsters – but the older guys, a lot of them are double the Minimum Wage. So, I always wanna be well ahead of the Minimum Wage. I wanna be the farm where people wanna work. That’s me. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

These responses are in line with the claim that farmers regard prescribed Minimum Wages as the entry level for new workers though there is some evidence that Minimum Wages for some farmers are also considered maximum wages (ECC Report 2012). However, as my research indicates, this needs to be qualified by the type of employment (casual or permanent) in order to clarify who in fact receives at least the Minimum Wage. That is to say, a newly-employed casual or seasonal worker would not receive a Minimum Wage rate simply because these categories of employed are not covered by the Sectoral Determination.

Farmers speak glowingly about a range of wage (and non-wage) benefits that supplement workers' regular wages. As previously noted, some of these benefits also serve as a way of compelling workers to increase levels of production. These benefits include bonuses, a thirteenth cheque and food parcels, though such benefits are spread unevenly across employment categories. In addition, a distinction needs to be drawn between benefits and payment-in-kind (PIK) as farmers and workers may understand remuneration in different ways. PIK refers to any payment made in kind and should be mutually agreed upon before the employee begins work. This serves to eliminate any confusion about the classification under which such remuneration falls, and it ensures that the employment contract serves as a vital source of reference. A case in point in this confusion is where employers consider something as a 'benefit', while workers consider it a 'deduction'. On Oak Leaf Farm, for instance, the farmer considered the provision of 4 litres of milk to his employees as a benefit:

Well, look, being on a dairy farm we give milk. I give 4 litres of milk to the workers...I don't ever want to hear someone saying they are out of milk because that's an insult to me – yes, it's part of their wage package...obviously I deduct the milk although it's an added thing; you add and deduct (Farm Owner/Manager, Oak Leaf Farm, 30/04/2013)

In contrast, his employees viewed it strictly as a deduction:

Yes [we get deducted]. The house we live in, milk and UIF government fund [are all deductions] (Farm Worker, Oak Leaf Farm, 30/04/2013)

But the assistant farm manager continues to dispute this:

It actually used to be a hidden cost; like here we have the housing allowance, milk, meat – at first that was a hidden cost, but now the pay slips show that. (Assistant Farm Manager, Oak Leaf Farm, 30/04/2013)

Payment-in-kind can be a vital source of maintaining paternalistic relations as it binds the employee to the employer (Naidoo, Klerck and Manganeng 2007) and hence its on-going

prevalence raises questions about the extent of labour relations formalisation on commercial farms. It follows that, in attempting to formalize the sector, payments made in kind should not factor into the agricultural employment relationship. Its continued existence, and particularly its acceptance even within the Sectoral Determination (along as it does not exceed 10% of the Minimum Wage) illustrates a system that is still in transition from paternalistic arrangements between owners and workers to formalised relationships between employers and employees that are regulated in practice by the government. This on-going paternalism is particularly prevalent on Oak Leaf Farm:

So, they certainly get milk, they do get meat over Christmas. And, you can't really call it anything, but when one of my animals die...I don't burn them and throw them away, they certainly get that. If they don't want them, I will throw them away, but that doesn't happen.
(Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

The PIK system is gradually declining though, as farmers reduce payment made in kind in the light of an upturn in Minimum Wages. Other than workers at Oak Leaf Farm, no other workers received benefits exceeding their wages. A worker in Woodburns Estate reminisced, saying:

Before 1994, there were cases where you may get a sack of oranges and maybe firewood, and meat when they still had meat...and that was our bonus maybe in December. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

This is a further indication of the broad but awkward shift towards a more formalised system of labour on commercial farms, which does away with key components of racial paternalism.

5.3 WORKING AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Naidoo (2011:79) argues that, in relation to the implementation of legislation on farms, “emphasis has been on regulating conditions at the site of production to the neglect of the conditions of social reproduction”. Paternal relations in the past extended beyond the labour-wage nexus due to the constitution of farms as a site of both economic production and social reproduction. The current labour legislation, including the Sectoral Determination, invariably affects both the production and reproduction dimensions of the farmer-farm worker relationship, particularly with the shift to a more business model of agriculture based on purely economic relations. A widespread example in the case of the studied farms in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape alike is the parameters that are now set in place for ‘favours’ and services previously provided freely by the farmer. These parameters have emerged as a result of Minimum Wage increases:

We used to provide health benefits, but with the increase of the Minimum Wage, we have had to do away with that. We provide housing for people that aren't from the area. And if someone has had a tragedy and needs a loan – *provided they are trustworthy*, they would get a loan (own emphasis). (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Although the paternalistic element pertaining to economic production and social reproduction has not disappeared completely, there clearly is a shift away from it – with farmers being much more circumspect (for instance, 'provided they are trustworthy' or dependable) in assisting farm workers beyond what is expected of a typical employer. Thus the instigation of labour legislation, especially with much of it concentrated on work and working conditions, is undermining the notion of the farm as a community or family. Indeed, many farmers have sought to separate out production and social reproduction by ensuring that workers no longer live on-site but nearby within travelling distance to the farm.

5.3.1 Terms and Conditions of Employment

The Sectoral Determination stipulates conditions of employment to which farmers should adhere. Their compliance though is dependent on the capacity and competence of the labour inspectors attached to the Department of Labour (DoL). Besides Minimum Wages, the Determination sets out hours of work, leave, prohibition of child labour and forced labour as well as termination of employment procedures. These issues, with the exception of the child labour and forced labour, are discussed below in the light of my farm-based studies in the two provinces.

Upon entering an employment relationship, a contract of employment becomes into effect. The contract of employment is a voluntary agreement between two parties in terms of which one party (the employee) places his or her personal services (labour power or potential) at the disposal and under the control of the other party (the employer) in exchange for some form of remuneration which may include money and/or payments in kind (Erasmus 2013). Since 1997, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) recognizes a written employment contract in the exchange of labour potential and wages. This is indicated in the quotations from farm workers below:

When I started [in the 1980s], this contract thing was not popular...and we got our wages in an envelope (Farm Worker, Oak Leaf Farm, 30/04/2013)

I started here in 1987, so that's when I started working here, but we only got registered [and started getting contracts] at the start of 1996. So that's when we 'officially' started, but I've been here for a while now. (Farm Worker, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

Indeed. The contract thing was not as prevalent when I started. We used to get our wages in an envelope and our income has increased slightly. (Farm Worker, Oak leaf Farm, 30/04/2013)

Written contracts result in significantly lower rates of violation of the Sectoral Determination than do verbal or non-written contracts (Bhorat, Kanbur and Mayet 2011). All interviewed workers, if employed for a year or more (permanent or semi-permanent), signed contracts with their employers. However the significance of contracts to limiting the infringement of SD provisions is still questionable as some farmers simply go through the motions:

Look, we have contracts because we must have them, but I'm a big verbal guy. But we have them because we must have them, so yes they are there [written contracts]. (Farm Manager/Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 30/04/2013)

Subordination is an integral part of the employment contract as the labour potential of the worker is at the disposal and under the control of another (employer). Klerck (2008) puts forward a crucial argument in reflecting upon the failure of the employment contract to express the realities of the employment relationship. More specifically, understanding the employment relationship purely on the basis of the contract is to imply that employees are consenting parties to hierarchy and subordination in the workplace (Klerck 2008). Though the contractual arrangement is voluntary and seemingly consensual, underlying it are relations of power and subordination to which workers submit mainly on grounds of compliance. The very structure of the farm, involving hierarchy and order, is a part of the employment arrangement to which the worker agrees to surrender. As one owner/farmer stressed:

I expect utmost respect from someone I pay. (Farm Manager/Owner, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

The pack house manager reiterated this:

I think, look...there's a certain degree of level of authority that goes with it [my position], and decision making and that. I don't have a problem if they question what I've done or why I do it. But I think they need to respect my decisions...that are made...and that's why we agree before they sign the contract, we go through everything. 'This is what's required of you', we need to know where our boundaries are so that they know what's required...and there will be

consequences if you don't operate within that function. (Pack House Manager, Carisbrooke Valley Citrus, 18/04/2013)

The form of control and subordination is also often dependent on the character of employment; for example, highly skilled workers regularly are subject to less coercive forms of control (Erasmus 2013). The BCEA in fact establishes employment categories, other than those fully-employed on a permanent basis, which relates to (but does not completely map onto) the categories I identified on the studied farms. These are as follows: (i) part-time, where the employee is permanently employed but only works part of a working day or working week, (ii) casual, where the employee is employed on a short-term basis but only works part of a working week and (iii) temporary (often referred to as a 'fixed-term contract'), where the employee is not permanently employed but only works for a specific length of time or until a specific job is completed.

In the conducted study, farmers notably streamlined the adherence of legislation according to the type of employment on farms. For instance, permanent staff not only enjoyed benefits favoured by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, but additionally received medical care, better housing and participation (although, arguably 'pseudo-participation') in the running of the farm. Seasonal staff, as temporary labour, were typically viewed as easily replaceable and, therefore, insignificant. Farmers claimed to have records of these workers, although no written contract was engaged:

Well a permanent [employee] is obviously someone who has a permanent job there and who knows he's gonna be there next month and the next month, obviously if everything goes well...whereas a casual their job can be over tomorrow morning. (Farm Manager/ Owner, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

Permanent [employees are] paid monthly, live on the farm and enjoy the benefits of the farm. Whereas a seasonal or casual employee gets paid per hour, but paid fortnightly but per hour that they work; or incentivised during picking...like now we're picking these peppers...they get paid per crate. (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

In addition, the core, permanent and securer workers receive protective gear, UIF protection and a retirement plan which is covered in their employment contract. On the farm, the end of an agricultural season usually implies the end of employment for most workers, though there is the prospect of future employment on the same farm. Since only permanent workers specifically, or at least in the main, received a written contract of employment, this gave room for the termination of employment for seasonal workers to be one-sided:

We hire more and increase until we've got enough to get around the farm within 10 days to pick everything. And then because of the natural yield of the farm they start tailing off and then people lose interest in picking (Farm Manager, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013)

The conditions for termination of employment require prior notice by one party. In the abovementioned case (of Varnam), the gradual descent of the harvest is proportional to that of employees – whether initiated by the farmer or workers. However, there are cases in which farm workers speak about the sale of a farm – and consequent loss of their jobs – without any notice being given to the employees. For example, a farm was recently sold in Sundays River Valley (Eastern Cape) without informing employees about the sale (they were only told when they received their wages); as a result 16 workers are now unemployed in that area (ECARP Meeting 25/05/2013).

The reaction of the state in such cases reflects the poor level of farm worker representation. Often, farm workers are left with no choice but to seek political solutions to their everyday concerns and struggles. In fact one could even argue that it has become common for poor people in South Africa to be listened to only when they embark in dramatic and sometimes violent protest activities (ECARP 2012), as took place in the Western Cape farm strikes. By and large, this is not limited to issues around employment. Farm workers (especially permanent workers) typically live and work on the farm, thus to lose their job is to lose their home. The conditions under which they live – and are permitted (or agree) to live – are placed under scrutiny in the following sub-section.

5.3.2 Housing and Living Conditions

The Sectoral Determination stipulates that when employers deduct wages for accommodation on farms, the housing must meet certain basic conditions (Human Rights Watch 2011b). If they deduct a farm worker's wages for accommodation, farmers must ensure that housing is at least 30 square metres in size and that it has a durable, waterproof roof; glass windows exist that can be opened; and there is electricity (if it exists on the farm), safe water inside the house or in close proximity, and a flush toilet or pit latrine inside or in close proximity (Sectoral Determination 13: Farm Worker Sector).

This study found evidence on how the type or category of employment influences access to housing and impacts on tenure conditions. For instance, in the dairy farm in Alexandria,

where the hiring of seasonal employees was significantly lower than in the citrus and vegetable farms, the permanently employed staff lived in block houses with running water and electricity – a luxury that is not afforded to a typical farm worker in South Africa:

They are as big as an RDP house...so it's a living room, a kitchen and two bedrooms...[with a toilet]... in the house. And then we have our own furniture, and metered electricity and water. (Assistant Farm Manager, Oak Leaf Farm, 23/04/2013)

On this farm, seasonal workers – in the minimal cases when they are employed – did not have access to housing at all and are expected to return to town at the end of the working day. The same can be said about Varnam Farm where permanent employees live on the farm, albeit in mud-houses with one communal tap (between nine families consisting of 40 to 50 people) which they pay for and metered electricity; while casual/seasonal employees are transported to and from town by the farm manager every day. As a permanent worker at Varnam mentions:

No, we do not talk to anyone about issues pertaining to our houses because we built the houses ourselves...out of mud...and then we pay R80 for it every month. (Farm Worker, Varnam Farm, 30/04/2013).

An exception to the farm dweller rule (anything less than permanent worker status translates into non-dweller status) is made to seasonal workers who were born and raised on the farm. There are no toilets at all for workers (and dwellers) living in Varnam Farm, meaning that they have to dig a hole in the ground when they need to relieve themselves. Workers claimed that they could not speak meaningfully to the owner about their living conditions as he was more concerned about the running of the farm. The relationship they have with him is purely business as they effectively rent the land and buy electricity from him. Any additional accommodation-related requirements they need are supposed to come from their own pockets. Although this type of attitude on the part of farmers was often linked to Minimum Wage increases, the workers in the case of Varnam claim that their accommodation (and social reproduction) challenges simply reflect the character of the current owner of Varnam Farm.

At the Woodburns Estate, housing is only provided to employees who are not from the Nokweja area. Employees come from as far as Umtata (+/- 400kms), while others are from Hlokozi (+/- 60kms) and Umzimkulu (+/- 10kms). Employees who are from Nokweja (permanent staff and, especially, seasonal workers) walk the +/- 5km distance to and from

work each day in the off-season, having to hire transport during the harvesting season. Since Woodburns do not provide staff transport, they were then required to provide lodging:

We provide housing for people that aren't from the area...from areas such as Mzimkhulu, Umtata, Highflats and Harding...they can't travel every day (Farm Owner/Manager, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013).

There is still a tendency, by the state and municipalities in particular, of delegating service delivery in farming areas such as education, electricity, water and housing to land owners (ECC Report 2012).

One of the interviewed farm owners calculated a labour expenditure of over R10,000 per day in accordance with Minimum Wage regulations, with the exclusion of bonuses and incentives or rewards. This figure excludes other labour costs – such as transportation (to a lesser degree), accommodation, uniforms, etc. – as well as the general running of the business. As a result, farmers felt that:

The higher wage we pay them [workers], the less responsible we feel. (Farm Owner/Manager, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

With the political spotlight weighing heavy on farm labour and accommodation conditions, farmers have responded by advocating a reallocation of service delivery issues. As one farmer pointed out:

If they [government] should have a say, they should have a say in everything... I think government should be fair (Farm Owner/Manager, Woodburns Estate, 19/04/2013)

This response therefore asserts and advocates that government should be solely responsible for the provision of service delivery such as the maintenance of housing, water, electricity and transport on farms. While the persistence of uninhabitable housing on farms can be attributed to this contest between farmers and the state, bestowing the responsibility on government departments could be futile because of concerns about local state (municipal) capacity. Additionally, the Human Rights Watch (2011a) noted a lack of clarity and indeed confusion regarding the respective responsibilities of different spheres and tiers of government, which likely exacerbates the state's failure to protect farm worker (and dweller) rights. The government has continuously failed to ensure improved on-farm housing or to prevent and assist evicted farm dwellers (Human Rights Watch 2011a). Thus farm workers are in a vulnerable position, and farmers manipulate this situation by withholding services for the worker on the justification that Minimum Wage increases relieves them of such responsibilities.

5.4 CONCLUSION

Like the previous chapter, this current chapter examines a labour control system on commercial farms in South Africa which is clearly ‘in transition’. A coherent post-apartheid labour control regime has not arisen on commercial farms, and there remain clear continuities with the past as well as signs of change. Any substantial change to the apartheid labour control system would entail a significant shift away from paternalism and the micro-welfare system. Though there are indications that this is being chipped away at by commercial farmers, there is no clear and decisive signal that it is being undermined as such. Further, under the weight of the new labour legislation, it seems that farmers are seeking a more formalised and structured system of control, yet this is sitting uncomfortably with ongoing despotism. Additionally, important forms of labour restructuring and reorganisation are taking place on the studied farms, notably with regard to categories of employment and casualisation; and it may be that labour control systems on commercial farms will become increasingly category-specific particularly with respect to the distinction between permanent and non-permanent agricultural labourers. Labour control restructuring is in flux on these farms and the end-point remains unclear. The final chapter to this thesis seeks to bring some coherence to labour control restructuring on commercial farms in South Africa, but without fitting (or forcing) this restructuring into pre-defined and fixed categories.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the agricultural labour process on commercial farms in South Africa with a specific focus on the systems of labour control, given the significance of control to the labour process. In particular, it sought to identify, examine and understand any changes and continuities to the system of labour control on commercial farms since the end of apartheid in 1994. And it did so by reference to four commercial farms, in KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces.

This concluding chapter provides a summary and synthesis of the thesis, and it is divided into two main sections for this purpose. The following section (section two) presents a summary of the thesis and, in the ensuing section (section three) I provide an overall synthesis as well as theoretical lessons about analysing labour processes under capitalism.

6.2 THESIS SUMMARY

There are two main contextual chapters to this thesis, chapters two and three. In chapter two, I analysed the capitalist labour process and, more specifically, the agricultural labour process. Central to the labour process is labour control (as a managerial function), as the labour power of labourers needs to be transformed into actual labour in a manner which maximises efficiency, productivity and profitability. The capitalist labour process and labour control systems though are subject to historical and spatial variation, and control systems within particular economic sectors (or branches of production) regularly have their own specificities. The agricultural labour process in capitalist or commercial farming has been regularly marked by the combined presence of sites of economic production and social reproduction on-farm, such that farm owners become responsible not only for questions pertaining to production but also for the social reproduction of farmers and their families. The fact that labour processes, and forms of labour control, change over time implies that labour control systems in commercial agriculture are not static but may be reconfigured under certain social conditions. Historically, a paternalistic despotism (or domestic government) has often characterised agricultural labour processes, involving highly privatised, personalised and

direct forms of labour control, all of which are manifestations of the privatised agrarian space which constitutes capitalist farms.

Chapter three examined commercial farming in South Africa, with a particular focus on post-apartheid South Africa and the labour control system within commercial agriculture. Historically, commercial farming (specifically white commercial farming) was heavily subsidised and supported unequivocally by the segregationist and apartheid states in terms of commodity markets but labour control was left unregulated by the state. This led to a highly privatised, paternalistic, informal and despotic labour regime (or a racialised and paternalistic despotism). Neo-liberal restructuring, which predated the end of apartheid, has brought about a process of state de-regulation with the withdrawal of significant state support for commercial farmers. At the same time, as part of a redistributive thrust, the post-apartheid state has sought to regulate labour relations within commercial agriculture (most notably, through the farm sectoral determination) and to enhance tenure security for farm workers and dwellers. Commercial farmers have responded to these multiple pressures in a variety of ways, including labour shedding, mechanisation, farm evictions, casualisation of the labour force and de-linking the production-reproduction nexus. The available literature on commercial agriculture in South Africa is suggestive of certain changes taking place in the labour control system on farms, away from the racialised-paternalistic despotism.

Chapters four and five, based on the four studied farms, sought to identify and understand possible changes and continuities in the labour control systems on these four farms and, in so doing, these chapters examined a diverse range of themes pertinent to the agricultural process on commercial farms in South Africa.

Combined, these chapters examine responses (from management) to the state's Sectoral Determination for agriculture and labour legislation more broadly, as well as to neo-liberal restructuring. In this regard, I highlight three points. One critical issue is the personalised bond of paternalism on farms emanating from the production-reproduction nexus and manifested in the micro-welfarism which has existed historically on South African commercial farms. Due to the labour legislation, which essentially stipulates the conditions under which farmers should conduct their employment practices, there is evidence of a possible shift away from paternalism as farmers feel less inclined to be held directly responsible for the social reproduction needs of their workers and families. In other words,

farmers may no longer feel obligated to ‘indulge’ workers beyond the parameters of their contractually-defined work relationship. Secondly, though, there is added pressure on farmers in the form of neo-liberal restructuring, leading farmers to maintain production and profit levels by reducing (or maintaining levels of) expenditure in order to remain competitive in the national and/or global market. In this sense, any changes to the agricultural labour process cannot be reduced to the effects of labour legislation, though clearly the latter is extremely important in this regard. For instance, the significance of labour legislation is apparent in the hostility sometimes evidenced amongst farmers to sectoral determinations and as expressed through violations of the Sectoral Determination or the strategies used to combat the consequences of legislation (for example, through reducing benefits once provided to farm workers). The third point is that there is an increasing bias by farmers towards a core permanent workforce compared to casual and seasonable labourers. An evident response to legislation (and Minimum Wage increases) is the casualisation of workers and, more specifically, the shifting from one employment category to another (mainly permanent to casual/seasonal). The core group of employees seem to receive – and increasingly so – more benefits linked to the new labour legislation and sectoral determination, and are also being managed and controlled differently than non-standard farm labourers. Though this is not a universal trend on the four farms, such a shift would be to the disadvantage of specifically female farm workers.

6.3 SYNTHESIS

No labour process as such exists. It is absolutely critical to be sensitive to the specificities of particular labour processes and the different kinds of labour control systems which exist. Even in the case of the agricultural labour process in contemporary post-apartheid South Africa, I argued – on the basis of the four studied farms – that I would not be in a strong position to come to broad sweeping claims about changes and continuities in the agricultural labour process nationally. This has in fact been borne out in the study of the four case studies themselves, as there are clear differences between the farms in terms of labour control restructuring. It is clear for instance that Oak Leaf Farm has experienced minimal change away from a racial despotism in large part because the farm is capital-intensive such that Minimum Wage increases do not significant impact on the cost structure of the farm. At the other extreme, the pack house (Carisbooke) seems to be furthest away from the past labour control system, presumably because historically its workforce has lived off-site; it therefore

finds it easier to adjust to the effects of the new labour legislation. The other two farms (Varnam and Woodburns) are somewhere in-between these two extremes.

This is an important conclusion which needs to be emphasised. It implies that understanding changes and continues with regard to the agricultural labour process on capitalist farms in South Africa needs to be case-specific or at least sector-specific. Any broad claims made about labour control restructuring on South African commercial farms must be approached cautiously and with reservation. Thus, the question of ‘space’ (if I can use this term to designate farm specificities) is an important key variable when seeking to identify and understand changes and continuities.

A second key factor is ‘time’. The agricultural labour process on commercial farms in South Africa, and particularly the labour control system, is undergoing change over an extended period. It is, as I have argued, in a state ‘of transition’ broadly speaking. Because of this, it is difficult – though I have used the term at times – to speak about the existence of a labour control ‘regime’ (or even ‘system’) insofar as the term ‘regime’ tends to imply unity and coherence. Rather, there are a very diverse number of tendencies taking place on commercial farms related to labour controls and these tendencies do not amount to a new comprehensive and totalising labour control system. The system is fractured and tension-riddled, as farmers – under a range of pressures – almost fumble their way through devising a sense and practice of coherence to labour controls. Making this claim is not an attempt on my part to ‘cop out’ (so to speak) by not coming to any conclusive claims about the post-apartheid labour control system on commercial farms. It is rather a recognition that on-the-farm realities are complex and messy, and it would be theoretically unwise and empirically insensitive to impose neat and tidy categories onto a fluid social process. In this sense, labour process theory must be used in a flexible and nuanced manner as a guide into reality rather than as an imposition onto reality.

With the qualifiers of time and space in mind, it is nevertheless possible to identify one key overall trend highlighted in the thesis. Farmers are ‘projecting’ their problems onto farm workers and their families, as they seek to respond to the various pressures impacting on productivity and profitability. This response takes on a variety of forms: doing away with certain privileges and perks with each increase in the Minimum Wage, enacting unlawful deductions to wages, violating provisions of the sectoral determination, reducing social

reproduction commitments, labour shedding, and casualisation. To highlight, this is simply a trend or a tendency, and it is a halting and uneven tendency. Certainly, though, if the trend were to continue, it would lead to a more formal employment relationship between farmer and worker and to more de-personalised, structured, and business-like forms of labour control and thereby undermine paternalism. But it may still remain in part despotic insofar as the South African state does not intervene more strongly in regulating farm labour relations. Changes (and continuities) to the labour control systems on commercial farms in post-South Africa need to be subject to ongoing study and research on a farm-by-farm basis if a nuanced and fuller understanding of labour control is to be forthcoming.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDELINE (FARM OWNERS/MANAGERS)

Background Information

- ❖ Name, Age, Race and Level of Education.
- ❖ Please give a brief description of your farm (i.e. the history of the farm, what is your business, how big is the farm, how successful would you say your farm is, etc)
- ❖ Are you the farm manager/ owner/ co-owner? (Is there anyone you report to regarding the production levels of the farm)?
- ❖ How long have you managed/owned the farm?

Perceptions on Authoritative Role

- ❖ Are workers involved in any decisions on the farm (or, for instance, management makes decisions and workers have to adhere to them)? If so, how is this administered?
- ❖ Would you say the decisions you make, as management, are for the benefit of the farm as a whole or just the farm as a business?
- ❖ Do you think your workers feel comfortable coming to management with their work-related issues (e.g. wages, working/living conditions, etc)?
- ❖ Do workers tell management of their personal issues?
- ❖ What do employees refer to you as (e.g. “baas”/ “boss”, “Sir”, “<name>”)?
- ❖ To what extent do you think workers should respect you (e.g. submissive – they should be wholly obedient, assertive – they should be confident and question authority’s decisions)?
- ❖ What is the procedure for grievances on the farm?

Labour Legislation Awareness/Government Influence

- ❖ Are your workers permitted to join any farm organisations or trade unions?
- ❖ Are any of them associated with any organisations?
- ❖ Do you liaise with government officials (i.e. labour inspectors)? If so, how often?
- ❖ How much knowledge would you say you have on labour legislation on farms (i.e. Sectoral Determination: Farm Sector) – immense, adequate, nothing?

- ❖ Do you believe that government should have a say in how farm workers are managed on the farms?
- ❖ Do you believe that government adequately represents farm workers in labour legislation?
- ❖ Are you a part of a Farmer Organisation?

Perceptions on MW and Employment Benefits

- ❖ Do you believe it is your responsibility to take care of farm workers beyond the scope of work (e.g. provide housing, basic education, etc)?
- ❖ Do you believe that the setting of a Minimum Wage for farm workers has helped the progression of the sector? Why/ Why not?
- ❖ In your opinion, what would be the implications (good or bad) of a cancellation of the Sectoral Determination in the sector?
- ❖ How do you categorise wages and remuneration packages on the farm (e.g. by gender, employment category, employment level – i.e. supervisor <> employee)?
- ❖ What is the standard remuneration package that comes with the job (for seasonal *and* permanent employees)?
- ❖ Are there any ‘unconventional’ methods of remuneration added in your workers’ package (e.g. food parcels)?
- ❖ Are there any deductions on employee wages (please provide examples of these, if so)?

Employment Protocol

- ❖ What is the difference between a "permanent" and a "seasonal" and/or “casual” farm worker?
- ❖ How do you recruit employees for employment on the farm?
- ❖ Is it the recruitment method the same for all categories of employees (i.e. seasonal, casual, permanent)?
- ❖ Once agreed upon, is there a contract signed by farmer and worker – or is the employment agreement and conditions a verbal one?
- ❖ Do you keep regular records of all your farm employees?
- ❖ How many workers are employed on the farm?

- ❖ How many of your workers are employed on a permanent basis? How many do you generally employ on a temporary (seasonal/casual) basis?
- ❖ Do you have any workers who also live on the farm?
- ❖ Do you have any people (other than workers) living on the farm (i.e. farm dwellers)?
- ❖ Are there any written or verbal rules and regulations for the farm? Please mention a few.
- ❖ Should an employee violate any of these rules, what is the disciplinary procedure?
Is the procedure the same for *all* transgressions?

Production

- ❖ What are your costs of production, e.g. labour, fuel, raw materials, etc.?
- ❖ Has this cost (production) been influenced by the increased labour costs (Minimum Wage)?
If it has not, did you employ methods (possibly before the gazettement of the Sectoral Determination) to ensure that production costs would not be affected?
If it has, are there any methods you are considering any methods to maintain or reduce production costs?
- ❖ Has the implementation of a Minimum Wage affected production *output* on the farm?
If it has not, did you employ methods (possibly before the gazettement of the Sectoral Determination) to ensure that production would not be affected?
If it has, are there any methods you are considering any methods to maintain or increase production output?
- ❖ When is your “peak season” (i.e. when you need more labour on the farm)?
- ❖ What methods do you employ in increasing levels of production on the farm (e.g. longer working hours, more labour, etc)?
- ❖ What kind of machinery do you use for production? Do you depend on it extensively as opposed to labour?
- ❖ How is labour organised (i.e. do you have one manager/owner and the workers or do you have supervisors who are also workers; is there work that is strictly for men/women)? Please elaborate on this point.
- ❖ Does your farm require workers to have extensive skills, or skills tailored for the farm (e.g. how to handle animals; in game farms)?
- ❖ Should they not possess these skills, do farmers provide the necessary training?

- ❖ Do farm workers need protective gear on your farm? If so, is this included in the employment agreement?
- ❖ Do you believe that your farm is very successful? Why/ Why not?
- ❖ Who are your customers? So who do you sell your products to locally and/or internationally?
- ❖ Are there other influences (e.g. economic pressures) which have contributed to a change in production patterns?
- ❖ Do you employ any foreign labour (e.g. Zimbabweans)?
- ❖ What costs do your employees bear for the housing (and, conversely, costs the employer covers) i.e. rent, water and electricity?
- ❖ What other employment benefits do your workers enjoy, e.g. maternity leave, UIF, etc.?
- ❖ Have you (your family) ever had any farm dwellers (i.e. people living on the farm, but not working for the farm)?
If so, what happened to them? Were they evicted?
If not, what do you think contributes to this (as most farms in South Africa are also homes to workers and their families)?

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDELINE (FARM WORKERS)

Background Information

- ❖ Name, Age, Race and Level of Education
- ❖ How long have you worked on the farm?
- ❖ Do you also live on the farm?
- ❖ If so, do you live with any family members?
- ❖ If not, how far is your home from the farm and how do you travel to the farm?
- ❖ Are there other members of your family that have worked on the farm before/ currently?

Conditions of Employment

- ❖ What category of employment do you fall in (i.e. temporary/casual, seasonal or permanent)?
- ❖ How were you recruited for employment on the farm?
- ❖ When employed, did you sign a contract or was it a verbal agreement?
- ❖ Do you know your conditions of employment and are you happy with them (e.g. period of employment, working hours)?
- ❖ How do you get paid (i.e. weekly, fortnightly, monthly)?
- ❖ How do you receive payment (i.e. cash, cheque, bank transfer)?
- ❖ How is your payment measured (e.g. production level, hours of work, etc)?
- ❖ What wage bracket do you fall into (MW set at R2273.52 pm as from 1 March 2013)?
 - > R500 pm/ > R150 pw/ > R25 a day
 - R500 – R1000 pm/ R150 – R300 pw/ R25 – R50 a day
 - R1000 – R1500 pm/ R300 – R450 pw/ R50 – R75 a day
 - R1500 – R2000 pm/ R450 – R600 pw/ R75 – R100 a day
 - R2000 – R2500 pm
 - Above?
- ❖ Other than your wages, is there anything your employer gives you as part of your remuneration package (e.g. food parcels)?
- ❖ Do you receive a pay slip with your wages?
- ❖ Are there any deductions made on your wages (e.g. UIF, pension fund)?
- ❖ Do you think you can have a decent living with your pay?
- ❖ How many people benefit from your salary?

- ❖ Please describe your typical day on the farm (e.g. clock in at 7am, work, tea break, etc)?
- ❖ How long is your average working day on the farm?
- ❖ Is there a time when you work longer hours than usual? When is this?
- ❖ Do you receive additional pay for longer hours (i.e. overtime)?

Housing and Living Conditions

- ❖ Please describe the type of housing provided to your employees:
 - ❖ Size (of the compound, or number of rooms)
 - ❖ Access to water (Is it running water? Is there a tank nearby? How far are workers from the source?)
 - ❖ Electricity (Is there electricity? Is it prepaid?)
 - ❖ Toilets (Do your employees have flush toilets or pit latrines? Do they share or does each compound/employee have a toilet?)

Interaction

- ❖ How would you describe your relationship with the farmer/farm manager (e.g. paternal, unapproachable, mutual respect, etc)?
- ❖ How often do you interact with management (socially or professionally)?
- ❖ How would you describe your relationship with other workers?
- ❖ When you have a problem regarding issues with your work, what do you do? Who do you report to?
- ❖ Do you feel comfortable reporting to this individual?
- ❖ Do you feel that your problems are solved quickly and fairly?
- ❖ If the issue cannot be resolved, are you given an explanation?
- ❖ Do you think farmers genuinely care about your issues (work and/or personal)?
- ❖ Do you believe that management is fair in decisions made about workers (e.g. in discipline)?
- ❖ Do you feel that it is the responsibility of the farmer to take care of you beyond the scope of work?

Worker Collectivisation and Participation

- ❖ Are you part of any Farm Worker Organisation or a trade union? Why/ Why not?
- ❖ Are you ever involved in decisions that have to do with the farm and how production takes place? To what extent?

Level of Expertise

- ❖ Do you feel you have the necessary skills to work on this farm? If so, how did you acquire these skills?
- ❖ Do you have any formal training to be employed on this farm?
- ❖ Do you feel safe on your farm (i.e. are there any concerns with inappropriate behaviour by colleagues/management)?
- ❖ What does *your* job entail?

Labour Legislation Perception and/or Awareness

- ❖ Do you feel you know enough about labour legislation on farms (i.e. Sectoral Determination: Farming Sector)?
- ❖ Do you think it is easy to hire/fire farm workers? Why/ Why not?

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDELINE (ECARP STAFF)

Background Information

- ❖ How long have you worked with ECARP?
- ❖ What is your position at ECARP?
- ❖ Please describe the most recent study conducted on farmers and workers on citrus farms.
- ❖ What methods do you employ when gathering data (e.g. focus groups, in-depth interviews, questionnaires, etc)?

Interacting with Farm Workers

- ❖ Do you believe that farmers (and workers) are honest (*loosely) in their responses when ECARP does research on farms?
- ❖ What programmes has ECARP been involved in the working and living conditions of farm workers (i.e. what role do you play, as an organisation, in bettering these conditions)?
- ❖ How are you generally received by farmers and workers when you approach them for research?

Perception on Legislation

- ❖ How is Minimum Wage compliance and general adherence to labour legislation on the citrus farms that you have researched in the Eastern Cape?
- ❖ Do you think that post-apartheid land and labour policies have a positive effect on building organisation on citrus farms?
- ❖ Have you found responses of the Minimum Wage to change the way employment is recruited/maintained on citrus farms?
- ❖ Has the implementation of a Minimum Wage affected the attitudes of farmers?
- ❖ How evident/blatant is the triangular relationship (farmer, broker, worker) in the research you have conducted?
- ❖ Based on your research, do you believe farm workers have sufficient information about labour legislation?
- ❖ Do you feel that farm workers are adequately represented in labour legislation?
- ❖ In what ways do farmers commonly violate SD requirements (e.g. unlawful deductions, incorrect payslips, no leave)?

- ❖ How is recruitment and selection done on the citrus farms you have studied (formal/informal)? Is it the same across the board (i.e. for all employees)?

NGO Intervention

- ❖ Do you feel that labour inspectors and law enforcement are actively involved in commercial farms?
- ❖ Do you believe that it is necessary for such organisations to intervene / has your intervention motivated a more active role from the DoL (in the Eastern Cape)?

Workers and Management in the Field

- ❖ What is the general structure of employment do you witness on the field (i.e. bureaucratic organisation of workers, along gender lines, etc)?
- ❖ How evident is the gender specificity of work?
- ❖ Are farmers genuinely concerned about the livelihoods of the workers?
- ❖ Do farmers tend to care for their workers beyond the scope of work?
- ❖ Are there any expectations, from the workers' side, of the farmers?
- ❖ Do you believe that farmers and workers interact socially or is their relationship restricted to business?
- ❖ What production methods are commonly implemented during 'peak seasons'?
- ❖ Do you find that workers are involved in decisions made on the farm – in terms of freedom to do their job as they see fit, as well as express their concerns about the farm?
- ❖ How much leeway are farm workers given in performing their duties (do they constantly have to report to management, or are they allowed to do the job as they see it)?
- ❖ What methods of supervision (and control) are employed on the (citrus) farms you have investigated?
- ❖ Do farm managers generally have qualifications?
- ❖ How are employees typically trained for the job?