LABOR, SEX AND SPIRITUALITY ON A SOUTH AFRICAN BORDER FARM

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“Labor, Sex and Spirituality on a South African Border Farm”

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This dissertation examines how labor relations are changing in South African commercial agriculture. It is primarily based on an extended case study of a large-scale tomato farm I call “Heddon Estates”, located along the South Africa-Zimbabwe border. For nine months, I lived among Zimbabwean workers in the farm compound and, for three months, in the home of a white manager. I argue that labor relations are governed less by apartheid-era paternalism than by practices I characterize as delegated despotism. This new production regime comprises at least four processes: a growing casualization of labor, new forms of private and public regulation, the monetization or withdrawal of many previously “in kind” benefits and services for farm laborers, and an expansion of the role of black intermediaries. These processes reproduce the authoritarian legacies of paternalism, but minimize the potential for benevolence. How management secures control over workers hinges not so much on the production of servile or deferential subjects, but the generalized fragmentation of the work force.

Paradoxically, the reliance on a fragmented and highly transient work force creates instability for the production regime. Strikes, work-stoppages and theft of farm property appear increasingly common. Transactional sex and worship practices emerge
as important terrains of struggle within the work force. Through transactional sex, the nominally most exploited group on the farm – women workers – are often able to increase their savings above that of men. In so doing, however, they expose themselves to HIV/AIDS and other negative consequences. Worship practices afford Zimbabweans a measure of solace and comfort amidst abject living and working conditions, but the largest farm church also projects the interests of management. Managers discourage the growth of alternative church groups, and thereby limit the autonomous spaces from which challenges to the production regime might emerge.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation is for me a sort of homecoming. Since 2005, I have conducted research with Zimbabwean migrant farm workers in Limpopo province, South Africa. While my previous work addressed the overarching political economy that situates Zimbabwean farm workers (Addison 2006; Rutherford and Addison 2007), it offered little regarding the lives of Zimbabweans themselves. As I prepared for my doctoral research, the need for a detailed ethnographic study of farm workers seemed clear, yet there was little to build on. The lacuna was present in the wider literature as well, even as Zimbabwean migration to South Africa garnered increasing international attention and academic interest in the latter half of the 2000s. South African farms are often “closed” to researchers wishing to learn about them, so the absence of detailed ethnographic data was unsurprising. Yet, even in other parts of the world, I learned that the social practices of farm workers are a neglected topic across the ethnographic canon. It is for these reasons that the research on which this dissertation is based has proven immensely satisfying. By living amongst Zimbabwean workers and white managers on a large scale tomato farm, I have illuminated the “culture” of the farm and thereby brought my own engagement with the topic full circle.

I would be remiss in failing to acknowledge all the help I received on this journey. First and foremost, I must thank all the farm owners, managers and workers who contributed to my research. Within the farm community I call “Heddon Estates” certain individuals deserve particular thanks, even if their true identities remain hidden though pseudonyms. I thank Arthur and Emmanuel for allowing me to stay with them in the compound for most of my fieldwork. Having only known me for a few days, they
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Introduction

Despite popular imaginings of the Limpopo River as a place of untouched nature and frontier adventure, the river sustains a growing epicenter of agro-industrial development. Interspersed with conservation parks and game ranches, scores of fruit and vegetable plantations run alongside the river for more than one hundred kilometers east and west of Musina. These “border farms,” as they are called locally, blend relatively seamlessly into the dry and lush landscape. Viewed from the road side, their picturesque citrus trees and tomato fields offer reprieve from the almost constant forests of mopane and baobab, only slightly compromising the impression of a vast wilderness. Notwithstanding the occasional giant packing facility or roaring transport truck, border farmers limit the imprint of their operations on Limpopo’s landscape, as though invested in its mythological representation. Yet, more is at stake than border farmers’ aesthetic preferences, for they have something to hide.

Far from the border road, tucked behind trees and hillsides, are compounds where primarily Zimbabwean workers responsible for Limpopo’s recent boom in agricultural production reside. Here one finds veritable bee hives of mud huts and other structures cleverly assembled from found objects. Chunks of wood add stability to mud walls. Maize sacks patch holes or form wind barriers around fire pits. Broken drainage pipes and sheets of corrugated iron act as roofs. Most compounds contain single-story, brick barrack-style buildings, where often up to six people share a roughly eight by seven feet sized room, and occasionally small cement houses reserved for the most senior foremen and managers. Abject accommodations are equaled by oppressive working conditions, including sub-minimum wages, extortion, physical violence and sexual exploitation. Yet,
the oppression of compound inhabitants is matched by their resilience and diverse social practices that shape the contours of life on the plantations. But since border farmers generally block access to their compounds by journalists, researchers and “outsiders” in general, little is known about these practices and their effects.

This dissertation is located within a long tradition of scholarship and activism that exposes the often hidden labor practices of commercial agriculture in South Africa and elsewhere (Mcwilliams, 1936; First, 1959; Marcus, 1989; Mitchell, 1996; Rutherford, 2001). Like these works, the aim is not merely to expose but to understand how labor relations are constituted in changing historical circumstances. Since the early 1990s, rapid social change has taken place in South African agriculture, with dramatic consequences for labor relations long characterized by traditional paternalism. Historically, paternalism constructed farm communities as “families” under the benevolent and centralized authority of white farmers (Du Toit, 1993). Yet, neoliberal economic reforms, new quality and ethical standards by retailers, post-apartheid labor legislation, new management practices and greater efforts by trade unions and NGOs to improve conditions for farm workers have disrupted apartheid-era paternalism. Amidst these challenges, paternalism does not disappear, but a novel articulation of class, gender and race emerges. Border farms, where the casualization, feminization and reliance on migrant labor are marked, serve as uniquely diagnostic settings for investigating how agricultural labor relations are changing in the post-apartheid context.

The Argument of this Dissertation

I argue that border farms are governed less by traditional paternalism than by practices I refer to as “delegated despotism.” Delegated despotism represents an
articulation, in Stuart Hall’s (1980: 325) terms, of seemingly disparate elements. The shifting composition of labor, new forms of state and private regulation, and changing management practices are brought together in a coherent – if unstable – regime of rule. If traditional paternalism is premised on, among other features, centralized authority invested in the figure of the white owner, a more dispersed locus of authority holds sway on the border farms, in which white owners delegate most responsibilities to black managers. In this context of decentralized management, forms of belonging are increasingly fragmented. Most workers achieve security through their relations with empowered managers and their own diverse survival strategies, rather than through deferential ties with the white farmer. White owners retain ultimate authority and a largely unaccountable scope of action, but many also go to great lengths to bring their operations into compliance with the standards of retailers, improving the quality of produce but not labor conditions. The production regime remains despotic and illiberal, even if white owners have distanced themselves from coercive measures used to discipline and recruit workers. In effect, the authoritarian legacies of paternalism are reproduced, while the potential for benevolence and social protection is minimized. The shifting articulation I characterize as delegated despotism calls into question a long-standing metaphor in studies of farm workers – the view of plantations or farms as “total institutions.” How management secures control over workers hinges not so much on the production of servile or deferential subjects, but the generalized fragmentation of the work force.

Paradoxically, the reliance on a highly transient and fragmented work force is also a source of instability for the production regime. Delegated despotism leaves workers
considerable room to maneuver. Strikes, work-stoppages and theft of farm property appear increasingly common. Quotidian social practices become important sites of struggle within the work force. Border farms offer a productive space for ruminating on two of the most widespread responses among Africans to growing economic precariousness and fragmentation: transactional sex and Christianity. Rather than a productive source of “agency” for women or a site of their total victimization, the sexual economy is shown to be highly contradictory with respect to the status of women on farms. It is often argued that Christianity helps Africans negotiate the dislocating effects of colonialism and neoliberalism. However, farm churches largely serve the interests of managers who act as pastors. Pentecostal churches independent of managerial authority draw limited participation largely because of an emphasis on moral purity. Transactional sex and worship represent forms of “introverted politics” (Bernstein, 1996) that largely reproduce the fragmentation of labor on border farms.

Before proceeding, a brief note on terminology. My use of the term “farm” (as in “border farm”) rather than “plantation,” is meant to ensure that my work resonates with readers in southern Africa. In this region, terms such as commercial farm, white-owned farm and large-scale farm are used interchangeably to describe large-scale agriculture. Where the term plantation appears, it is usually in reference to non-food production (such as timber or tobacco), but even in these cases, farm is more often used. To avoid confusion for this audience, I therefore stick to the terms farm and farm worker, except when discussing wider literature where the term plantation is in use. It must be added here that even in the wider scholarship on agrarian labor, distinguishing between large-scale farming and plantation agriculture is difficult. The typical characteristics associated
with plantations, such as export-oriented production, mono-crop specialization, foreign ownership, on-site processing facilities, large land holdings and numerically large, low-waged resident labor forces, can also be said to characterize many so-called farms (Gibbon, 2011). A more useful distinguishing criterion is identified by Reddock and Jain (1998: 8). Production units referred to as “commercial farms” often deploy factors of production not strictly for capital accumulation, but for owners’ status needs or aesthetic aspirations. For instance in Southern Africa, white farm owners often set aside land for conservation purposes or invest significant resources in making their farms “picturesque,” often for tourism purposes but also aesthetic ideals (Hughes, 2010).

Similar concern over the representation of agricultural landscapes holds in California (Mitchell, 1996). A concern is that by using the term farm, might I inadvertently perpetuate the rural ideal desired by owners? I have enough faith in my ethnography that – whatever support my terminology lends to the symbolic world of white farmers – this is out-weighed by my critique of their labor system. Indeed, by making my work more accessible to a Southern African audience, there is a greater possibility that this work will inform and aid the struggle for justice among farm workers in South Africa.

Navigating Anxiety: Research Methods on Commercial Farms

It is common for graduate students to experience anxiety over the course of their doctoral research. Few field sites, however, are as anxiety-inducing as commercial farms in South Africa. Throughout my fieldwork, I lived in constant fear that my access to the farm would be revoked at any moment. Anxiety permeates daily life on farms. White farmers are suspicious of unknown outsiders, and workers are often afraid to speak about their precarious situation. A broad macro-level study, involving single or multiple visits
to farms, only scratches the surface of this anxiety. A fine grained ethnographic study, where the researcher lives with black workers in the compound, is to invite all of the anxiety upon oneself. Before I describe my research methods, some discussion of this anxiety is necessary to apprehend the conditions under which research was conducted. My research was only possible through fortuitous circumstances and careful negotiation of my positionality.

Figure 1: Map of Limpopo Province, South Africa

As a general rule, white owned South African farms are tightly guarded spaces, with security guards posted throughout the farm and fences surrounding the property.

1 This map is borrowed from article by Rutherford and Addison (2007).
Security is meant to protect whites from so-called farm “attacks” or “invasions” – highly publicized incidents where white farmers have been assaulted or murdered during robberies. Farm invasions are closely related to another source of anxiety: farm occupations by land-hungry South African blacks, similar to Zimbabwe’s fast track land reform since 2000. While security may provide some assurance from these external threats, it is also meant to counter internal threats on the farm, whether in terms of stealing or, as the recent murder of Eugene Terreblanche illustrates, violence from aggrieved workers. The security presence underscores farms as private spaces, in which farm life is deliberately hidden from the view of labor inspectors, unionists, journalists and researchers. Farm owners are highly conscious of their public image, aware of how media most often portrays them in a negative light as abusive employers and representatives of apartheid. Farmers are often skeptical of outsiders attempting to learn about their business.

Anxiety extends beyond the white farming community and is found among farm workers as well. As we shall see, the farm environment is characterized by a lack of trust between workers and their employer. Because access to the farm is closely tied to the white owner’s approval, workers tend to perceive any “visitor” as supporting the employer’s interests, particularly if the visitor is white. Farms remain highly racialized: for instance, white employees typically hold “managerial” status as workers and exercise authority over even the highest ranking blacks. Workers question the motives of any outsider, but their suspicion is heightened if the visitor is white. Even after twelve months of living on the farm, I was not able to dispel completely suspicions that I had a hidden agenda, whether it was in support of the farm owner or some other interest. Thus,
the possibility of doing ethnographic research in these anxiety ridden spaces is not favorable. Unsurprisingly, I struggled throughout my pre-dissertation fieldwork and early doctoral fieldwork to find a farm that would accept my ethnographic project. On 20 or so farms I visited in the Limpopo valley, I found most white farmers willing to talk with me, but skeptical of the idea of me interviewing their workers. If they did consent to this practice, they usually appointed the workers themselves and remained in the room or within listening distance as I talked with them. Whenever I raised the possibility of me living on their farm, let alone with the workers, farmers reacted coldly. Another problem was that the few white farmers open to research had already had their farms studied in detail by other academics, including myself (Addison, 2005; Zamchiya, 2007; Rutherford, 2010; Bolt, 2011). One large citrus farm forbade me access because of my involvement in a farm worker strike there in 2005 (Rutherford and Addison, 2008). These bleak prospects for research on white farms almost led me to focus on the so called “emerging” Venda commercial farmers in the Nwanedi area of the Limpopo Valley. In fact, it was on one of my pre-dissertation visits to this district that I serendipitously discovered many large commercial farms along the border east of Musina. The first farm I approached in this area I thought held the best chance of accepting my ethnographic research. The farm was owned by a large South African corporation that owned many farms throughout South Africa. As a “company farm,” I did not have to deal with a white owner holding absolute power, but rather a consortium of shareholders and a chief executive officer based at the head office of ZZ2 near Johannesburg. The prospects of me flying under their radar seemed good. I formed a solid friendship with the white head manager who was in effect the symbolic owner of the property. At the start of my year-
long fieldwork in August 2009, he accommodated me for a week in the farm’s guest house and allowed me to travel throughout the farm and interview workers. We discussed the possibility of me staying in the compound and, while skeptical, he seemed open to the idea. However, when I returned to the farm shortly after my initial week there, he regretfully informed me that I could no longer access the farm. He had informed head office of my project – that he was allowing a student from the US to visit the farm – under the impression they would not object. He said apologetically: “It turns out our company has got a bad name from this sort of research, and they don’t want to allow it. I am very sorry.”

Following this rejection, I contemplated driving to the ZZ2 head office to persuade them otherwise, but decided to first visit another large tomato farm in the area, as a kind of last ditch effort. I pulled up by the main office, with the intention of meeting the owner. My timing was apparently good. Philip, the owner, was already in the office seated at his desk when I stepped in and introduced myself. He seemed intrigued as I described myself as an anthropology student interested in the social organization and culture of this farm. He nodded as I spoke, saying “yes, the culture of Africans is fascinating.” He offered to help and immediately radioed one of his black managers, Clayton, and asked him to report to the office. After Clayton arrived, we sat at one of the office tables and Philip, Clayton, Alex (another black manager) answered some general questions that I asked them about the farm. At one point, Philip stopped himself in mid-sentence and, as though struck by a sudden disturbing thought, asked me “where are you going with this information?” I reminded him that I was a student and that I was not using any real names in my research. Reassured, the conversation eventually concluded
on warm terms, as I shook hands with each person. I was invited to return to the farm the following morning so that Philip could introduce me to the entire work force.

When I arrived the following morning, over six hundred workers stood around in small groups waiting for the morning roll-call to commence. Following a brief prayer by one Zimbabwean worker, Philip stepped up to the podium and invited me to stand beside him. He spoke to the crowd in English allowing Clayton to translate his words into Shona:

This man is from Canada. He is a learned man. He is training to get his Phd and then he will be a professor. He is interested in the culture of the Shona and Venda people, and he is doing a study of the farms in the area, all the way down to Nwanedi. He is here to be with us. And he will be spending time with you in the compound and at work. He is interested in the history, culture and social activities that you do. If you are going to catch fish, maybe he will come with you and catch fish. If you are selling cigarettes and other things, he wants to learn about it. And he is not going to anyone else with this information, not to labor or government or anyone, it is only for his studies. You should feel open with him. One day he may put this information in a book, and perhaps we will get a copy of it. Perhaps your grandchildren will read that book. And he is not here to look for women. He is a married man.

His final point about my pursuit of farm women brought forth uproarious laughter from the crowd. He had in fact asked me during our initial meeting if I was going to be “chasing after ladies.” Apparently Philip had recently fired a white manager for sleeping with some of the women farm workers. I utilized the break to address the workers myself in Shona. I told them where I was from and what I was hoping to learn from them. Clearly appreciating my use of Shona, everyone clapped when I was finished. As people left the space of the roll call towards their places of work, Philip took me aside and issued a warning: “Now it’s okay if you go and publish articles overseas, but we don’t want anything here getting out to the government or newspapers.” I proclaimed my agreement with him, and over one year of fieldwork at Heddon Estates began on that day.
It remains a puzzle for me as to why Philip accepted my research and how I sustained myself on the farm for so long. A number of factors worked to my advantage. As I later learned, Philip had something of an erratic and unpredictable temperament. It was fortuitous that in my first encounter with him he was in something of a “good mood” and receptive to a visitor. More generally, I benefitted from his understanding of culture as the supposed focus of my research. Like many whites who came of age in the apartheid era, Philip had a very apolitical understanding of culture, associating the term with African customs and habits, such as rituals, dance and folklore. This antiquated notion of culture premised on a clear disassociation with anything remotely “political”, a notion anthropologists so often lament, actually worked in my favor. Since my project was all about “culture” as he understood it, I was removed from the threatening categories of journalist, organizer or human rights campaigner who are invariably interested in the politics of the farm. His perhaps fragile ego may have been warmed by the idea of a North American future “professor” electing to conduct research on his farm. It must also be added that since I was a white person, I fit the category of an “acceptable” visitor. Although white farmers are situated by multiple anxieties, they are often isolated and have few occasions to interact with other people of their “race,” let alone a white person from another country. It is possible that Philip hoped for a meaningful friendship or at least acquaintance with someone from overseas. Perhaps most important was my identification as a Christian. It became apparent to me, early on, that if my place on the farm was to be secure I needed some kind of social role or purpose. Historically, as David Hughes (2010) observes, only certain long-term social roles have been open to whites in rural Africa, such as farmer, government official or missionary. The identity of
“researcher” by itself was too opaque to workers or threatening to Philip. The history of research on South African farms tends to be antagonistic to white farmers. Other possible social roles included development worker, trade union organizer or employee. There was not much scope for “development worker,” because the only NGO that interacted with the farm was Doctors without Borders, and they visited the farm once a month. Trade union organizer would have resulted in my immediate eviction from the farm. Finally, becoming employed at the farm would have posed its own difficulties in terms of ethics and time for research. I therefore increasingly settled into the public identity of missionary. As I describe below, I became very active in the workers’ churches and frequently did the prayer and message at roll call. I also had over 50 bibles sent from the US to the farm. These activities helped me gain a measure of trust and respect with Philip, who himself was a “born again” Pentecostal Christian.

Despite this cordial beginning with Philip, he made efforts to regulate and set the terms of my research. In the main, this regulation took the form of a “guide” he assigned during the first month of my research. He did not force me to accept this guide, but politely suggested that I would benefit from having an interpreter and someone to “show me around.” Significantly, Philip said, “he is someone that I trust.” Not wanting his first impression of me to be colored by disagreement, I consented to his suggestion. He advised me to work with Albert, a Venda man with whom Philip shared a close association. Albert was an enigmatic figure, and some explanation of his background is necessary to understand how his presence shaped my research. In his mid-50s, Albert was trained as a Pentecostal minister in the Rhema Bible church in Johannesburg. Yet, he also claimed to be the rightful chief over much of the land and people in the Nwanedi
area, a position that was not recognized by the government. Officially designated a “white farm” area until the mid-1970s, Nwanedi then became a resettlement area for black commercial farmers, one of many “pilot” initiatives launched by apartheid government in partnership with the Venda homeland. Land was granted to Venda men who were well positioned to the then Venda homeland government and its president Mphephu (Lahiff, 1998). The post-apartheid government did not recognize a “traditional leader” in this resettlement context. From its viewpoint, the proper administrative units were a communal property association and consortium of black commercial farmers. Nevertheless, Albert carried enough legitimacy among local residents of Nwanedi, including the black commercial farmers, to act as a mediator and interpreter between Philip and Venda commercial farmers in the Nwanedi area of the Limpopo valley. Philip was one of a few white farmers who entered into partnerships with some of these black farmers by offering them advice and resources to get their farming operations off the ground. Theoretically, the white sponsors would get some return on their investment following the success of these ventures. However, one white farmer told me that the small black farmers are not viable and the reason for supporting them is to gain credibility among South Africans who, they fear, could one day invade their farms. Albert was himself an aspiring black commercial farmer and hoped that government would one day recognize him as chief, granting him land and income to become a commercial farmer. He perpetually wrote letters to government and phoned officials to make his case, although these appeals were usually ignored by the recipients. Yet, Philip believed enough in Albert’s claim to the chieftaincy and dream of farming that he invited Albert to come and live at Heddon Estates in order to learn about commercial agriculture.
In this period, Albert resided in the compound, observed all farming activities, and received a monthly salary from Philip. Yet, Albert also served other purposes for Philip. During the year he lived on the farm, Albert came to learn about the stealing of chemicals and selling of tomatoes. He informed Philip of this but Philip replied that nothing could be done unless someone was caught directly. Although Albert shared this story with me, I did not fully appreciate the sense in which he acted as a spy for Philip, and the problems this posed for my research.

In the first weeks of my research, Albert seemed indispensable. On my commute from Musina to the farm – before I managed to obtain residence in the compound – I picked him up at his home in Nwanedi and brought him with me to the farm. His knowledge, not only of the particular dynamics of Heddon Estates, but of the surrounding area and its history helped initiate important themes in my research. For instance, he was the first person to alert me to the high degree of promiscuity on the farm, the practices of managers in securing bribes, and the different forms of Christianity on the farm. Moreover, many of my initial interviews were conducted with his help, especially with Venda informants. He also introduced me to my eventual hosts and Christian “brothers,” Arthur and Emmanuel; Albert had been an active participant in their Pentecostal church group during the time he lived on the farm. During the first weeks of my research, we all shared meals and even attended a few church services together.

Yet, eventually Arthur and Emmanuel alerted me to a major problem in my relationship with Albert. As Emmanuel stated one afternoon, in a moment of transparency when Albert was absent: “Lincoln, some of the important things about the farm we can’t share with you, because of Albert. The things we say he will pass on to
Philip.” He also explained that many people on the farm viewed him as a spy for Philip. Following this revelation, I distanced myself from Albert. I stopped bringing him with me to the farm. For the remainder of my fieldwork, I occasionally visited him at this homestead, but I essentially cut him off from my research at Heddon Estates.

Distancing myself from Albert created new problems. Albert had served as a kind of buffer that helped secure my position on the farm. Although he never stated it explicitly, Philip’s acceptance of me was in some sense conditional on having the surveillance and oversight of someone he “trusted,” like Albert. It was not so much that he did not trust Arthur and Emmanuel, whose sphere of influence I increasingly became part of, and who were enmeshed in their own paternalistic attachments to Philip. Albert was brought onto the farm, in this instance, for the express purpose of serving as my guide, interpreter and research assistant. The loss of this figure, this channel through which Philip experienced a sense of oversight over my research, meant that Philip had less control and knowledge of my activities on the farm. I became enmeshed in the life of the compound, a space where – I came to understand only too well – whites rarely go. In various ways, I tried to bridge the widening gulf between myself and Philip. When I saw Philip at morning roll-calls, I made a point of greeting him, often shaking his hand and trying to engage him in conversation. I deliberately exhibited my Christian credentials in front of him – making sure to say the morning prayer and sermon if he was there. Yet, our conversations were awkward in that I could only tell him so much about my activities and what I was learning about his farm. I did not want to disturb his impression of my research as an apolitical study of “culture.” My efforts to befriend Philip did not counter my growing sense that my presence in the compound not only
offended his racialized sensibilities, but somehow threatened the social order of the farm. From Philip’s perspective, I did not fit in. By residing in the compound, I was separated from the white community. But within the compound, I did not fall under the supervision or control of one his delegated managers, largely because I was white and had significant resources on my own, symbolized perhaps most strongly by my personal car.

One final instance occurred in mid-October, after I had been living in the compound for several weeks, where Philip tried to bring me back within his optic. We had been enjoying an exceptionally friendly conversation in which I was telling him about growing up in Canada. The conversation arose from a random encounter in which I had been standing around near the workshop, when Philip drove up to give instructions to the security guard. Perhaps because it was the end of the work day, Philip was more relaxed and inclined to talk with me informally. He leaned casually out the window of his truck, and I stood alongside the vehicle. It was a moment of personal connection – I told him about my family history and a story about meeting my wife. Yet, as the conversation ended and I motioned to walk back towards the compound, the connection broke down. As I walked away, Philip beeped the horn of his pick-up truck, beckoning me to come back to him. He spoke excitedly: “You know Lincoln, I just had this thought. We have that house over there (he pointed to small, unoccupied house up the hill from the workshop). You are welcome to stay there until we hire another manager. There is a geyser and electricity.” I thanked him for the generous offer, but told him that “I was really benefitting” from being “close” to the workers in the compound. He replied, his voice trailing off, “oh…okay.”
My rejection of Philip’s beneficence further alienated me from the white community on the farm. Several weeks passed in which I did not see Philip. In part, this was because he was nearly always preoccupied with farm business. But I also began to avoid him because I had a mounting fear that he would revoke my access to the farm. In early November, I was told by a key informant that some of the black managers were “speaking against me” to Philip. Apparently, senior managers – perhaps Clayton himself – were telling Philip that I was journalist and I was trying to report issues on the farm. My key informants speculated that the managers felt threatened by my presence, because I was going “directly to the people” to do interviews and talk with them, rather than going through the managers. One manager confessed to my research assistant: “All the time I am thinking that this guy is a spy but I don’t know who he is.” Arthur and Emmanuel reported that Philip asked about me in their meetings. On one occasion he asked “Is Lincoln really a Christian?”, and at another time he probed “You don’t think he is a journalist?” The brothers did their best, they assured me, to explain that I was not a journalist, and that I was participating strongly in their church services. Yet, I felt a growing sense of insecurity. My tactics became increasingly that of avoidance and hiding from Philip. I spent whole days without leaving the compound, gathering data from people who were not working. Following this tactic of avoidance, I thought Philip would forget about me, and I could carry on my research activities in the compound without interference. When I did encounter Philip during November and December, I could barely contain a dreadful feeling that he would tell me to leave.

Perhaps my research could have persisted on these terms, had not everything unraveled unexpectedly in January. As I detail in Chapter Two of the dissertation, my
roommate Emmanuel was caught stealing chemicals from the farm, which led to his arrest and Arthur’s departure. Although Philip did not accuse me directly of stealing, he felt that my close association with Arthur and Emmanuel made my presence on the farm too problematic. In a meeting in late January, he ordered me to leave the farm permanently. Fortunately Dolores, the office manager, intervened on my behalf. She pointed out to Philip that she had already promised to host my wife, Christina, and I when the former came in March. At this point, Philip changed his mind and reduced my sentence to a temporary suspension; I was permitted to return to the farm in March with Christina. The period between March and August marked a significant shift in my position on the farm. With the exception for the month of April, when I lived in a mud hut in Madongoni, I resided with Dolores’ family and another white manager, Heinrik. From May to July, Christina and I lived in the homes of these whites. Christina’s presence on the farm greatly assisted my research. Had she not visited the farm in March, I would not have been permitted to return to the farm. In a sense, Christina and I became part of Dolores’ family. Our friendship with white managers brought stability to my research and created a protective buffer between myself and Philip that lasted until the end of my fieldwork.

My position on the farm was also shaped significantly by Leonard, a farm worker who became my primary research assistant. In his mid-20s, Leonard was the perfect candidate for my research assistant. When I met him through Pentecostal worship on the farm, he had recently graduated from a Zimbabwean University with a degree in Anthropology. When I learned of his background, I employed him in many research activities. He became a “note taker” during church services at the farm, in which he
recorded and translated into English what was being said and sung. He also maintained journals in which he recorded his own observations of events on the farm. My association with Leonard lent credibility to my research activities among workers. Unlike Albert, who was perceived as “sell out” connected to Philip, Leonard was known by most workers because his family lived in the resettlement areas near Gaha, Mberengwa where the majority of workers originate (as explored in Chapter One). Indeed, one of his aunts was married to a senior manager on the farm. Yet, employed as an ordinary worker in the pack shed, he was not perceived as a management figure. He attended primary and secondary school with many of the young men and women on the farm. Leonard often introduced me to farm workers and reassured people that they should feel “free” to speak with me. He served as an interpreter during interviews. Although my Shona language skills were strong enough to gather general information from interview subjects, I required the assistance of Leonard when the subject matter became more complicated.

My fieldwork comprised a variety of methods and techniques for gathering data. Most fundamentally, there were my own observations as a resident of the farm. While living in the compound, I was witness to domestic routines, relaxation activities, conversation, gossip and other forms of “everyday” social interaction among workers. I was also in close proximity to events that proved particularly diagnostic. Such events included domestic disputes between cohabiting partners, a police raid targeting undocumented migrants, deaths of babies, and a suicide by a worker who hung himself from a tree branch. When Christina and I lived in the homes of white staff, we were party to numerous casual conversations over meal times that revealed a great deal about
race, gender and labor relations on the farm. We often witnessed the frustration of white employees as they complained about poor performance of workers or, surprisingly more frequently, about the behavior of Philip. We overheard communication through farm radios – there was no cell phone reception on the farm – that offered a glimpse into the decision making process, and how whites attempted to control and supervise what was happening on the farm. Throughout my research at the farm, I attended the “morning roll call,” a daily ritual held near the workshop where attendance is taken, prayers and announcements are made, and orders for the day are given. The same location served as the site where pay was distributed once a month, a chaotic procedure I often attended (as described in Chapter One). Walking around the farm on a daily basis provided opportunity for observing work processes and migration practices - I often watched how people crossed the Limpopo River back and forth from Zimbabwe and encountered migrants on their way to destinations further south.

I was also an active participant in the work and social life of the farm. At different stages of my research, I worked as a picker, loader and in weeding gangs. Initially, it was my intention to join one of these work groups permanently, but I discovered obstacles to complete integration. The jobs were physically demanding. As a picker, I was required to fill large plastic crates with tomatoes that, when full, weigh 45 kilograms. Most of the time I was bent over, reaching though bushes on the ground for appropriately colored tomatoes. The “case,” as it is often called, is then hoisted onto the shoulder and carried to a road for pick up. Working at my hardest, I could manage five crates in a two hour period. Loading required travelling around the farm in groups of 5 or 10 workers on a flat-bed truck or trailer pulled by a tractor, and collecting the cases of
tomatoes for delivery to the pack shed. One is constantly lifting and stacking full crates of tomatoes. I could sustain this work for an hour or two, but beyond that I became slow and tired, getting the sense that I was burdening the work group by being in the way of faster, more efficient workers. Weeding did not require lifting, but nevertheless involved being bent over almost the entire time, pulling weeds out of the ground with bare hands. Like picking and loading, it was a job conducted in the full heat of the day, with limited access to drinking water or shade. These jobs brought one in close proximity to pesticides applied to tomatoes, and at times chemicals were being sprayed in fields close by. The physicality of these jobs, in combination with extreme sun exposure and my concerns about pesticides, limited my ability to become a “regular” worker. When I attempted to work in any of these positions for a several days in a row, my body broke down. I developed an extremely sore back and shoulders, aggravated by sleeping on a cement floor – when I was living in the compound – with only a thick blanket separating me from the ground. My exhaustion after working these jobs prevented me from conducting interviews and writing field notes in the evening. In addition to physical obstacles, I feared that whites on the farm were offended by my direct involvement in manual labor. I have already discussed how I felt insecure and typically avoided Philip; this fact alone restricted my efforts to get involved in the work of the farm. But in a more general sense, like living in the compound, I transgressed racial boundaries by performing work usually reserved for black people. On one occasion a white manager noticed me working in the loading team. Pulling up near me in his truck, he beckoned me to come close. “Lincoln, you don’t need to hurt yourself. Let the blacks do the work.” His comment showed concern for my health, but perhaps also the suggestion that
I was “out of place” by working with blacks. Yet, my efforts to join work groups afforded opportunities to gain rapport with black workers and meet people whom I could later interview. I struck a balance by working only occasionally and for short periods.

I became a more prominent participant-observer among church groups in the compound. Being present in the churches provided the opportunity to listen to people preaching and praying, giving testimonies, and singing songs that conveyed some of their hopes and anxieties. I participated in two churches, a Pentecostal group known as the “Inter D” and a more dominant initiated apostolic church called “Zion.” I was prevented from becoming involved in a third church, Johanne Masowe, because the prophets strongly disapproved of my presence. When I approached the main prophet of the church and asked him if I could attend, his response was, “Whites killed Jesus Christ, and so we do not want them at the service.” I was also told that if I write about the church my notes would “disappear.” I therefore did not attend Johanne Masowe services. I do not consider this a significant loss because my participation in the other groups and other research activities meant that, in any case, I did not have the time to attend. Some sacrifices had to be made. Moreover, the church did not draw a large membership (compared to the other groups) and I was still able to learn about the group in interviews with participants themselves.

My prominent role in the Inter-D and Zion precluded other kinds of activities. As I became known as a sort of missionary among the farm workers, some activities were potentially discrediting. My acceptance and friendship with Arthur and Emmanuel was, in a sense, conditional on my rigid abstinence from alcohol and smoking. Since they had taken me into their room, I did not want to undermine the example of “pure living” they
were trying to set in the farm community. Thus, I was unable to deepen my connections with other men by drinking with them, as I have done on other farms, for example. Because my time on Sunday was preoccupied with church attendance, I was unable to join the official farm soccer team which played games against other farms on Sunday afternoon. Although I occasionally played soccer during the week and got to know many of the players, a deeper involvement in this social practice was sacrificed in favor of church. I also spent significant amounts of time preparing sermons for the services I was scheduled to preach - energies that could have been directed into other research activities. Yet, my participation in the Inter-D and Zion was crucial to my acceptance in the community of the compound. My willingness to sing, dance and preach in these contexts won me a great deal of support and compliments from Zimbabwean workers. I was told several times that people had “never seen a white person” joining them in church, and that it brought them great joy. Philip occasionally preached at the morning roll call, but my participation in the churches of the compound was a revelation. My participation was frequently interpreted by pastors as a miracle from God. I found that after participating in church, people were more willing to do interviews with me.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 78 workers and unstructured interviews with approximately 50 workers and managers. I also had innumerable conversations with six key informants throughout my fieldwork. The informants in semi-structured and unstructured interviews were selected through a snowball sample or
referral method. Most of the respondents were individuals that I first came to know through socializing or participating in activities at the farm, such as work, soccer and church. Without this initial familiarity, I found workers to be reluctant or suspicious of my intentions when I requested interviews. In general, women were less likely to agree to be interviewed. Women who cohabited with men were sometimes blocked from participating in the survey, as their partner would answer questions on their behalf, or they were too preoccupied with cooking, washing or cleaning after work. I had more success interviewing such women when their partners were absent. However, to give an example of the pitfalls of this approach, I once interviewed a woman whose husband was in town for the day. We conducted the interview in her hut. The man came back drunk and found us talking in the relative privacy of his mud hut, at which point he became angry, started shouting at me and tried to beat me. Fortunately, his wife was able to hold him back while I retreated back to my own residence. The following day he apologized to me. Yet, my relations with him were permanently colored by the incident; he asked his wife never to speak to me again without his permission and he himself declined to be interviewed. Some farm workers told me that they heard gossip stating that I slept with the woman, a rumor that persisted until the end of my fieldwork.

While my unstructured interviews usually focused on the respondent’s view of some current event on the farm, such as a strike, suicide or the infant deaths, the semi-structured interviews followed a comprehensive list of questions. These questions covered, among other themes, basic demographic information (e.g. age, education, place of origin), migration and life history, involvement in recreational activities on the farm, spending and saving patterns, and the interviewee’s own analysis and perspective of life
on the farm. I frequently departed from the script by asking respondents to elaborate or provide more details when unexpected topics of interest came up. Some of my questions were problematic. For instance, in the beginning I asked people how much they earned each month. However, I came to learn that this question fed the impression that I was a journalist or government agent, so I stopped asking it. Moreover, once I had established the rates of pay for each position, it was no longer necessary to ask it.

My questions also shifted because, as my fieldwork progressed, I became more interested in gender relations and the sexual economy, by which I mean different forms of non-marital transactional sex. From the very beginning of my fieldwork when Philip introduced me to the work force – and announced that “he is not here to chase after ladies” to everyone’s great amusement – the sexual economy was a perpetual theme. It became clear to me over time that gossip and speculation about sexual relationships were central to farm life. While men frequently accused women of being prostitutes, the promiscuity of black managers was also underscored. My friends in the Pentecostal church focused on the sexual economy in their prayers, preaching and reflections, but as something to be resisted and distanced from.

The sexual economy thus seemed to be an essential aspect of the community, but how could it be studied? Following the advice of my key informants and research assistant, asking people directly about how many partners they have and how their relationships operate would be inappropriate and perhaps offensive. Therefore, I approached the topic by asking people to define, in general terms, what I understood to

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3 As I noted above, some workers and managers made this accusation about me to Philip, partly on the basis of this question.
be the different categories or types of relationships in the sexual economy, and how these relationships on the farm differed from those in Zimbabwe. This turned out to be a fruitful method because it gave informants a sense of anonymity and distance from the topic at hand, even as they likely drew upon personal experiences in their reflections with me. Some informants, specifically a few men, discussed their involvement in transactional sex quite openly, perhaps because they were proud. But in general, I learned about this aspect of farm life from third person accounts, as well as stories and gossip people told about other people.

I also obtained other kinds of data. I asked informants to draw maps of the farm, to represent the space as they saw it. I obtained farm documents, including spreadsheets containing wages paid to workers in 2009 and 2010, and the farm’s Global Gap audit file. Off the farm, I interviewed representatives from NGO’s based in Musina working with Zimbabwean farm workers, including Doctors without Borders, International Organization for Migration and Musina Legal Advice Office. I also attended a workshop organized that brought together academics, government officials and NGO representatives to discuss the problems facing farm workers in Limpopo province. Finally, while this dissertation focuses on the community of Heddon Estates, I also draw on at times my experiences and observations at numerous other farms in the Limpopo valley I have visited in various research trips since 2005.

**Theoretical and Historical Framework**

South Africa’s dramatic transition to democracy in the mid-1990s promised a new era of inclusion and prosperity for all historically marginalized groups. Yet legacies of racialized inequality, xenophobic tensions, and increasingly fractious labor relations
threaten to derail post-apartheid South Africa’s emancipatory promise. Three regional events since the end of apartheid demonstrate the explosive potential of these contradictions. First, in neighboring Zimbabwe, where a similar democratic transition in 1980 left the unequal distribution of land mostly intact, South Africa may see shades of its own future. In 2000, widespread land invasions of most white-owned commercial farms catalyzed an economic crisis from which Zimbabwe is yet to recover, and led millions of Zimbabwean migrants to seek economic and political refuge in South Africa. Second, during a week in May 2008, a wave of xenophobic violence left scores of mostly Zimbabwean immigrants dead and thousands displaced. The provocative scenes of anti-immigrant pogroms placed the politics of migration, in a context of structural unemployment, center stage. Third, in September 2012 – after my fieldwork was completed – over thirty striking workers at Marikana mine were shot and killed by South African police, as the South African government and union allies remained largely silent. If, as some commentators suggest, this event reveals the “true face” of the ANC-led government, it also heralds increasingly turbulent labor relations throughout the economy.

While border farms appear distant from these events, they in fact enable a deeper understanding of their significance. Formally separate as distinct “events,” border farms are sites where the larger politics of these events intersect. The geography of border farms grants them significant diagnostic power. Their location along a porous and frequently traversed international boundary, their relative isolation from urban centers and state oversight, means that white domination remains particularly entrenched, that international migrants are even more vulnerable to exploitation, and that labor relations
are particularly unstable. Border farms are thus microcosms in which the key post-
apartheid dilemmas – the legacies of racialized injustice, the marginalization of non-
citizens, and increasingly fraught labor relations – can be witnessed operating together
within the confines of relatively bounded communities.

While the geography of border farms enables fresh insight into post-apartheid
South Africa, it also makes them a generative vantage point for comparison with other
forms of enclave capitalism found in Africa and elsewhere. In the context of neoliberal
globalization in Africa, James Ferguson (2006) argues that transnational capital is
attracted to spaces where post-colonial governance is weakest, creating “investment
enclaves” where the accountability of employers is minimal. In contrast to “socially
thick” forms of investment found in the developmental state, he calls these forms of
enclave investment “socially thin.” There is little commitment on the part of investors to
the social development of communities they operate in or to the welfare of their work
forces. Given the diminishment of paternalistic benevolence in South African
agriculture, my analysis of border farms provides a localized case study of socially thin
enclave capitalism, adding ethnographic flesh to Ferguson’s model.

Beyond Africa, I suggest border farms serve as bridge over which the study of
South African agriculture can be connected with a broader analysis of migrant labor on
plantations, export processing zones and sites of border production in other contexts. A
common feature across these forms of production is the effort of capital to access
“surplus populations” – to benefit, in other words, from the abundance of potentially
cheap and docile job seekers found throughout the global south. At a time of growing
global unemployment, these production sites represent selective spaces of labor
absorption. Capital accesses surplus population in innumerable ways, not only through forms of enclave production and zones of export processing, but also through myriad guest worker programs or less regulated forms of undocumented migration that channel surplus populations to sites of production in the global north. However, as I argue below, the connection of surplus people with “formal” labor markets cannot be simply assumed. The leverage of employers within the labor process, and associated exploitative working conditions, cannot be simply deduced from the inequality produced by the abundance of job seekers on one hand, and limited opportunities for employment on the other. The modes of access through which migrants become employed, the forms of labor control and management they confront, and their expressions of resistance and agency must be analyzed in all their historical specificity.

This section begins by stressing the importance of contingency within the broad relationship of surplus populations to labor markets. I then introduce the concept of production regime and outline how it can be combined with existing literature South African literature on agrarian labor, largely centered on the concept of paternalism. The adoption of a production regime approach in this context involves expanding the conventional understanding of the labor process to include domestic and leisure activities pursued by workers in and around the residential compound.

**Towards an Anthropology of Surplus Populations**

The concept “surplus population” may appear overly simplistic and even offensive. Mainstream pundits frequently invoke the Malthusian specter of over-population to explain disorder and poverty in Africa (e.g. Kaplan, 1993). The term also has a particularly violent resonance in South Africa. During the apartheid era, millions of
black people were forcibly removed from white areas after being categorized as “surplus,” then subsequently sent to live in the overcrowded Bantustans (Surplus Peoples Project, 1977). Despite this historical and haunting association, the concept underscores the intractability of structural unemployment and crises of social reproduction in most societies of the global South and, in this sense, is of enduring relevance.

Rather than a Malthusian imbalance between population growth and food production (thus leading to “overpopulation”), surplus people implies a condition of redundancy in relation to the requirements of capital accumulation (Araghi, 2009; Li, 2010). The production of surplus populations is connected to the stalled or truncated agrarian transition throughout societies of the Global South (Bernstein, 2004). Unlike agrarian transitions in Europe, where displaced peasantries were largely absorbed by industrial employment, those dispossessed from agricultural livelihoods in the global South find few opportunities for formal employment. Driven out of small-holder agriculture by myriad forms of “land grabbing,” enclosure, importation of cheap food and climate change (White et al., 2012), formerly rural populations subsist not only through informal economies in the ever expanding “planet of slums” in urban settings (Davis, 2004), but also through oppressive wage labor on rural plantations and industries, export processing zones, mining enclaves or labor markets in other countries. These processes reflect a “fragmentation of classes of labor,” according to which “the growing masses of global labor pursue their reproduction in conditions of increasingly scarce, insecure and oppressive wage employment, combined with a range of likewise insecure informal sector activity” (Bernstein, 2006: 13).
How some surplus people become integrated within particular zones of formal employment – instances of labor absorption – is not a straightforward process. Drawing on an older – largely Africanist – literature, some Marxist analyses view the contemporary production of surplus people as synonymous with the creation of labor reserves (cf. Wolpe, 1972, Meillassoux, 1975; Amin, 1976). In this view, surplus populations operate as a kind of reserve army of unemployed that place downward pressure on wages and job security (Araghi, 2009). This perspective can be overly economistic, in that the distinct processes of displacement and connection of surplus people with labor markets are represented as functionally integrated moments (Li, 2009). In contrast, Marx’s own writings stress contingency. Tracing the enclosure movement in 15th and 16th century England, Marx demonstrated that the expropriation of land from peasantries did not automatically create a class of free workers, only “disenfranchised peasants and artisans who are just as likely to resort to beggary or crime as they are to show up at the doors of the factories and mills of the newly emergent capitalist class looking for work” (Read, 2002). It required several centuries of “bloody legislation” to discipline the uprooted peasantry and transform it into a largely urbanized working class. For Marx, then, rural dispossession and proletarianization reflect two distinct historical processes that do not necessarily “link up.”

The classic example of a labor reserve is apartheid South Africa, where bantustans were in fact created, in part, to lower wages paid to black workers. The bantustan system enabled employers to pay black workers as single seasonal workers, rather than at wage levels commensurate with the reproduction of their wider family. As seasonal workers confined to the Bantustans for several months a year, wages were not
paid to blacks over the full calendar year, but only when they were actively employed. In this sense, the reproduction of workers was subsidized by the agricultural and reproductive labor provided by women and children in the reserves (Bozzoli, 1983). But in most instances surplus populations and labor markets are not functionally linked. The case of Zimbabweans seeking employment in South Africa is a case in point. The economic crisis that encourages Zimbabwean migration to South Africa has not been engineered by South African farmers or capital in a larger sense (Addison, 2006). White farmers in South Africa lament the collapse of white agriculture in Zimbabwe, even as they paradoxically and unexpectedly benefit from the expansion of migrant labor forces. The fact that the Zimbabwean crisis and migration to South Africa has escalated precisely at time when South African agriculture experiences rising demand for casual workers suggests not a “grand strategy” on the part of capital and the state, but rather a coincidental intersection of different historical trajectories.

It can be misleading, therefore, to explain the employment of Zimbabweans on border farms through a series of “push and pull” factors common in migration analyses. As the critical migration theorist Sandro Mezzadra (2004: 269) has put it:

Social sciences have been characterized during the 20th century by a substantial predominance of hydraulic models, which too completely reduce migrations to objective causes…Regarding the view of the “critical left”, one can note, for example, that in the writings on “neoliberalism” the bodies of migrants are mostly represented as simple objects, dragged along and overwhelmed by the “global mobilisation” of capital.

What is obfuscated in such hydraulic models of migration are the localized processes through which migrants become integrated within particular labor markets. As Tania Li (2009) argues, the focus must shift to the “series of agencies” and contingent interactions
that connect surplus people with places of employment (Li, 2009). Ong (2006) similarly presses migration scholarship to account for the contingent “middle ground” between rightlessness and full citizenship. The influential work of Agamben (1998; 2005), she argues, creates a stark division between “citizenship” and “bare life,” according to which the only criterion of protection for migrants becomes the extension of citizenship. But citizenship is only one form of protection and need not preclude more complex forms of claim-making or survival strategies among migrants (Ong, 2006). For migrant workers on border farms, these concerns raise at least three questions: What are the pathways, routes and intermediaries through which Zimbabweans find their way to employment? Once employed, how are workers made to work productively in highly oppressive circumstances? What are the avenues through which workers shape their circumstances? An ethnographic sensibility, attuned to the micro-politics of work environments, is needed to respond to these questions in a meaningful way.

The “Production Regime” Approach

A body of scholarship known as “Labor process theory” offers valuable insights for studying the micro-politics of work (Braverman, 1977; Thompson; 1983). Within this tradition, Michael Burawoy (1979; 1985) developed the concept of “production regime.” In Burawoy’s formulation, production regimes involve two aspects: the labor process and the political apparatuses of production. The labor process involves the “the coordinated set of activities and relations involved in the transformation of raw materials into useful products” (Burawoy, 1985: 16). This involves the organization of tasks and division of labor one finds at the point of production, as well as the “political and ideological effects” arising from these arrangements. For example, in his study of shop floor culture in a US
factory, Burawoy (1979) discovered that workers engaged in “making out” while working on assembly lines. Making out involved games and informal practices intended not only to pass time and make work more interesting, but also a means for workers to exercise control over the pace of work and piece work earnings. Yet, Burawoy argues that the practices of making out divert tensions between workers and management into “intra-employee competition,” thus demonstrating how consent can be manufactured in the labor process itself. The political apparatuses of production refer to the “institutions that regulate and shape struggles in the work place” (Burawoy, 1985; 16). This includes how the state regulates work place relations, such as through legal legislation. It also includes the rules and codes of behavior set out by employers themselves, and procedures and entitlements created through collective bargaining and unions. The labor process and the political apparatuses of production are co-constitutive — one does not wholly determine the other.

Burawoy’s contributions to labor process theory have proven highly influential in studies of farm workers in the United States. Based mainly in California, this literature explores how agricultural producers adapted after the phasing out of the bracero program and rise of the United Farm Workers union in the region. For example, Thomas (1984) analyses how California lettuce growers employ increasing numbers of undocumented workers and women in order to keep wages low, restoring manager control through greater segmentation among workers. He describes modern US agriculture as essentially factory production — resonating with McWilliams’ (1939) evocative title. In her study of strawberry growers, Wells (1996) demonstrates a shift from wage labor towards sharecropping as a means of dispersing risk and undermining unionization. In so doing,
Wells argues that sharecropping is not a pre-capitalist institution, but a fully contemporary one. It is part of a “pervasive trend toward the apparent downsizing of firms and the distancing and casualizing of employment relations” (Wells, 1996: 7). Mize (2006) describes the production regime among citrus growers as “market despotism,” following Marx’s analysis of the Lancashire Mills in the “Working Day” section of Capital Volume 1.

The changing context of industrial agriculture in the US, as described by these works, resonates with the shifting circumstances of South African agriculture. Like agricultural producers in California who benefit from close proximity to Mexico and working population available from that country, white farmers in Limpopo province benefit from the availability of desperate Zimbabwean migrants in the region. Beyond these similarities, comparison of labor regimes between the US and Southern Africa has encouraged the cross-fertilization of ideas. Burawoy’s notion of the production regime builds on his earlier work on “colonial despotism” in the Zambian copper mines and migrant labor in Southern Africa (Burawoy 1976). South African scholars, as we shall see, use notions of paternalism that draw largely on the work US historians of slavery, particularly Eugene Genovese’s (1972) landmark work. Yet, in contrast to the sociology of US agriculture, studies of commercial farming in Southern Africa have drawn much less on labor process theory. This scholarship focuses on macro-theories of agrarian change, (e.g. Morris 1976; Marcus 1989), micro-histories detailing the struggles against proletarianization (Bundy 1979, Keegan 1987) and, most centrally, discursive approaches centered on the concept of paternalism (Du Toit 1993, Rutherford 2001). My intention is
to introduce the notion of production regime to the literature on farm workers in South Africa, heretofore dominated by the concept of racialized paternalism.

**Restructuring Paternalism**

A rich literature in South Africa explores the paternalistic modes of rule that long characterized white owned farms. In this body of work, paternalism refers to the symbolic construction of farms as organic families, in which white farmers are father-figures and colored and black workers are cast as children, a style of labor relations inherited from slavery (Van Onselen, 1992; Du Toit, 1993; Kritzinger and Vorster; Waldman, 1996; Orton et al. 2001). Paternalism in South Africa can be traced to 17th century Master-slave relationships and the Masters and Servants Act of 1856 that followed the abolition of slavery in 1834 (Scully, 1997). Following the abolition of slavery, the Masters and Servant Act defined all farm laborers as servants and farmers as masters and made provisions for farmers to punish workers who violated labor contracts. Missing work without permission or otherwise disobeying the Master’s command could result in beatings and prison sentences. Farmers and workers lived in tightly woven, intimate communities, often tied together through generational linkages. Farm owners enjoyed supreme authority and, supported by the apartheid state after 1948, they had almost total control over their workers. Pass laws under apartheid kept many workers legally bound to farms, and farmers had labor shortages addressed partly through the use of prison labor (Marcus, 1989). Yet, coercion existed in tension with benevolence. Owners could terrorize labor – as the infamous case of Bethal in the 1940s and 1950s indicated (First, 1959; Bradford; 1990) – but also frequently subsidized their workers through “free” accommodation, food or grazing rights. Heavily racist and illiberal, most
owners felt a fatherly obligation towards their workers, and took an active interest in their moral uplift (Crpanzano, 1985). Centered on the concept of paternalism, the scholarship often describes farms as “total institutions.” Farm workers are perceived as so completely dominated by racialized paternalism that they have no alternative understanding of their situation or access to any autonomous realm of action (Nasson, 1984, cf. Newby, 1977).

The South African scholarship ultimately traces how paternalism was challenged in the 1980s by the rise of a “farm management movement” launched by the Rural Foundation (Mayson, 1989). The Rural Foundation was an organization established by white farmers in the early 1980s and partly funded by the apartheid government (Ewert and Hamman 1996, 149). Reflecting attempts by white farmers to recast their international image as abusive employers, the Foundation was tasked with improving conditions and labor relations on commercial farms throughout the country. In accordance with its prescriptions, farmers throughout South Africa adopted so-called “participative management” strategies. As Du Toit (1993: 320 emphasis in original) notes in regard to the Rural Foundation’s influence: “Above all, it led to an emphasis on farm management, the idea that what farmers must do is not to farm but to manage [both land and people]…The procedures by which judgement operates, the criteria by which it happens, the consequences with which it is invested – all became objects of intensified concern.” Participative management brought more layers of bureaucracy to farms, led to the incorporation of black workers into supervisory positions and introduced profit sharing schemes. While farmers still resisted unionization, committees were established on farms in order to give expression to workers’ interests through regular meetings with management. By the end of the 1980s, these reforms improved living and working
conditions on some farms, but they did little to undermine the private and absolute authority farmers held over their workers (Du Toit, 1993).

The reforms were given added impetus by wider political-economic shifts in the 1980s and 1990s. As the African National Congress (ANC) assumed power in 1994, state subsidies for white farmers were withdrawn, while land tenure security and minimum wage legislation were introduced to support farm workers and residents (Ewert and Hamman 1999, 205-206). Throughout the agricultural sector, farms were consolidated among fewer yet larger entities, while thousands of farm dwellers were retrenched or evicted (Greenberg and Mather 2003). Farmers who were kept on the land by apartheid-era subsidies were no longer viable in the deregulated environment, causing many to leave farming or to shift from farming crops to less volatile game farming and ranching. Since 1992, over 250,000 farm workers have been retrenched, even as part-time and migrant employment in agriculture has increased over the same period. As part of their efforts to lower labor costs and avoid unionization of workers, farmers have employed a growing proportion of casual and seasonal labor, often drawn from neighboring countries, the former homelands or nearby townships (Du Toit and Ally 2005; Johnston, 2007). Taken together, the rise of participative management, the removal of agricultural subsidies, new forms of labor market regulation, and shifts in work force composition encouraged changes in longstanding paternalistic labor practices.

This scholarship traces how some aspects of paternalistic labor practices have changed, but leaves some crucial questions unanswered. Du Toit (1993) and others (Du Toit and Ewart, 2005) emphasize that paternalism has not disappeared as farmers have embraced, to varying degrees, the management ethos articulated above. Formerly
paternalistic benefits have been privatized, as many of the informal gifts and favors such as housing, food and electricity (on more developed farms) are now commonly deducted from workers’ pay. Similar to commercial agriculture in Latin American and elsewhere (Bain, 2010; Ortiz and Aparicio, 2010), there is greater segmentation and inequality within work forces (Ewert and Du Toit, 2005). To the extent that there is a general trend that most if not all farm owners have followed, it is the externalization and casualization of labor. Externalization refers to farm owners’ use of third party contractors or labor brokers to – depending on the nature of the contractor – supply, oversee and pay temporary workers. Casualization refers to growing employment of part-time and seasonal workers, by and large residing off the farm, and employed without the use of a third-party. In the case of externalization, the moral contract of paternalism is “severed” as contractors come between temporary workers and the farm owner (Du Toit and Ally 2003: 51). Similarly, casualization produces growing social distance – if not a total “severing” – because temporary workers do not reside in housing provided by the farm owner, considered the “lynchpin” of traditional paternalism. The combination of these processes is thought to render paternalism increasingly uneven and exclusionary. Farm owners channel benefits, incentives and their personal attention to the relatively few permanent and skilled workers, while the majority of workers – seasonal, part-time, migrant – are left outside of the paternalistic contract and fending for themselves through largely informal, off-farm survival strategies. In the Western Cape, where most recent studies have been conducted, the synergy between skilled, long-term colored workers and farm owners is thought to produce an “ethnic corporatism,” according to which these core
workers align themselves more with the farm owner than temporary workers (Ewert and Hamman 1996).

Helpful as this analysis is, two important questions receive less attention: first, what sort of labor relations enmesh temporary workers who live most of the year on farms? Existing literature tends to restrict this category to the wives of permanent workers, but it includes more people than that. Such temporary workers may or may not gain employment through a third-party contractor, but their sustained presence on farms suggests that their relationship with farm owners is perhaps not totally severed. Second, given the growing divisions between core and temporary sections of the work force, what characterizes relations between these two groups? It is clear that they have distinct and perhaps contradictory interests, but the potential forms of dependence, social ties, and patron-client practices that occur between them have not been explored in detail.4

Conditions on the border farm examined in this paper, Heddon Estates, enable fresh insight on these questions. On this border farm, externalization and casualization are conflated. Almost the entire work force, over six hundred people for most of the year, is made up of Zimbabwean migrants who are employed as temporary seasonal workers. Approximately half of the work force is comprised of women (most of whom are divorced, widowed or unmarried). Despite their seasonal status, most workers live on the farm for at least eight months a year. They appear as casual labor because they are employed without the involvement of a third-party contractor. Yet, their relationship

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4 These questions are of particular relevance since they arguably characterize the employment status of most workers in agricultural guest worker programs in North America and Europe. Their avoidance by the South African literature perhaps shows the problematic tendency of exceptionalism in South African studies.
with the employer is not direct – their entrance to the work force is mediated in significant ways by an elite group of Zimbabwean managers. These managers serve as *de facto* labor contractors who are located within the shifting paternalistic universe of the farm. They possess wide discretionary powers as they implement – often selectively – the policies of the increasingly distant white farm owner. Yet, alongside their empowerment comes growing responsibility. As the interface between the farm owner and mass of temporary workers, they are tasked with containing the instability attendant upon the employment of a highly fluid and disaffected work force. My argument is that the expansive and many-faceted role of black managers both disrupts and reproduces the circuits of paternalistic power. They render paternalism at once less humanitarian and edifying, and more authoritarian and arbitrary. As deferential ties with the farm owner become more limited, there is scope for workers to enter into relations of mutual obligation with Zimbabwean managers. Such relations, however, appear less durable and encompassing than those facilitated by apartheid-era paternalism between owners and workers.

**Delegated Despotism**

I characterize the shifting production regime on Heddon Estates as delegated despotism. In contrast to the idea of “market despotism,” which for Burawoy (1985) refers to the complete subjection of workers and absence of state intervention in the labor market, delegated despotism captures how new forms of public and private regulation coexist with a delegation of rule – a form of rule that ultimately reproduces the
vulnerability of farm workers. Delegated despotism is more closely related to Mamdani’s (1996) notion of “decentralized despotism.” Mamdani argues that the legacies of the colonial state, specifically its division (“bifurcation”) between direct and indirect rule, placed limits on democratization and social movements in contemporary Africa. By the early 20th century, indirect rule – what Mamdani calls “decentralized despotism” – became the preeminent form of rule for securing political control throughout colonial Africa. Under decentralized despotism, the native authority – while ultimately appointed by and accountable to European officials – was highly autonomous. It presided over the native reserves which were segregated from towns and subject to customary law. Designed to be self-sustaining, the native authority combined judicial, administrative and treasury functions into a single chief. Summarizing the objective of decentralized despotism, Mamdani (1996:56) states:

Its point was to create a dependent but autonomous system of rule, one that combined accountability to superiors with a flexible response to the subject population, a capacity to implement central directives with one to absorb local shocks.

As another variant of indirect rule in Africa, delegated despotism in commercial agriculture also attempts to strike this balance between the accountability of intermediaries and the capacity for “flexible response” to the subject population. Yet, there are important differences in the farming context that distinguish it from decentralized despotism. To discern these differences is difficult, for – despite the all-encompassing nature of his argument – Mamdani does not address in detail the spaces of white commercial farming in settler-colonies. One can infer from his analysis that farm

5 “Market Despotism” is one category in the typology of production regimes presented by Burawoy (1985). See also Mize (2006) for an extended analysis of the concept.
workers, given their legal status as “servants” of white farmers for most of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, would be categorized as living under the “centralized despotism” of white farm owners. Yet, as suggested in the introduction, the view of farm workers as subject to the totalizing control of white owners is less tenable in the post-apartheid context. It will become apparent in the chapters that follow that black managers are far less autonomous than how Mamdani portrays native authorities under colonialism. On perhaps the most obvious level, the geographic distance that separated most European officials from native authorities in the reserves is minimized on farms. White owners and black managers both live within the confines of the farm; while they inhabit separate spaces with strong symbolic boundaries (e.g. the compound versus the white owner’s home), there is more physical proximity than the colonial model allowed for. More fundamentally, black managers do not combine administrative, economic and judicial functions to the extent embodied in colonial chiefs. The former play important roles in recruiting and disciplining workers, and sometimes become involved in settling disputes, but administrative, economic and even judicial matters are tasks shared with whites in the farm office. On Heddon Estates, workers are not fired without Philip’s consent. When workers fight with one another in the fields or in the compound, they are often sent to the office for Philip’s adjudication. Additionally, workers sometimes ignore the formal hierarchy and appeal directly to Philip with their problems and concerns (i.e. asking for money if a relative dies). There remain, in other words, significant paternalistic legacies that – in combination with new forms of regulation, labor sourcing and changing management practices – produce a peculiar form of indirect rule distinct from decentralized despotism. My use of the term delegated (rather than “decentralized)
denotes how power is increasingly dispersed and channeled through black managers, while nevertheless firmly linked to the farmer at the pinnacle of the occupational hierarchy.

My adoption of the concept “production regime” for analyzing delegated despotism is done with some important provisos. There is a tendency in some labor process theory towards “industrial determinism;” that is, the consent of workers is perceived as organized entirely within the factory, and can be traced solely through the organization of work and management practices. Wells (1996) points this out when she discusses the need to go for wider “labor market leverage,” instead of leverage within the production process alone. Referring to Latino migrant farm workers in California, she states: “In the context where most workers compete for jobs in secondary labor markets, without benefits of citizenship, in a context of sustained labor surplus – the political regimes shaping the leverage of workers in labor market are more determinant of working class power than are their power bases within the firm.” There is a need, in other words, to consider farm laborers in a wider field of power than just the work process (cf. Willis 1979; Finn, 1996).

Following Wells’ critique, there is a need to reenvision how the labor process itself is conceptualized. In their analysis of contract farming among Mandinka households, Carney and Watts (1990) argue that the labor process and family politics “are inscribed within the same domestic sphere.” Contestation is directed within the household, over such gendered processes as kin naming and access to land. Similarly, in a study of industrial zones in China, Ngai and Smith (2007) argue that spatial aspects of production have been ignored by Burawoy and others. Responding to this lacuna, the
authors identify a new production regime they term the “dormitory labor regime.” The dormitory regime is premised on the short-term employment of male and female migrants from rural China whom, while employed at very low wages, reside in company-provided compounds. The rise of a dormitory labor regime shows the “configuration of new forms of work-residence for the daily reproduction of labor in transnational labor process space” (Ngai and Smith, 2007).

Building on this analysis of the work-residence nexus, my dissertation emphasizes the role of social practices within the space of the farm worker compound. In a space such as a commercial farm, where the site of residence overlaps with the space where paid work is performed, it is necessary to include domestic and leisure activities as among the “coordinated set of activities and relations” implicated in the labor process. These activities, similar to Burawoy’s notion of “making out” on the shop floor, can equally be considered a terrain upon which the production regime is shaped, contested and reproduced.

To adopt such a wider view of the labor process within production regimes, I think of the latter more as assemblages of practices (Moore, 2004), with a greater emphasis on the process of articulation. By articulation, I refer to the dual processes of combination and enunciation integral to Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony (Hall, 1980). What might be viewed as disparate elements – new forms of state and private regulation, global and regional restructuring, legacies of paternalistic control, discourses of management, and the shifting survival strategies of workers – are joined together in localized regimes of rule on farms. Dominant discourses hold these contradictory and conflicting elements together, “constructing unity out of difference” (Hart, 2002). This
fusion brings together “not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages… and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups” (Gramsci, 1971: 161). Yet, the hegemony cultivated through these dominant discourses is never totalizing, finished or complete. It is inherently fragile and must be continually renewed and modified (Hart, 2002).

The articulating linkages that constitute delegated despotism are historically contingent and operate differently on different farms. For instance, on Heddon Estates – the primary case study in this dissertation – sharp contradictions animate and create tension within labor relations. A neoliberal management discourse exists awkwardly alongside coercive practices, racism and the remnants of paternalistic ideology. The farm owner Philip embodies the contrast between paternalism and management. Having grown up on a large farm in northern Limpopo during the apartheid era, and learning to speak African languages such as Venda and Shangaan, Philip can be viewed as a relic of old-style paternalism. Yet, he also represents the shift towards “management” in farming, manifest in his degree in agricultural science and economics from the University of Kwa-Zulu obtained in the early 1990s. More broadly, Heddon Estates is a very large farm in terms of land holdings and the overall population of workers. But unlike other large farms operated by absentee owners or companies, Heddon Estates still falls under the nominal authority of a single white owner who also resides in the space. Moreover, the delegation of rule to managers results in potentially conflicting centers of authority. Although managers are accountable to the owner, they have great discretionary powers
and often deviate from official policy. Less direct oversight by the white owner makes the farm vulnerable to theft and other transgressions.

This perspective suggests that there is no underlying structural logic from which forms of labor control and resistance can be mechanically deduced. Delegated despotism constrains social practice without determining it. Practices among workers that we label “resistance” do not emerge from some autonomous realm outside fields of power. Hegemonic discourses are simultaneously “controlling” (in service of the employer or dominant social group) and a source of entitlement for farm workers (encouraging contestation “from below”) (Moore, 2000: 673; cf. Scott, 1985). Resistance by farm workers draws upon subjectivities within hegemonic discourses or “multiple fields of power” (Moore, 1998: 352). A methodological focus then is to investigate how delegated despotism is contested and rearticulated through the practices of workers, to understand how, as Moore puts it, (1998: 351) “performances do not unfold in a pre-given discursive field, but rather shape the very texture and contours of that terrain.” It is in this sense that I look at church groups and the sexual economy as two crucial sites where the production regime is contested. The delegated authority of managers is rendered transparent in the leadership of the dominant church on the farm, and a marginal Pentecostal church shows how this authority is contested. The sexual economy shows how women, nominally the most exploited group in the form, upset the distribution of wages on the farm, and return home with greater income than their male counterparts. I also give examples, in the chapters that follow, of a large-scale work stoppage and well organized stealing of farm property by workers.

Outline of Chapters
Chapter One examines the four structural features of delegated despotism. These include, first, a shifting composition of labor, involving the expanded employment of Zimbabwean migrants on a part-time or seasonal basis. Second, there are new forms of private and public regulation, involving third-party inspections by retailers and efforts by the post-apartheid state to improve conditions for farm workers. Partial compliance with these regulations by owners leads, third, to a withdrawal of once “free” paternalistic services. Fourth, the new forms of labor recruitment and growing social distance between owners and workers encourage a delegation of rule to black managers, personified in the role of Clayton, the senior black manager at Heddon Estates. The structural conditions of delegated despotism encourage widespread divisions and what I term “fragmented belonging” among farm workers. Paradoxically, these practices are also situated by Zimbabweans’ own goals and motivations, encapsulated in the idiom *kuvaka musha*.

Chapter Two shows the kind of resistance that this production regime produces. The widespread stealing of chemicals – exposed in a scandal that led to my own temporary banishment from the farm – is encouraged because workers have little access to farm owner benevolence, but ample opportunity to steal. This dynamic is illustrated in the case of “middle managers” Arthur and Emmanuel. Arthur failed attempts to build a close relationship with Philip show the limits of “belonging” on the basis of paternalism. Emmanuel’s involvement in the stealing of chemicals shows how such middle managers, denied the privileges accorded to senior figures like Clayton, channel their frustration into stealing. In contrast, the example of a tomato picker strike shows opposition on a more collective basis. The strike also exposes the vast responsibility placed on Clayton
to contain such labor unrest. Yet, the strike is conducted within the confines of existing expectations, and avoids leveling radical demands. While these examples demonstrate the volatility and instability of delegated despotism, they do not point to any kind of sustained labor movement that could transform the production regime.

Through a discursive analysis of narratives surrounding infant deaths on the farm, Chapter Three discusses how delegated despotism alters the sexual economy and gender relations among workers. Instead of relatively stable farm worker households living more or less permanently on the farm, the casualization of labor has encouraged the employment of more independent and often unmarried Zimbabwean workers, including unprecedented numbers of women. The resultant production regime involves less paternalistic entitlement than in the past and grants more power to black supervisors, allowing them to exploit other workers for bribes or sex. At first glance, women appear to be most exploited workers, but through the sexual economy, they increase their savings above that of men. But this process has contradictory implications for their status on farms and, from a broader perspective, the sexual economy aggravates existing divisions within the work force.

Chapter Four considers the role of farm churches with the production regime. I argue that churches largely project the interests of management. Churches independent of the senior black managers struggle to survive. Pentecostalism, in particular, is the key alternative to the dominant Zion church, but its emphasis on individual morality – rather than social gospel, for instance - appears poorly adapted for conditions on border farms. The “fall” into different kinds of sin by my roommates in the compound, Arthur and
Emmanuel, contributes in different ways to their leaving the farm, and illustrates the limits of Pentecostalism under delegated despotism.
Chapter One: Factions in the Field: The Structural Dimensions of Delegated Despotism

Moving Into the Compound

The circumstances of my first night in the compound of Heddon Estates gave insight into how labor relations are shifting in South African agriculture. In preceding weeks, I had been travelling to the farm each day from the nearest town of Musina, some 50 kilometers away mostly by gravel road. In the course of these visits, I began to develop friendships with a few workers, notably the two Zimbabweans brothers Arthur and Emmanuel. These brothers stayed together in one of the rooms of the “new houses:” long, single story brick buildings in which foremen, long-term and semi-skilled workers found accommodation. The immediate rationale for staying overnight was an evening church service on the farm, held by a Pentecostal church group in which Arthur and Emmanuel were organizers. Eager to facilitate my participation in the service, they suggested that I spend the night with them. I graciously accepted their offer, but I proposed that we contact the farm owner Philip to gain permission; I knew how unprecedented it was for a white person to sleep in the compound. Moreover, during our first meeting, when I expressed interest in taking up residence in the workers’ compound, Philip responded coldly that “all our rooms are occupied.” To my surprise, the brothers stated that contacting Philip was not necessary. “We will tell him tomorrow at the roll call,” Arthur stated. “For now, we must go and speak with the manager, Clayton, to let him know you will be staying with us.”

As we walked up the hill to Clayton’s house, Emmanuel elaborated on why Clayton, rather than Philip, should be informed. “Philip is not much interested in things
inside the compound. But with Clayton, he is like the chief of this place…it is important to be friends with him and to create good relations.” When we reached the zenith of the hill, Clayton’s modest three roomed house stood before us, his white Isuzu pick-up parked outside – a “bonus” Clayton received from Philip for a particularly successful season a few years ago. His house, outfitted with electricity, running water and satellite television, made a stark contrast to housing in the compound below. Compared to the ramshackle rooms of the new houses, or the innumerable mud huts clustered beside them, the house and vehicle marked Clayton as a figure of extreme wealth and power. And yet, these signifiers of wealth were in some sense not entirely “his,” even if, in the case of the pick-up truck, he had formal ownership. They were gifts and privileges from the true owner of the farm, Philip, who could perhaps take them all away. After sitting on his front porch for a few minutes, Clayton emerged from his house and greeted us warmly; his eyes were bloodshot and he staggered slightly, showing that he’d been drinking.

Emmanuel, speaking in Shona, notified him that I would be staying in the compound and participating in the church event. Clayton did not object and, putting his arm around me, slurred in English: “So you want to stay with the blacks? There is no problem, my friend. You are welcome.” Then, in a grandiose gesture, he ordered two bottles of coke and chicken pieces brought out from his freezer by one of the young men hanging around his house, which he gave us to bring back to our room in the compound. “Pray for us!” Clayton yelled, his voice trailing off as we walked back down the hill.

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6 By “notifying him,” Emmanuel was implicitly asking Clayton’s permission for me to stay overnight in the compound, although he did not put it that way.
At first glance my seeking permission from Clayton, rather than Philip, seems consistent with South African labor history: white employers have often relied on such black intermediaries to govern life in mine and farm compounds (Crush 1994; Moodie 1994). Yet Clayton’s responsibilities go far beyond his governance of the compound. He oversees practically all aspects of farm production and recruits Zimbabwean labor; in many ways he is the “face” of the farm, even while Philip is the true owner. Placed within the larger context of social change in commercial agriculture – the greater participation of professional managers in farm decision making, the shifting composition of labor, and forms of both deregulation and reregulation enacted by government and private sector retailers – the encounter sketched above registers a decisive reworking of traditional paternalism that long characterized white-owned farms. How this reworking takes place, and the consequences it holds for the advocacy and organization of farm workers, remain central questions for studies of agrarian labor.

Delegated despotism reflects at least four trends. First, a changing composition of labor, according to which a growing proportion of agricultural labor is seasonal or part-time and sourced from neighboring countries. Second, a new regulative architecture encroaches on the formerly private spaces of commercial farming, in the form of post-apartheid labor legislation and Global “Good Practices in Agriculture” (Global Gap), a set of private ethical and environmental standards imposed by retailers. Third, white owners no longer provide many of the “in kind” benefits and entitlements to workers characteristic of traditional paternalism; labor relations are guided more by impersonal economic logic than in the past. Fourth, as they have become more distant, white owners delegate unprecedented powers to black managers and other “middle men” – often those
responsible for recruiting and transporting seasonal workers to farms. This chapter illustrates not only how these four trends are evident on border farms, but how they work together to widen divisions among workers to the detriment of collective action.

In what follows, I first provide a brief history of Heddon Estates and the border territory it spans. This history sketches how apartheid-era paternalism was sustained until the 1980s and 1990s when economic reform and the incorporation of Zimbabwean workers began to unravel this labor regime. I then outline how delegated despotism takes shape on Heddon Estates, focusing on the four trends identified above. After this outline, I discuss how delegated despotism widens segmentation, reinforces existing divisions on the farm and gains traction through Zimbabweans’ own ambitions and goals. I suggest that building a rural homestead and supporting family ties in rural Zimbabwe, encapsulated in the Shona term *kuvaka musha*, express the central aspirations for most male and female workers at the farm. Under the pressure of social expectation from home, and divided by the labor regime at work, most Zimbabweans feel compelled to pursue household-oriented livelihood strategies. In the final section, I illustrate how one of the most widespread strategies, high interest money lending, tends to reproduce divisions and thereby further undermine prospects for collective action among workers. These money-lending practices, known as *chimbadzo* on the farm, illustrate how “modes of belonging” (Rutherford, 2008) have become increasingly fragmented on commercial farms.

**The Eastern Border and Heddon Estates**

Heddon Estates is one of many fruit and vegetable farms located along the Limpopo River in the vast bushveld between Musina and Kruger National Park. It forms
part of a distinct geographical area, which I refer to as the “eastern border.” Historically, the land along the eastern border has not been conducive to large-scale commercial farming. During the 1980s, the border was inhabited by dozens of small-scale white farmers, some of whom lived there for several decades, yet they practically disappeared when apartheid-era subsidies were withdrawn. Most of the large fruit and vegetable farms in this area, including Heddon Estates, are relatively new, established in the post-apartheid era. The hot climate, water source and good soil near the Limpopo have made these farms among the largest winter tomato producers in the country. Yet the owners mention another decisive reason for their success: the unprecedented supply of cheap labor from Zimbabwe. In the following section, I trace the local history of the land occupied by Heddon Estates, focusing on the sourcing of labor as it has shifted over time.

According to long-term residents in the area, the original inhabitants of the land were Venda agriculturalists living under the authority of chief Manenzhe. The inhabitants of this territory appear to have maintained a high degree of autonomy from the colonial state and farmers well into the twentieth century. Interaction with hunters, ivory traders and other African migrants crossing the Limpopo in the early 1900s did not

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7 What I refer to as “eastern border” constitutes the border line east of Musina, stretching along the Limpopo until arriving at Madimbo Corridor military base. I do not consider the area between Madimbo corridor and Kruger Park as part of this designation, since it has historically been communal land or mining areas, and thus not as relevant for white farming.

8 The history of this area, including northern Limpopo more generally in the 20th century, is yet to be written in any systematic way. I draw on archival sources, interviews with long-term Venda residents in the surrounding area (including former farm workers), local white farmers and relevant secondary sources.
displace Venda from the land or undermine local headmen’s authority. Venda inhabitants ignored or refused to pay taxes required for living on “crown land.” Likewise, the sale of much the eastern border as part of the huge “Scrutton’s Lease”\(^9\) for mineral prospecting appears to have had little effect on their lives (Mulaudzi, 2000:67-68). There appears to have been no white settlers actually living in permanent settlement along the Limpopo until the 1930s at the earliest; most farms were owned by absentee-owners engaged in land speculating (Mulaudzi, 2000: 161).\(^10\) One elderly Venda woman explained that the “first whites” to live on the land near Heddon Estates were involved in hunting and cattle grazing: “they were only staying here, not farming.” Small fruit and vegetable farms were not established until the 1940s. These farmers ordered Venda inhabitants to work as labor tenants. According to the woman and some of her relatives, this demand made many Venda leave the lands, with only a minority remaining as tenants.

The meaning of “tenancy” was variable and shifted over time. One descendant of the original Venda group explained that when the first whites came, people were required to work three months without pay, in exchange for grazing rights and staying on the land. Yet, another Venda informant claimed that during the same period (roughly 1940 onwards) some people stayed on the land without working. Farm labor in this period was subject to negotiation and conflict between Venda inhabitants and the white land owner.

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\(^9\) Scrutton himself was an active trader in the northern Transvaal in the 1880s and 1890s, and had originally obtained the land from the Venda chief Makhado, before the latter was driven out of the Zoutpansberg District by an army detachment from Pretoria (see Maanda Mulaudzi, 2000: 67–68).

\(^10\) The obstacles to white settlement along the northern frontier, in an earlier period, is also discussed by Wagner (1980). Mulaudzi (2000) discusses how conditions for white farming improved in northern Zoutpansberg District after 1930.
As Mulaudzi (2000: 250) suggests, many Venda subverted labor demands from farmers even as they remained on the land. Although whites technically owned the land, they lacked enforcement mechanisms, especially given their distance from towns and lack of decent roads. They needed a cheap source of labor near the farm, and there were few other options.\(^\text{11}\) It appears that some form of labor tenancy persisted along the eastern border up to the 1960s and 1970s.

During the 1970s, however, many of the remaining descendants of the original Venda inhabitants were evicted or vacated the land occupied by small white farmers.\(^\text{12}\) Although they moved away from the farms, many settled across the river in then Rhodesia and continued working on the farm as seasonal laborers. One former Venda farm worker explained to me that his family moved across the Limpopo because the “laws on the farm became too difficult.” In particular, he claimed that the farmer at the time stopped allowing people to graze cattle and that people left in large numbers, establishing small settlements across the river under the authority of Venda headmen on the Rhodesian side. Other Venda informants told me that they moved to other larger commercial farms in Limpopo, such as Tshipise and Nwanedi, while others relocated within the newly formed Venda homeland. As was occurring throughout South African

\(^{11}\) It is unclear if and to what extent farmers in the study area made efforts to recruit labor using recruiting agents, as was done by white farmers in the Tshipise/Nzhelele area and others around the Zoutpansberg. Farmers along the border were well positioned to “intercept” migrants who were crossing the river en route to the mines near Johannesburg, much like Heddon Estates today. However, I have not found any archival or oral evidence supporting this possibility. It is likely that migrants avoided the farms given poor wages. The farms depended, in the main, on Venda living on the farm or migrants from nearby villages across the Limpopo.

\(^{12}\) This was probably the second major exodus from the land. The first occurred when the first white settlers arrived and many Venda chose to leave at that time.
farms during the period of forced removals, it seems likely that the small border farmers – with the support of the state – also evicted tenants in order to maximize their own land utilization (Marcus, 1989: 1-7).

While border farmers recruited some labor from the homelands or across the Limpopo, the main source of labor remained Venda who lived “permanently” on the farm. These workers were “full-time” employees and were deeply enmeshed in paternalistic relations with the farm owner. A former worker on the border farms said “in those days the farmer was the master...they could just shoot blacks, there was no one to stop them.” But another former worker suggested “some were not bad…on Christmas we were given so much clothes, food and drums of beer… enough to throw away.” These statements exhibited how, under paternalism, benevolence and violence existed in tension. Farm workers could expect certain entitlements, such as the provision of food and housing, yet they remained at the mercy of the farmer, who presided over them as a father figure. Labor relations were premised on a discourse of “belonging to the farmer” (Rutherford, 2008), in which acceptance depended on being in good favor with the white farmer. Black workers lived in tightly woven, intimate communities with their white employers. Identification with the white farmer may have, for some workers, overridden attachments to territory around the eastern border. “In those days,” a Venda man reflected, “we would play together as children…if the white man sold the farm, he sometimes took his blacks with him to his new place. At least they remained employed.” By constructing farms as families, paternalism helped stabilize highly unequal and racialized labor relations.
From the onset of white farming in the 1950s extending up to the 1980s, paternalism flourished along the eastern border, in part because the farms themselves were relatively small, allowing for closer relations between workers and employers. Previous farmers in the area state that, at its peak in the mid-1980s, the white farming community along the eastern border represented between 30 and 40 individual farmers. The largest of these farmers could have employed, at most, 100 workers during harvest season, but most employed less than 20. This paternalistic world was bolstered by state subsidies that assisted border farmers. During the 1980s, border farmers received monthly stipends, military training and equipment from the government (in addition to other forms of state support available to all white farmers during apartheid) as part of the state efforts to clamp down on anti-apartheid resistance. These “incentives” were intended to attract white people to live and farm along the border, thereby acting as a buffer zone in which invading guerrillas could be detected and intercepted. Roads along the border were tarred (West of Musina) and soldiers regularly camped at the farm during the 1980s (Davis, 1987).

By the end of the 1980s, and especially after 1994, land ownership records indicate that farmers faced financial difficulty, with successive farmers selling their land to banks. It was in the environment of liberalization and the end of apartheid that the current owner of Heddon Estates, Philip, began acquiring land along the eastern border. He started Heddon Estates in 1995 on a five hundred and forty hectare farm, but now

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13 Moreover, state authority was relatively weak along the border.
14 The extent of guerilla activity along the eastern border is unclear and needs further research. I was told by farmers and former workers that border farmers had the authority to shoot anyone they found crossing the Limpopo River during the 1980s.
owns at least three thousand hectares of land near the Limpopo River, though only one or two hundred are planted in a given season. Philip narrates the loss of an older “farming life-style” in favor of large-scale commercial farming:

This area has been inhabited by struggler farmers for years, before we came here, really guys that had been struggling [Afrikaaner farmers]. They were small farms, there was a community, but they were known as strugglers. They were just using the wrong technology and they could not experience economies of scale... The way farming is going now, which is sad in a way, the old farming life-style is being pushed out, unfortunately. Farming is becoming more and more of a business. When I was in University in 1990, they told us farming in this country was going to be taken over by conglomerates, that fewer and few farming entities will be operating on larger and larger pieces of land. When we came here there was ten people farming in our immediate vicinity, and they have all disappeared.

Despite Philip’s nostalgia his own farm, Heddon Estates, represents this shift in South African agriculture. In 1995, Heddon Estates employed roughly fifty people. By 2009, the farm employed over six hundred. The changing political landscape and the removal of apartheid era subsidies in the early 1990s undermined traditional paternalism on the eastern border. Most border farmers became economically unviable and were absorbed by larger operations such as Heddon Estates. Yet, the fact that farming is “more of a business” does not imply more “formalized,” or less authoritarian, labor relations. The sense of farms as somehow exceptional spaces, as subject to the private rule of white farmers, somehow still lives on – despite a new regulative architecture in the post-apartheid context. Before outlining these new forms of regulation, I discuss how Zimbabweans have been incorporated at Heddon Estates as seasonal migrant workers, the first aspect of delegated despotism.

The Shifting Composition of Labor
Some consideration of how Zimbabweans were first employed at the farm is necessary to understand their present circumstances. Almost all workers at Heddon Estates are chiShona speaking Zimbabweans, but this was not always the case. When Philip first acquired land along the border in 1995, he “borrowed” workers from his relatives’ farm in Tshipise. Some of these workers were people with whom Philip already had a working relationship from his previous role as manager on the Tshipise farm. Philip descends from some of first white settlers north of the Zoutpansberg, and his family is well known in South Africa and Zimbabwe as successful farmers. Some of these workers stayed on with Philip and over the years gained seniority. As it happens, these workers – who in 2010 number only three – are now the most senior foremen at Heddon Estates, the “top structures” as they are called on the farm. From 1995-1997 these workers were supplemented with South African Venda workers recruited in nearby rural settlements, such as Madimbo, Domboni and Malale. People were hired for month long contracts at the farm. As in the past, some Venda workers also came from neighboring villages just across the Limpopo in Zimbabwe. But in 1997, a major change took place in the sourcing of labor. This change is encapsulated in the statement of one long-term worker: “I worked on the farm in 1995, and it was all Venda. Then I went to Joburg for some years. When I came back in 1998, it was dominated by Shona. I don’t know what happened.”

15 Interestingly, this term is also used in South Africa politics, often referring to the leadership in the ANC.
16 And these Venda on the Zimbabwean side were now considered “Zimbabwean” according to their citizenship, although they may have been born in South Africa.
The employment of Zimbabweans is related to many factors, not least of which is the economic decline in Zimbabwe that encourages migration. But shifts within South Africa are also important, particularly the restructuring of agriculture (Rutherford and Addison, 2007: 627-630). The introduction of farm labor and tenure security legislation in the 1990s, alongside the removal of farm subsidies, precipitated mass evictions and retrenchments of South African farm workers across the country (Wegerif et al., 2005). In their place, many farmers employed migrant workers less able to claim protection under the law. Johnston (2007) argues that the employment of migrant labor is primarily due to the fact that migrants find it difficult to strike or unionize (although it must be added that few South African farm workers are unionized).

How chiShona speaking Zimbabweans came to dominate specifically at Philip’s farm is a matter of local controversy that deserves analysis. Interviews with other long term workers suggest that Philip told all of his “top structure” men to recruit workers in their home areas. Whereas all other foremen came from Venda areas in South Africa (Nzhelele) or Zimbabwe (Beitbridge) only one, Clayton, came from a Shona area (Gaha) in southern Mberengwa, Zimbabwe. Clayton was the only foreman to attract large numbers of workers. According to Clayton, he did not aggressively recruit people from Mberengwa. “What happened is that these South Africans didn’t want to work…he (Philip) told me to come with people, so I did.” He likely benefitted from the gathering economic crisis in Zimbabwe that, by 2000, was leaving young people in rural areas with few options but to migrate to South Africa. People who knew of his position came to him looking for work. Many of these people were his relatives, including his four brothers – who eventually became managers and tractor drivers – several nephews and one aunt.
Beyond his direct relatives, hundreds of people from his home area gained employment through their connections with him as pickers and field laborers.

It is worth noting that this method of labor procurement, according to which high-ranking managers are ordered to recruit people in their home areas, deviates from historical patterns of recruitment in Africa. In contrast to a figure such as Clayton, who has no customary authority in his home village, traditional authorities and private recruiting agencies served as the primary intermediaries through which employers and colonial states accessed labor (Jeeves, 1985; Brown, 2003; Mark-Thiessen 2012). The practice at Heddon Estates has more resemblance with the 19th century *kangani* system in South-East Asia through which Indian migrants were channeled to plantations in Malaya and elsewhere. The *kangani* were plantation workers commissioned to recruit people from villages in India, for which they received “head money” for each day their recruits worked (Kaur, 2004: 63). While Clayton did and does not receive any direct compensation from Philip for bringing workers to Heddon Estates, he has been progressively recognized by Philip as the most senior black person on the farm. In fact, Clayton’s official title is “labor manager” - the only black person on the farm to have a “management” position on the farm.17

Interviews with former Venda workers tell a different story about how Shona-speaking Zimbabweans came to dominate the farm. One former worker in the nearby village of Madimbo told me that by the end of the harvest in 1997, Philip ordered Clayton to lay-off all the people who are foreigners, “those without IDs” as he put it. But instead,

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17 Yet, his belonging to the (white) management group is only partial, not least because he is still categorized as a seasonal worker in the farm’s roster book.
Clayton laid-off all those with IDs. According to the informant, who was among those laid off, Philip did nothing about this contravention of his orders. “He (Philip) is bewitched by Clayton,” the informant claimed. “Clayton is not a human being…he caused things to be like this. Philip wanted to hire local people but Clayton said no. That farm is now a place for Shonas.” He also mentioned that Philip was concerned about being fined by the police for hiring people without documents, so hiring foreigners “was against his interests.”

While the informant’s comments convey his resentment that Venda people were squeezed out of the labor force, they probably mislead as to why Philip employed more Shona-speaking people. According to the man’s narrative, Philip desired to continue employing South Africans, but was somehow tricked or manipulated by Clayton into employing Zimbabweans instead. It seems more likely that Philip simply wanted a more docile labor force. Philip himself claims that the police have not given him any trouble since he obtained permits for his workers. He also gave the following rationale for employing Zimbabweans: “The Zimbabwean labor is very important to our farm. They are intelligent, better educated, better mannered and have better hygiene. You can have a conversation with them. The South Africans say “we do what we want, we have the government behind us.” He praises their higher skill level and education, but his main emphasis seems to be upon the greater docility of Zimbabwean labor: they are less likely to claim protection from the government and/or unionize. Thus, Heddon Estates has benefited from Zimbabwean labor not because Zimbabweans have filled a pre-existing “labor shortage,” but because they are more willing to accept low wages and difficult
living conditions on the farm. Indeed, another white manager, Heinrik, warns that when the Zimbabwean economy recovers, Heddon Estates will suffer: “I don’t know what he (Philip) is going to do when these guys go back to Zimbabwe. I give it ten years.” Philip, in contrast, is unconcerned about the possibility of losing Zimbabwean workers. He recently purchased a bulldozer to clear several hundred hectares of land for more tomato planting. In three years he hopes to double production. Whatever the future may hold, the farm is now dominated by Shona speaking Zimbabweans, the majority of whom are from Clayton’s home area in Mberengwa. I provide further details on the overall composition of the work force below.

The farm’s workforce fluctuates according to the seasonal rhythms of production. Heddon Estates – like other farms in northern Limpopo – harvests its crop during the winter season. The warm climate provides the farms with a comparative advantage against other farms in South Africa, which are restricted to a summer growing season. The farm has three major buyers for its tomatoes and other crops: the highest quality fruit is packed and shipped to “Freshmark,” a major fruit and vegetable distributor, supplying grocery stores in South Africa such as “Pick and Pay.” The middle grade tomatoes are sold to Indian and African merchants, who send large trucks to the farm almost on a daily basis to be loaded with tomatoes. These merchants deliver the tomatoes to markets in Durban but also Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The lowest quality tomatoes are sent to factories in Makhado and Tzaneen for canning by other companies. During the picking

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18 There are thousands of unemployed South African Vendas staying less that 50 km away from the farm, in villages such as Madimbo and Malale. As I indicated above, some of the people staying there are former farm workers at Heddon Estates. But other people I spoke to also expressed interest in working at the farm, but only if the wages were higher and they could receive daily transport to and from the farm.
season (roughly from April to October), the farm employs over 600 people in the fields and in the pack shed. The main areas of employment during this period are tomato picking, weeding, baboon scouting, loading, packing and tractor driving. As the picking season closes in late October, most workers return to Zimbabwe for planting at their own rural homesteads. During November and December, the farm employs less than 200 people, mostly employed in digging irrigation trenches and preparing the land for re-planting, and from Christmas until the New Year the farm is closed. After the New Year, people start returning to the farm, in search of jobs. From January until March, the farm gradually expands its work force, until reaching the picking season once again.

The biophysical properties of tomatoes are implicated in these patterns of labor migration as well as the labor process itself. Growth cycles for tomatoes are staggered throughout the winter picking season, so there are different varieties of ripening tomatoes available for harvest at all times. Different buyers demand tomatoes of varying quality and degrees of ripeness, so each day picking teams receive different instructions about the type of tomatoes they are picking. Pickers usually prefer harvesting lower quality tomatoes as they can pick faster and be less discerning about what goes into their crates. The majority of tomatoes are grown on the ground, with weeds and small bushes often growing overtop the fruit. When picking or weeding, workers are constantly bent over, as they reach for tomatoes and fill crates or pull up weeds. Occasionally, workers are stung by scorpions or encounter snakes in the tomato rows. Higher quality tomatoes are grown above ground level, attached to ropes connected to poles. These above ground tomatoes necessitate a group of “rope tiers” - invariably women because of belief in their “nimble fingers” – who attach the ropes to the poles during the planting season.
Tomatoes are more fragile than most other fruit and vegetables. When picking from the ground or along the ropes, pickers must be gentle with the tomatoes or risk having their filled crates rejected by foremen. In the relatively low-rainfall area of the Limpopo valley, large tomato farms like Heddon Estates require elaborate irrigation systems to water the crop. Heddon Estates pumps water from the Limpopo River, which is then applied to the crop through innumerable small hoses running alongside each of row of tomatoes. A team of irrigation workers maintains the pumps and hoses. During the night, and occasionally during the day, crops are sprayed with multiple pesticides to prevent pests and diseases on the crop. The rationale for spraying at night is so that workers in the fields avoid exposure to the chemicals, but the workers’ compound – is adjacent to tomato fields, so exposure is inevitable. Anecdotally, I was told by Dolores, one of the white office workers, that doctors found dangerously high levels of the chemicals in her blood stream. If Dolores, who spends most of her time relatively far away from the fields in the office and in her home, has such high levels of chemicals in her blood, it must be even greater for workers who are much closer to the spraying.

Apart from the seasonal fluctuations of the work force, many people reside or pass through the farm throughout the year. Being situated along the border, Heddon Estates has a wider geographical significance that makes it a destination for Zimbabweans who are not working at the farm. As a farm it is relatively “open,” – there is no security fence around the compound or farm property, as one finds on most commercial farms. At any time the population of the farm is much higher than those simply employed. This includes migrants passing through, staying for a night or two, tobacco smugglers across the river who maintain girlfriends in the compound, or traders
who flock to the compound during pay weekends. In addition, women account for about forty percent of the workforce, but when accounting for the overall population on the farm, the proportion is closer to fifty percent. This is because many wives or girlfriends of male employees accompany them to the farm, staying with them in the compound.

With few exceptions, all workers come from Zimbabwe. The vast majority of workers live in rural areas, with only a few individuals coming from Harare or other urban areas and towns. More than fifty percent of the work force comes from Gaha, Clayton’s village in southern Mberengwa.\footnote{Approximately ten percent of workers are from Chivi, and another ten percent are from Venda areas across the Limpopo, especially Diti and Beitbridge. The remainder of the work force is from places such as Shirugwe, Zvishavane, Mwenezi, Maranda and Harare. Approximately fifty percent of the workforce is composed of people who have worked on the farm in previous years. The other fifty percent are people arriving at the farm for their first time. Most of this latter group works only for a short time, typically one month, before moving further south. The farm work force is thus in a constant state of flux, losing and hiring new workers. With the exception of the few individuals based in urban areas, every farm worker is engaged in small holder agricultural production at their rural homes. At least one hundred workers from Mberengwa have received land as part of Zimbabwe’s fast track land reform since 2000.} Approximately ten percent of workers are from Chivi, and another ten percent are from Venda areas across the Limpopo, especially Diti and Beitbridge. The remainder of the work force is from places such as Shirugwe, Zvishavane, Mwenezi, Maranda and Harare. Approximately fifty percent of the workforce is composed of people who have worked on the farm in previous years. The other fifty percent are people arriving at the farm for their first time. Most of this latter group works only for a short time, typically one month, before moving further south. The farm work force is thus in a constant state of flux, losing and hiring new workers. With the exception of the few individuals based in urban areas, every farm worker is engaged in small holder agricultural production at their rural homes. At least one hundred workers from Mberengwa have received land as part of Zimbabwe’s fast track land reform since 2000.

There are generally two categories of people who use the farm for different purposes, often corresponding to their background. First, there are long-term farm
workers, who have worked for five or more seasons, and plan to continue working on the farm in the future. They typically stay on the farm for at least ten months out of the year. These workers frequently come from rural areas, such as southern Mberengwa or Venda villages near the border. They tend to have only obtained “standard seven” education, and rarely have work experience outside of the agricultural sector. Within this group are young men below the age of 18 from rural areas with hardly any education or formal work experience. Second, there are people who once held urban based or skilled jobs in Zimbabwe, such as teachers, waiters, taxi drivers, retail and people employed in other industries. Some have tried their luck at gold panning. They have generally obtained their “O level” education. These people sometimes stay at the farm only for a brief period, enough time for one month’s pay or even shorter. They generally do not plan on working at the farm over the long-term. Women farm workers, who are mostly divorced or widowed, are in both categories.

Public and Private Regulation

Agricultural restructuring since the early 1990s has entailed not only deregulation, as in the removal of apartheid-era subsidies for white farmers, but also new forms of regulation. This regulation comprises different forms of state intervention, such as labor laws, and also private-sector regulation, such as Global Gap standards, which govern the quality of produce as well as the well-being of workers. An overview of the farm suggests that, when it comes to the welfare of workers, Heddon Estates complies with these regulations only selectively and on a superficial level. The farm maintains documentation that creates an impression of full compliance, but in actuality deviates substantially from the standards of regulators. This strategy works because both the
Department of labor and Global Gap base their assessments largely on documented evidence, rather than observations of actual labor practices. Admittedly, the farm does comply partially with these regulations; for instance, the introduction of minimum wages for farm workers has increased wages at Heddon Estates. Yet, when the farm adopts “external” standards, it tends to withdraw pre-existing social entitlements. Post-apartheid laws and Global Gap add legitimacy to the labor practices of white farmers, despite the fact that they largely fail to ameliorate the vulnerable status of workers. This section examines how existing regulations are dodged or absorbed by Heddon Estates.

Since the end of apartheid the ANC-led government has introduced a range of legislation intended to support farm workers. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) grants collective bargaining rights and improved health and safety standards for workers. The Extension of Tenure Security Act (ESTA) enhances farm dwellers’ land rights by making it more difficult for white farmers to evict them. The Sectoral Determination of Wages for farm workers introduces minimum wages for farm workers. While these reforms have improved conditions for some workers, they are not widely enforced and, as evidenced by Heddon Estates, they apply only partially to migrant workers.

Zimbabwean farm workers are subject not only to these regulations from the Department of Labor, but also the shifting immigration policies of South Africa. On Heddon Estates, most Zimbabweans possess corporate worker permits issued by the Department of Home Affairs. These permits are valid for twelve months from the date of issuance. The permits are acquired by the farm itself every three months or so, when Philip sends a truckload of workers to the office in Musina for processing. New arrivals
at the farm are frequently undocumented until they have the opportunity to be included in this process. In the meantime, they are vulnerable to occasional police raids on the farm which can result in undocumented people being taken to temporary detention centers in Musina. Until 2009, undocumented farm workers would be deported from these centers back to Zimbabwe, but in that year a moratorium on Zimbabwean deportations was introduced by the South African government. Undocumented Zimbabweans seized at farms were not deported, but taken to Home Affairs where they were granted temporary “asylum permits” which remained active until early 2011, when deportations of Zimbabweans resumed. Regardless of the shifting forms of documentation through which Zimbabwean migrants have been situated by the South African state, Heddon Estates itself classifies all Zimbabwean workers as temporary “seasonal workers.” Zimbabweans are hired for one-month contracts that are continually renewed. On the twentieth of every month, a new roster of farm employees is created, replacing the previous one. This system grants the farm considerable flexibility in terms of laying-off workers. It also prevents workers from being classified as “permanent,” which happens automatically if someone works longer than three months. As a permanent worker, one is entitled under South African law to vacation and pension pay-outs. Despite the illegality of this one month contract system, according to everyone I spoke to this arrangement has never been challenged by any government official.

While the collective bargaining rights accorded by the BCEA theoretically include migrant workers, unions are reluctant to become involved in with migrant workers, making the legislation minimally relevant for Zimbabweans. In my conversations with organizers from the Food and Agricultural Workers Union (FAWU),
they emphasize the high turnover and constant fluctuation in the work force, which they feel prohibits successful unionization. However, it must also be said that farm workers in general in South African, including citizens, are rarely unionized (Addison, 2008). Similarly, the provisions of ESTA do not apply to non-citizens who cannot claim permanent residence or occupancy on farms. As of March 2010, the minimum wage was R 1316.69 per month, but wages at the farm were often much lower than this. Tomato pickers are paid according to a piece rate, at R 1.5 per crate. The highest paid picker can receive R 1200 per month, but the average wage is around R 900, fluctuating according to ability. Most other positions receive a daily wage of R 36, or between R 800 and R 950 monthly. Foremen and tractor drivers are slightly higher paid, with most receiving around R1500 per month, but five “top structure” foremen earn 3000 per month. The highest paid worker is Clayton, who receives around R 5000 per month.20 Most workers’ wages fall below the required standard. Yet, if government inspectors ever challenged Philip on this matter, I was told by Dolores, the office secretary, that he could retroactively charge workers for perks he ordinarily provides for free. She said:

If the Department of labor comes here, we would be in shit. But I know what Philip would do. He would say, okay, here is 36 rand per person [the daily wage for most workers], but we have deductions for accommodation, water, for drives to town, for protective clothing. I just know that’s what he’ll do.

Apparently, in an instant, erstwhile benefits can be transformed into wage deductions (or “costs”) to achieve formal compliance with minimum wage laws.

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20 What is most striking about the pay rates is that apart from Clayton and other top structure foreman, everyone receives between R 850 and R 1500, reflecting an equal wage across almost all the positions. As we will see below, the inequality in wages between “top structures” and everyone else reflects the peculiar authority structure at Heddon Estates.
If labor laws have been in different ways ignored or incorporated into the farm cost structure, it is much the same for worker welfare requirements of Global Gap. Global Gap arose out of efforts by large European retailers to demonstrate “corporate social responsibility” in 2001. To achieve Global Gap certification, growers must meet an array of standards for food safety, quality, environmental protection and worker welfare. Growers are assessed on each of these criteria by an independent auditor. Global Gap certification has become not only “the standard” for growers wanting to export to Europe (Bain, 2010), but increasingly high-end retailers in the Global South also require these standards (as in South Africa). The effort to bring in this private sector regulation is part of improving the image of white farmers in South Africa, long blemished due to their central symbolic place during apartheid. As Bain argues (2010), the standards of Global Gap are premised on “technoscientific values.” She argues that, by appealing to value-neutral science, Global Gap distinguishes itself from public-sector regulation implicitly cast as biased. Assessment criteria is divided between “major musts” that require 100 percent compliance, and “minor musts” that require 95 percent compliance.

Heddon Estates has been certified under Global Gap since 2008, when the farm began selling tomatoes to the distributor Freshmark for supply to high-end grocery chains in South Africa. During my fieldwork, I obtained a copy of the original audit conducted by Global Gap in 2008. In the area of worker welfare, it identified two “major must” areas that Heddon Estates had to correct in order to receive their certification. The first

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21 Initially termed EuroGap, the name changed in 2007 to reflect the growing global reach of the certification program.
was in regard to the lack of a transparent complaint procedure and a trail of
documentation indicating that complaints were being recorded and addressed. To address
this problem, the farm administrator Dolores drafted a document titled “Complaint
procedure,” which spelled out the steps to be taken for complaints. The document
outlines the steps taken over the period of three days, beginning with “recording the
complaint into the complaint document” and ending with “management to contact
complainant and give feedback to resolve complaint.” Absurdly, the document mentions
on day two that management “phone the complainant and inform them that their
complaint has been received.” Workers do not have access to personal land lines and
there is no cell phone reception on the farm. The Global Gap regulations are supposed to
encourage a transparent, equitable grievance system but in actuality, a different grievance
system operates on the farm. Commenting on how the farm falls short of Global Gap
requirements, Dolores described the “real” grievance procedure on the farm, before
criticizing Philip for apparent double standards:

For complaints, workers go to the supervisor, supervisors go to Clayton, then Clayton
goes to Philip. That’s the grievance procedure. The supervisor is the so called shop
steward… If someone has a gripe, they just sit on the bench outside [of the farm
office], and he [Philip] just walks past without saying anything at all. One thing I’ve
noted about this farm, although Philip talks about professionalism – like [he complains
about] Douglas calling me “Ma” on the radio, yet for a man who professes to be a
perfectionist, for his farm laborers, that all they are. It’s a case of you take it because
you are desperate for the job.

The second “major must” identified in the audit was the lack of documented
procedures for hygiene during the harvesting process. In response to this non-
compliance, Dolores drafted another document titled “Hygiene/Produce handling policy,”
which spells out a series of rules for handling fruit. Yet, in my observations during
fieldwork, most of the rules in the policy document are in practice ignored or unenforced. For instance, the rules call for hand washing with soap and a “single use, disposable towel.” Yet, there are no hand washing facilities near the fields, not to mention soap or disposable towels. The rules call for preventing contamination of food by “controlling perspiration” and preventing people with communicable diseases from working in the fields. On many days in the fields, people were covered with sweat as they try to make as much money as they can under the piece rate system. Many people on the farm were sick, including common colds, flu and diseases like HIV/AIDS. Yet, I never heard of any occurrence of people being told they could not pick due to sickness. Dolores also mentioned that during one “tour” of the farm given to the auditor Philip put up a small empty building in the fields which he claimed was a toilet and hand washing station, although it was empty.

Apart from these “major musts,” which the farm responded to by drafting new policy documents – although not necessarily following through with the policy – another change dealing with labor relations is worth mentioning. I was told that in 2008, as Philip prepared the farm for certification, he announced one-day during a roll call that the farm would establish a workers’ committee that would hold monthly meetings and bring forward the grievances of workers to management. A committee of this nature and regular meetings are required by Global Gap. Yet, the man appointed to chair this committee was, I was told, a “drunkard” and was fired at the end of the season for beating his wife too often, despite several warnings. I was told his name continues to be written as the chairperson, but he has not been on the farm for several years. The
meetings were never held. During an interview with Philip, he described why he does not support the idea of a workers’ committee:

In principle it is a good idea. The only thing is that it could turn out to be an ‘I want’ committee, where this committee is established and they just place demands, that they need this to be done and this and this and that. So you must be realistic about what you can provide and what you can’t.”

While Heddon Estates does not comply fully with the worker welfare provisions of Global Gap or the government’s minimum wage laws, these forms of regulation still have significant effects. Wage levels would probably be much lower and working conditions more hazardous in the absence of the BCEA and minimum wage laws. While its provisions do little to enhance worker welfare, Global Gap certification likely improves the quality of fruit and reduces the environmental impact of commercial farming. Both sources of regulation, public and private, impose new costs and pressures on the farm. The privatization of benefits and decline of paternalistic idioms are partly responses to these new forms of regulation, and constitute the third aspect of delegated despotism.

**Diminishing Benevolence: The Compound**

Living conditions for workers on Heddon Estates illustrate how paternalistic benefits are more limited and understood as costs. Admittedly, the fact that workers on Heddon Estates reside in compounds free of charge gives an impression of strong traditional paternalism. After all, Du Toit (2005) characterizes the provision of free housing as a “lynchpin” of paternalism because it grants the farmer additional control of workers’ lives. Yet, as my own integration with compound suggests (described in the
beginning of this chapter), Philip’s connections and knowledge of the compounds are limited.

With the exception of Clayton, who is allocated his own three-roomed house, all workers reside in one of two farm compounds separated by roughly four kilometers distance.\(^{22}\) Both compounds are divided into two types of housing: brick block-style housing known as “new houses,” and hundreds of mud huts constructed by workers themselves.\(^{23}\) Rooms in the new houses are reserved for returnees, foremen and skilled workers. With the exception of four senior women (recognized as “owners” of their own rooms by management), the rooms are occupied by men, sometimes living with their wives or girlfriends, who may or may not be working at the farm. Philip has a policy that only married couples can live in the new houses, but this is not enforced. In both compounds, the new houses are surrounded by hundreds of mud huts clustered together, resembling a giant beehive. Maps of both compounds, sketched by workers themselves, suggest strong contrasts between the two types of housing (See Figure 2). The new houses are magnified in size and drawn with precise straight lines, whereas the mud huts are diminished, only gestured at by the drawer with far less detail than the brick blocks. When I asked the workers why they did not draw the huts with precision, I was told “there are too many of them,” and “they are too ugly.” The different emphasis placed on each section of housing may suggest that the new houses are more firmly under the radar

\(^{22}\) The larger of these compounds, where two-thirds of the farm population resides, I term “Compound One.” The smaller compound is referred to as “Compound Two.”

\(^{23}\) Workers collect the wood poles and mud from the farm property itself. As I mention elsewhere, Philip tries to discourage workers from cutting mopane trees near the compound, but many prefer to do this rather than walk several kilometers to designated wood gathering areas.
Figure 2: Sketch Map of Compound One by Male Tractor Driver
of farm management. Indeed, the mud huts are a less regulated space than the new houses, in that management formally allocates rooms in the new houses, but does not assign or keep occupancy records of those living in the mud huts. Returning workers are able to reclaim their hut\(^{24}\), while newly arrived workers – once they have been hired – can construct their own hut or “take over” unoccupied ones. Constructing one’s own hut involves seeking permission with other hut residents who are in the immediate vicinity, but I was told that people rarely object. The more established residents of Compound One occupy the even ground around the water tap, and newcomers often build on the hillside leading up to the area marked “chikwarani,” where primarily Venda speakers reside on the top of the hill. The majority of single, divorced and widowed women occupy huts in Compound One, with roughly half as sole residents and the remainder cohabiting with men.

As indicated, workers stay in both compounds free of charge, but the accommodations are extremely sparse. Workers sleep on the concrete floors of the new houses or on the ground in huts. There are three taps in the compound from which workers can access running water, but there is no electricity. Residents prepare food outside over open fires, often cordoned off with wood poles and torn plastic. Huts and rooms are built so close together that there is little privacy for anyone. Workers are not allowed to grow gardens or keep livestock. Moreover, Philip stated to me in an interview that he intends to start charging fees for housing in future years. For the first two years at Heddon Estates, Philip would provide large sacks of maize to his workers on a monthly

\(^{24}\) Although it is also common for returning workers to find their hut damaged or destroyed by rains during their absence, necessitating repairs or rebuilding.
basis, but this service was revoked, forcing workers to buy maize at inflated prices from the farm merchants or incur additional expenses travelling to town. During the research period, he ordered workers to stop taking tomatoes from the field back to the compound, although the practice largely continued in a more hidden form. I discuss his changing policy around the taking of tomatoes further in Chapter Two. In general, however, the removal or monetization of these former “benefits” is a way of cutting costs – a trend across post-apartheid South Africa (Ewert and Du Toit, 2005; Hall et al. 2013).

While Philip practically never enters the compound, he does make some interventions to regulate behavior among his workers. For instance, he bans the selling of alcohol on the farm. “I don’t mind someone sitting in his room with a six-pack,” he explains, “but we have found that with people selling, this creates disorder and violence.” Although beer selling continues in the compound, especially of the home-brewed variety, it is more subtle than would be the case otherwise; people are occasionally fired for breaking this farm law. Philip also evangelizes among his workers by ordering a bible reading and prayer at the general morning assembly before work begins. As discussed in Chapter Three in the context of an infant formula donation made by Philip, these forms of edification are important aspects to Philip’s self-identity as a responsible farmer, but they do not generate deep paternalistic bonds with workers.

With such a large labor force, it is difficult for personal relationships to develop between Philip and his workers. Instead of a paternalistic “family,” there is a proliferation of managers and foremen to oversee production. Philip’s interactions are almost entirely confined to a small elite group of white and black managers. Moreover,

25 I discuss this incident in more detail in Chapter Two.
there is also a high degree of turnover at the farm. Each year, approximately fifty percent of the work force is replaced by new workers, reinforcing the impersonal nature of labor relations from Philip’s standpoint. Not only are the wages of black managers much higher than other black workers, their pay is supplemented with bonuses tied to achieving or exceeding “performance targets” set in place by Philip. The most prominent bonus, perhaps, is the Isuzu pick-up truck Philip gave to Clayton in 2004 for an especially profitable season. Clayton uses the truck for a taxi-business adding more to his income. The prevalence of “incentive” based production places more emphasis on an entrepreneurial ethic than fostering paternalistic relations. As Philip states:

> We have developed a strong work ethic at this farm by using the people themselves to enforce norms and accepted standards of work…They work better when their own people lead them. Work is not time orientated on this farm, it is task orientated, and I’ve tried to instill that into my managers. I kind of work easier with black people than with white people in that respect, because white people come here with their old baggage, where the black people are fresh, they’ve got fresh ideas, and you can actually mold them into the ethic of the farm. And one thing we believe in here is that you come, you do the task, and you can go when it’s done, irrespective of the time it takes.

Philip’s contrast between task and time oriented work reverberates with but also transcends traditional paternalism. In the paternalistic relationship, time in its more industrial sense (i.e. the “eight hour day”) was often ignored by both workers and owners. Workers accepted that in certain periods (i.e. harvest times) they may be required to work beyond what they normally provided. But owners also appreciated that their workers needed time to tend to their own crops, as for example under labor tenancy arrangements (Keegan, 1987). There was a shared (though contested) understanding – or at least a

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26 This figure is a rough estimate on my part derived from background information I collected from over one hundred workers as well as workers’ own estimates.
sense of transparency — of when work began and when it concluded. Yet, this kind of paternalistic compromise does not apply at Heddon Estates. Generally, the various work teams are not permitted to knock off until their assigned tasks for the day are finished. More fundamentally, workers do not know when their contracts will formally “end” and they will be told to go home; they can only guess when the formal order will be given as the picking season winds down. When Philip alludes to the “ethic” of the farm, he means that workers should have a kind of moral commitment to the farm — to subordinate their personal interests in favor of the production and profitability of the farm.

Despite Philip’s belief that this ethic is followed throughout the farm, most farm workers do not feel such a moral commitment. As I describe later in this chapter, their perspectives are shaped more by the desire to build homesteads in Zimbabwe. Similarly, even a manager like Clayton, upon whom Philip depends for enacting the work arrangements on the farm, is not a mere functionary carrying out Philip’s will. Paradoxically, Clayton is both a conduit of Philip’s paternalistic authority, and also an alternative center of power in his own right.

**The Dispersion of Authority: Clayton**

Farms in northern Limpopo have benefitted significantly from the surplus of migrant workers that has become available following the decline of Zimbabwe since 2000. The rapid growth of labor forces has made farm owners in this area more dependent on managers for stabilization and control of temporary workers. Moreover, the large size of the labor force, the high degree of turnover, the lack of historical connections and common language between Philip and most workers limit personal ties. Instead of appealing to Philip, with whom most workers have little connection, they
interact with and appeal to Clayton. Instead of being drawn into the racialized construction of the “farm as a family,” and having access to a white farmer’s benevolent “understanding” (Du Toit, 1993), many workers are drawn increasingly into patron-client relations with Clayton. Yet, his authority is not invested with the same kind of edification that animated many white farmers. He is less a paternalistic father and more of a Dionysian character (e.g. Benedict, 1934), always in pursuit of pleasure-seeking activities and experiences of excess, particularly with alcohol and sex (while also – admittedly – working long hours for Heddon Estates).

The farm hierarchy illustrates the complications involved in this shifting power structure. All workers are placed in a complex chain of command, with Philip and other white managers at the top, followed by Clayton, the other black managers and a series of foremen. The majority of workers occupy the bottom of the hierarchy, in such positions as picking, weeding and general labor. However, this hierarchy does not function as a smooth, seamless directive of orders, originating from on top and filtering down. The proliferation of managers and senior foremen making it often unclear who has authority in a given situation. In a moment of frustration, one white manager confides: “You know, the problem with this farm is that there are too many chiefs, and not enough Indians.” This state of affairs grants considerable power to Clayton, who is responsible for hiring new workers at the morning “roll call.” He uses his power to obtain *kudiza* (bribes), a practice that Philip cannot curtail without undermining the farm hierarchy.

**The Roll Call**

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27 The derivation of this word is unclear. When I asked Zimbabweans about the term, they say they have only heard it at the South Africa farm.
The roll call is an important farm ritual that displays and reinforces the farm hierarchy. Every morning (except days-off, such as Sunday) almost everyone gathers outside the farm workshop, the effective center of the farm. A concrete landing attached to the nearby “guard room” serves as the focal point and stage as people gather. Figure 3 is another map drawn by a farm worker, with the guard room marked at “GR.” The centrality of this location to the community is borne out by the illustrator’s decision to place the guard room in the center of the map. Only senior workers – foremen, drivers, security guards or other veteran workers – stand in the immediate vicinity of the guard room, and only a few of the highest ranking people, such as Clayton or Philip himself, actually stand on the concrete landing, which serves a podium. All other workers are scattered around the open loading zone, some seated on large stones and others standing in small groups discussing the latest farm gossip. Seated at some remove and observing the goings on are prospective job seekers, especially in January when the farm reopens after the Christmas period. Men and women are starkly divided, with women occupying the far side of the loading zone, and there is little communication between the two groups during roll-call. People are often still trickling in from the compound when Clayton shouts “swederai kuno!” (come closer!), a signal that the morning proceedings are about to begin. At this command, stragglers quicken their pace towards the guard room; latecomers risk admonishment from Clayton and can be sent back to the compound without work for the day. After people have drawn closer to the guard room, Clayton (or Philip if he is present) starts the proceedings by saying “de macheroni” to everyone, a morning greeting which is always done in Venda. A farm pastor in the local African
Figure 3: Sketch Map of Heddon Estates by Male Foreman
initiated church (known as “Zion”), who happens to also be a senior foreman and Clayton’s brother, then reads a passage from the bible in Shona. He then occasionally preaches a short sermon and closes with a prayer. Everyone is expected to listen silently (although many workers tell me they don’t pay attention). The sermons and prayers address work relations, emphasizing subservience to superiors but also enthusiasm about work. A recurring statement is “tino fanira kushingira,” (“we must struggle fully”), implying people should take their jobs seriously and work well together. If Philip is present, he often addresses people after the pastor is finished. Philip never addresses the workers directly, but his statements are always made through Clayton. For instance, he will say “Clayton, tell the people that I know firewood is in short supply, but that I don’t want them cutting the trees on hills,” and proceed to give instructions to Clayton, who relays them to the people in Shona. Some examples of his topics are mundane instructions regarding when wages will be distributed, stern warnings against selling beer in the compound or accusations of stealing farm property. When Philip has finished his address, Clayton then meets with the other foremen, and they are given their daily assignments and confirm that the workers for whom they are responsible are present. If the farm is in need of workers, the final order of business at the roll call is sometimes employing new workers.

It is in the process of hiring where the seamless regularity of directives breaks down, and the limits of Philip’s authority are witnessed. When it comes to hiring, Philip insists that people who have worked in past years must be employed first, and those who have caused problems in the past must not be hired back (especially for lateness, drinking and fighting). However, Philip does not himself select the new workers, and even when
he “oversees” the process, bribery is rampant. The term “oversees” needs to be taken loosely. He is not actually involved in selecting the workers, but basically is standing around the workshop area usually talking with other managers. Philip and other white managers have little direct communication with the workers, beyond the managerial group. This is partly a language issue but also indicative of the racially divided culture of the farm.

Bribery during the process of hiring usually works as follows: all job seekers are ordered to form a long queue, which in January and February, can number several hundred people. The foreman who requires workers then selects his own workers from the queue. However, Clayton exerts influence over the hiring, either by discreetly ordering the foreman whom to hire or, alternatively, the foreman pays Clayton privately for each person he hires. These payments – called kudiza – are typically R 100, and should be paid before one is hired. However, I am told by some workers that they paid at the end of the month, but the price doubled to R 200. I have also been informed that women can also provide sex instead of money, if Clayton or other foremen demand it. Many people pay Clayton in his home area in Mberengwa, and then expect employment when they arrive at the farm. Indeed, at one morning roll call in January, Clayton apologized to people and asked them to be patient because job openings were not yet available. It could be possible to be hired without paying, if one is lucky, but sooner or later I’m told that Clayton will approach and ask for kudiza.

In the past, Clayton had complete control over the hiring process. But his practice of demanding bribes was eventually discovered by Philip, who tried to institute new procedures, such as having foremen select their workers, and appointing a white manager
to oversee the morning roll call when he is not there. But these measures have done little actually to curtail Clayton’s power, even if they have forced him to be less direct. In part, the problem is one of language, since neither Philip nor any other white managers speak Shona, it is easier for Clayton to manipulate the process. However, the more fundamental problem is that Philip can intervene only to a certain point in Clayton’s activities; otherwise he risks undermining Clayton’s broader authority, which he perceives as necessary for the smooth running of the farm.

Clayton is effective as the labor manager because workers seem to fear his authority; they listen to him and work hard when he demands it. As one white manager put it, “Clayton is the backbone of this farm. Can you imagine little Philip trying to control all these blacks? I don’t think so.” Philip stated explicitly why he values Clayton as the labor manager, stressing his authority and respect he has with the work force as a whole:

What I appreciate about the existing head [Clayton]…is that if I ask him to get something done, he’ll do it absolutely efficiently and effectively. Anything I ask him to do, he will basically say “consider it done,” and to get that level of efficiency and reliability is hard to come by, even amongst whites. He probably rules with an iron fist, and when he says jump, the people say, “how high?” And if, for instance, a truck of fertilizer comes in the evening, after people have knocked off, I’ll just tell this guy, find people to off load it, and in no time they will offload it…And also to maintain the quality standard in the land where you are picking,…because you have to be very firm in dealing with such a big labor force. For example, if he tells a laborer continuously “you mustn’t pick this under ripe tomato, or this rotten tomato,” and they keep finding that in the same crate, he will end up tearing up that person’s ticket and sending the person home. That guy would lose financial income for the day, but the next day, it wouldn’t happen again. He’s stern in that way. And as long as he is fairly fair, I will support him in that, it seems to work.

By “support” him, Philip implies that he is willing to tolerate some of Clayton’s illicit activities (such as demanding kudiza). He values Clayton’s experience and authority
over other workers more than he is outraged by his perceived corruption. It is not only Clayton, but also other top structure figures, upon whom Philip has almost become too dependent for the smooth running of his farm. I once asked Philip why he doesn’t act more forcefully to control the illicit activities of black managers. He said: “It’s very difficult to prevent it – I think in every farm there is a certain politics, or a certain mafia that is prevalent – but you’ve got to ask yourself, that by changing that existing mafia, and replacing it with somebody else, it’s only a matter of time where the same thing is going to be repeated, because this is what happens in Africa.” By rationalizing the bribery as being just part of “Africa,” Philip effectively relieves himself of responsibility for the situation. His comments also suggest that Clayton is not indispensable or has somehow “captured” the farm. Despite Clayton’s centrality to farm operations, it is important to remember that Philip could fire Clayton at any time (he could “change the existing mafia”). Clayton possesses leverage in that his firing might potentially involve considerable disruption to production, and require Philip to replace Clayton with a similarly effective manager. In the event, these are at worst inconveniences to Philip, not insurmountable problems.

The Anxiety of “Selling Out”

As Du Toit (1993) argued, the empowerment of non-white managers potentially makes them “sell outs” (or *pimps*) in the eyes of ordinary workers. They are, in this argument, “too close” to the authority of white farmers and are alienated from, or lack credibility with, the majority of workers. At the same time, in order to retain the confidence of white farm owners, black managers must command enough respect from the majority of workers that the latter will work hard for them. Some scholars argue that
third-party contractors and labor brokers project their own locus of paternalistic authority, an alternative web of obligations and expectations through which they secure the support of temporary workers. To some extent Clayton projects such a web, but it is not independent of Philip’s authority. His web with ordinary workers manifests in several ways. As mentioned, at least one half of the work force comes from his home area in Mberengwa and dozens of workers are directly related to him or have married into his family. The fact that many people are related to his family creates a sense in which they must obey him.

Clayton’s house, which looms above the compound, is a central place for entertainment on the farm. During off-work times, dozens of people watch television at his house for free. Pointing to the satellite dish attached to his house, Clayton once said to me: “You see that satellite? I pay for the channels every month. But every time I come here, there are too many people. I can never watch what I want.” When I suggested that he charge people to watch television, he responded, “No, I could never do that.” Yet, I once witnessed Clayton switch off the TV, although more than ten people were watching it, and complain to them, “why don’t you buy some drinks? I’m paying 350 a month, so you must buy something so I get money to subscribe.” Other “perks” he gives to male workers is to allow them to charge batteries and cell phones at his house. During pay weekends, when the compound is frequented by Venda vendors, gamblers and other visitors, Clayton parks his truck near the crèche and plays loud music as a kind of public service for everyone to hear. Additionally, many young men, as they wait for employment in the compound, can often find work at Clayton’s house. They can work tending his garden, selling his drinks and other items, or as part of his taxi business
collecting money and unloading luggage. As I explore in Chapter Three, many farm women are drawn into patron-client ties with Clayton through sexual relationships. A woman worker, Constance, said: “as long as you are a lady here, he has to come and propose you.” Referring to the managers as whole, distinguished on the farm by the motorbikes they ride, she emphasizes the sexual competition between them: “These guys with the motorbikes, they compete and bet with each other. So he will be feeling like a loser if he didn’t get what he wanted from a woman. He needs to feel like the king of the area.” He gives easier tasks to women he favors, but can assign harder work to women who refuse him. Constance added, “If he has a girlfriend in the team, it works nicely. If not, they get hard work.”

As the example of him switching off the televisions suggests, his behavior is unpredictable. A young man working as his gardener described it the following way: “Sometimes he is like a good father, very friendly, but other times he is angry, and you don’t know the reason. He has many different roles.” As the opening anecdote to this chapter suggests, during my research I too became embroiled in patron-client relations with Clayton. On several occasions, initially at the advice of my roommates in the compound, I gave him “gifts” as a token of respect and a way of maintaining access to the farm. Some of the gifts were products of my own initiative, as when I gave Clayton portions of kudu meat that I bought from a local poacher. On another occasion, after noticing I was driving to Musina, he requested that I bring him a case of frozen yogurt packets for the shop he runs in his house.

This request he made with a polite tone, even promising to pay me back (although he never did), but other times his “requests” seemed tied to a different agenda, that of
appearing as an authority above me. My residence in the compound, and broader role on the farm, was no doubt complicated for him. The compound was a space in which his word was law, but white people are nominally not subject to his power. He perhaps experienced anxiety that I was outside of his authority on the farm. At other times, he demanded gifts from me in highly public spaces. For example, on a day off when I travelled with most of the work force to Musina, I encountered Clayton near the central taxi rank where hundreds of Zimbabweans and South Africans were drinking and eating at an open air shebeen. Clayton, holding a beer can in each hand, stepped out the crowd and in front of me, drawing attention from hundreds of observers. I was carrying a can of baked beans in each hand. He shouted at me, “you must give me!” and reaching out two fingers, took one of the cans of beans from me. Until that point, his disposition towards me had always been kind and using customary greetings, so I was surprised. He was straight faced, unsmiling, and reeking of alcohol. After taking the can, he said “Now it is one for you, one for me.” I smiled and kept walking, feeling the eyes of hundreds of observers. After telling one of my Zimbabwean roommates in the compound, Emmanuel, about the incident, he said “he wants to show that he is important, that he can give orders to someone like you.” On another occasion during a weekend after work, I was driving through the compound, and passing through the two new house blocks, he stepped in front of my car, forcing me to stop. There were dozens of people on either side of the car, including Venda vendors selling their wares. He approached the window, “If I ask you to stop, you must stop.” “Yes,” I said, uncertain of how to proceed in the encounter, and noting that he was drunk again. “If I ask you to stop, you must stop,” he said more forcefully, prompting a more enthusiastic “yes” from me. “I am like the chief
of this place. If I step in the way, you must stop. If I want you to go like this,” he crossed his arms across his chest and bowed, “you must do it.” I again nodded and replicated the motion he suggested. He then moved off to the side without saying anything else, and I took the opportunity to drive on. He yelled at me as I left “come back and eat meat with us later!”

Yet, I was also the beneficiary of his “good will.” During the World Cup, when hundreds of male workers gathered in front of his television, he insisted that I get one of the best seats on the couch directly in front of the television screen. And, as I mentioned above, he frequently gave me cold drinks without charge. This capricious behavior reflects not so much Clayton’s individual personality, but the awkward and insecure position black managers are placed in. This dynamic is explored further in the context of a tomato picker strike in Chapter Two.

Clayton’s role on Heddon Estates suggests that senior managers are becoming increasingly important to the control of labor in northern Limpopo. As I described in previous pages, since the 1980s, many white farmers have promoted black and colored workers into positions of management, often incorporating them into profit-sharing schemes and into the highest-levels of farm decision making. Across South Africa agriculture, there is deepening segmentation within farm labor forces, as managers and “core” workers enjoy the privileges of higher wages, incentive schemes and close relations with white owners, while the majority of workers are employed on far more precarious terms. On Heddon Estates, these trends manifest in the persona of delegated rulers such as Clayton, who combine the roles of labor broker and manager. As a “delegated” ruler, his authority ultimately hinges on his relationship with the farm owner,
Philip. Yet, Clayton also pursues his own exploitative agenda on the farm, beyond the control of Philip. If, as Doreen Atkinson (2007) suggests, white farm owners retain a “reservoir of goodwill and reciprocity” and “moral commitment to paternalism” in post-apartheid South Africa, this commitment appears short-circuited on border farms by the pragmatic reliance farmers have developed on managers such as Clayton. Through this dynamic, the potential for benevolence within paternalistic rule – such as the provision of in-kind benefits and other forms of livelihood subsidy – is minimized, while the scope for arbitrary decision making by owners and management remains intact.

This analysis provides insight into the new “cultural politics of belonging” emerging for farm workers in post-apartheid South Africa (Rutherford, 2008). Belonging, in this sense, refers to the identification processes through which workers gain recognition and are able to make claims on powerful or elite members of a community. Belonging is no longer premised on direct paternalistic relationships with white farm owners. The structural dimensions of delegated despotism mean that “belonging” is achieved in the decentered and precarious “parallel economies” of the farm, which are often controlled by management figures such as Clayton. In addition to being wage workers, many farm workers are themselves “precarious entrepreneurs” (Mbembe 2001) seeking to supplement their livelihoods however they can. However, this kind of fragmented belonging is driven not only by the production regime, but also by Zimbabweans’ own aspirations.

**Fragmented Belonging: Other Sources of Division**

“Ndiyo Joni yacho,” this is Johannesburg, a young Zimbabwean woman says to me when I ask her about sex-work in the farm compound. A torn plastic tarpaulin
wrapped around stick poles cordons off the small fire pit in front of her hut. I am seated on a plastic bucket in this enclosed space – the makeshift kitchens of farm dwellers – and she sits on the ground, rising periodically to stir a pot of boiling sadza. The dry Limpopo, the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe, runs contiguously with the compound and is the backdrop to our conversation. “You just tell yourself that this is Joni… The wages are low and the men don’t want to be married.” During our conversation, a dispute erupts outside her hut, involving a group of men, one of whom is her boyfriend. I gather from the dispute her boyfriend is trying to avoid paying his chimbadzo – the debts he has acquired from other workers plus a hefty interest.

Johannesburg itself is more than 500 km away, yet Joni seems everywhere. All at once, the term characterizes the farm environment by hustle and desperate strategies of individual survival.

The comparison between the farm and Johannesburg is not farfetched when one considers the multiple sources of division among farm workers. The farm population is divided through mutual suspicion and spying, ethnic and gender difference and – among Zimbabweans – different political views and affiliations. Before considering the objectives and goals of Zimbabwean migrants themselves, I first consider these sources of division in more detail.

The first prominent source of division is pervasive spying and reporting of “stories” to managers and Philip. Although the compound is unregulated in the sense that people freely move through it, there is also a culture of surveillance whereby workers often report each other to management when farm laws are broken. This could include inciting people to strike, stealing farm property or selling alcohol. As one worker replied
when I asked him why workers are reluctant to organize a local trade union: “He [Philip] does not want that thing. If you try to organize something like that, there is the problem of CIOs\(^{28}\), people will tell to the manager and you will be fired.”

When someone reports information, it is done in secret, to avoid being labeled a *mutengesi* (sellout). These activities can remain secret only in perhaps three circumstances: first, that there are only few people involved in the transgression, so that the activity remains secret. Second, that very many people are involved such that any potential *mutengesi* will be extremely ostracized or beaten, and so no one steps forward to report out of fear. Third, in cases where senior managers are involved, Philip is unlikely to intervene and reporters fear retribution. A good example of these dynamics is when many farm workers left the farm for days to work as occasional tobacco smugglers – trying to maintain two jobs, as it were. This story was relatively easy to report to Philip because it involved only a few dozen younger workers and managers were not implicated. People are eager to report stories, since it is practically the only way to advance on the farm. Some will even invent stories in order to gain favor with the owner. For instance, while I was living in the compound I was the subject of several false rumors, including working as an undercover journalist or plotting to steal farm equipment. This tendency to report on one another is characteristic of paternalistic farms, illustrating how certain “older style” methods of labor control persist in the present context.

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\(^{28}\) By CIOs, the informant is referring to the central intelligence office of Zimbabwe, widely perceived as spies for the ruling ZANU-PF party.
Related to the seemingly ubiquitous presence of farm spies, white managers enjoy seniority strictly because they are white and thereby have trust with Philip. In a sense, the farm is a microcosm of apartheid. The white employees are the only workers hired on a permanent basis, that is, their names are not entered and re-entered every month on the roster. The white employees identify more with the interests of their employer, Philip, than with the black workers. In part, this may be because they are paid far more than black people. When a young white man was hired to supervise the pack shed, his starting salary was above Clayton’s. The latter complained to me: “Boss Philip is not fair, I built this farm to where it is now.” The solidarity among whites is also based on racial ideology. Philip feels that he can only trust white people because blacks have stealing “in their blood.” There are limits, in other words, to how much blacks can be “molded into the ethic of the farm” as Philip put it. Regardless of skill or qualifications, white people rank above blacks in the farm hierarchy.

In contrast to the relative racial solidarity among whites, blacks are divided along ethno-linguistic lines between Shona and Venda speaking people. Shona is practically the official language on the farm, yet there are dozens of Venda speakers who understand little Shona and form a distinct community separate from the Shona majority. Within the compound itself, mud huts constructed on the upper reaches of a hill are effectively reserved for Venda speakers, while Shona people reside elsewhere in the compound. This area atop the hill is called tshikwarani, Venda for “mountain,” a sort of signal to all residents that the place belongs to Venda people (see maps in appendix). Given the fact that the farm is located in a historically Venda controlled area, it is perhaps surprising that Venda workers do not express more animosity towards the Shona workers. One
Venda man describes his attitude towards Shona speakers as follows: “We get along okay, but what worries us is that we think this is our area, but it is not the case because we are fewer, but we know they will go home in the due course of time.” (It is interesting that the Zimbabwean Venda recognize the farm as “their area,” even though it is on the South African side of the border). Another Venda states that she feels “looked down upon” by Shona people because she is less educated than most of them. Indeed, several Shona speakers admit to thinking the Venda are intellectually inferior. One Shona supervisor remarks: “It is difficult to work with the Vendas because they are slow to learn what we are doing.” While it is true that the Shona speakers are generally more educated than the Venda speakers, this is because more highly educated Venda migrants tend to go further south for employment, as they more easily pass as South African citizens. It is only the least educated among them who seek employment on the farm.

Added to these ethnic divisions are divisions along gender lines. Men and women are discouraged from recognizing their common interest in the organization of farm work itself. Men and women work in separate groups and, as indicated, they are spatially separated at the morning roll call. In addition, many informants told me that it is impossible for women and men to be “just friends” at the farm. One male informant states: “friendship is impossible on the farm, eventually you will be tempted…In Zimbabwe it may be possible to be friends, but not here.” A complex sexual economy has developed on the farm, comprising long-term cohabitation relationships to pay-on-the spot sexual encounters. I consider this sexual economy in detail in Chapter Three, but suffice it to say that these relationships generate considerable male resentment towards women, even as they enable connection between men and women. With the exception of
church services, practically all social activities on the farm are separated along gender lines. For instance, women tend to socialize and play card games separately from men while other activities, such as soccer and drinking alcohol, are exclusively for men.

Ethnic and gender divisions and the prevalence of spying inhibit farm workers from organizing against the interests of management, but added to these obstacles is a general sense of fatalism among workers in relation to broader politics. This fatalism became clear when I asked informants about the Zimbabwean crisis and its causes. Responses from workers could be grouped into three categories: first, there is a pro-MDC narrative that blames Mugabe’s policies for economic decline. It attributes the modest economic stability over the last year to the involvement of the MDC in the government through the Global Political Agreement (GPA). Second is a pro-ZANU-PF narrative that blames the West and sanctions for ongoing economic troubles. Third, there is a narrative of indifference or consternation concerning the political situation. Most people espouse this third narrative, although the majority can also be described as MDC supporters (despite the fact that most people admit to voting ZANU-PF in the last election). Overall, few people appear to be passionate about Zimbabwean politics. Apart from a former MDC activist and one war veteran who supports Mugabe ardently, people do not take political debates very seriously. Most discussions and debates are seemingly

29 Supporters of this narrative disguise their preferences from Philip. Informants claimed that Philip has been known to fire workers if they are Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) supporters. I was told that on one occasion a few years ago, a group of Zimbabwean border jumpers stood before Philip asking for employment. He asked the group who among them raises a fist, and who raises an open palm (the raised fist is associated with ZANU-PF and Robert Mugabe, while the open hand is related to the MDC and Morgan Tsvangirai). Those who raised the closed fist, suggesting support for ZANU-PF, were not given jobs.
light-hearted and interspersed with laughing, as though their real value lies in distraction from tasks at hand or possibly to defuse underlying tensions.

Nevertheless, politics is a frequent topic of discussion among workers in the fields or relaxing in the compound. Many read newspapers and listen to radio reports with interest. The first and second narratives are counter-posed and frequently manifest in debates among Zimbabweans. My research assistant reported a conversation to me among his Zimbabwean counterparts as they picked tomatoes:

Machezo: Why do you support Mugabe?
Lyton: Because if Tsvangirai comes the whites will come back
Machezo: But that will not happen.
Lyton: Look at our country. We have freedom, there is no crime. It is the white countries that are giving us problems.
Machezo: So you like this life of being a migrant?
Lyton: Do you like this life of being exploited by a white man?
Machezo: So what is better, being a migrant or being exploited?
Lyton: (laughing) You are the kind of people we beat at home, it’s only that we’re not there!

Supporters of the second narrative can have a more nuanced perspective than might be expected. On one occasion, a debate over sanctions against Zimbabwe erupted during an interview. The MDC supporter explained that sanctions are not broad-based and only target select individuals in Zimbabwe. The ZANU-PF supporter retorted that because the “targeted individuals” own such a large share of Zimbabwe’s economy, sanctions against them inevitably impact the wider economy. The MDC supporter, on the defensive, conceded that this may be the case.

Those who espouse the second narrative tend to come from rural areas of Mberengwa and are often beneficiaries of fast-track land reform. One informant explained that, “these people are grateful to Mugabe for giving them land, but they also
see how the economy has improved since the MDC got involved in government.” Such people may long for political change, but experience genuine anxiety about losing their recently obtained land should the MDC come to power. But the second narrative is not always so ambiguous. One man claims that when he arrived at the farm he was an MDC supporter. But after working on the farm and hearing stories about how the white owner, Philip, can beat people, he now thinks “Mugabe is right.” He states: “What will happen if the white man comes back in Zimbabwe? We will get the same treatment over there.” However, several informants claim that people are more likely to convert to the MDC, rather than to ZANU-PF, when they are staying at the farm. The experience of migration, exposure to new people and new ideas can be determining factors according to them.

The third narrative, an expression of indifference, accounts for most people’s view. In conversations with informants, politics-related questions provoke a common response: informants often turn their eyes to the ground and utter “aaahhh....,” followed by silence or a despondent statement such as “Mugabe will not go” or “we don’t know how to change our President.” This sort of reply, eschewing detail, conveys the indifference many Zimbabweans at Heddon Estates feel towards politics in Zimbabwe. It is not that people don’t care about the political future of Zimbabwe, but rather that many see little benefit in contemplating or speculating about politics. One informant put it like this: “what is the benefit of politics anyway? The people at the top are enjoying the good life in nice houses, while we are the ones fighting each other. Why do we even get into it? I’m not going to deal with politics, I’m just here to work. I don’t even want to vote.”

Another common refrain on the farm, “everyone here is after money,” illustrates how people are too preoccupied with their individual economic strategies to invest deeply in
political concerns. Indeed, Zimbabweans seem to express more concern over rainfall at their rural homesteads than they do over political struggles. Many people understand the current political-economic moment as a time of “waiting and seeing,” a time of weathering the storm by working in South Africa and maintaining only a distant connection to politics in Zimbabwe. The sense of resignation that animates the third narrative also characterizes how many farm workers perceive farm politics. Prospective labor action against management is limited not only by the fear of being “sold out” by fellow workers, but also by a feeling of powerlessness as migrant workers. One worker commented, “We are foreigners and have no rights. If you are against the manager you will be fired… Here it is every man for himself.”

Multiple sources of division on the farm, such as pervasive spying and racialized, gendered and political difference, are largely accentuated under delegated despotism. The divisions encourage workers to channel their energies into survival or pleasure-seeking activities. And yet, the fragmentation of the work force is not driven solely “from above.” Zimbabweans own motivations and goals are also complicit, as seen in their belief in *kuvaka musha*.

**Kuvaka Musha**

Most Zimbabweans at Heddon Estates have in their possession a small notebook, usually stored in their rooms or mud huts. Inside they keep track of money lent and borrowed, records of purchases and lists of objects they intend on buying called “targets”. For instance, one notebook lists such targets as a generator, television aerial, a cow, radio, shoes and various groceries. For each item an estimated price is noted beside it. On any given day, Zimbabweans can be seen referring to the targets in their notebook,
checking off the items they managed to obtain or perhaps just to remind themselves of their goals. For Zimbabwean migrants, much depends on these targets; they are both a source of immense hope and anxiety – hope that “results” (*mbairo*) will be achieved and anxiety over the possibility of failure. The targets are, in effect, Zimbabweans’ attempts to *kuvaka musha*, a dominant idiom on the farm that literally means “building a rural homestead.”

*Kuvaka musha* most often refers to supporting dependents at home, through paying school fees or providing food and other necessities, but also to physical improvements to a house or plot and the accumulation of livestock. A closely related concept, *kugadzira ramangwana* (to prepare for the future) encompasses using farm income to start a business, attend college, pay bride service to a wife’s parents, or, as in the case of some women, purchasing fashionable clothing to attract a husband back in Zimbabwe. These practices are important to Zimbabweans in at least three ways. First, many Zimbabweans believe that to obtain prestige or maintain good standing with friends and relatives in the rural home, one must demonstrate improvements to the homestead. *Kuvaka musha* in this cultural context is the “proper” use of wealth. Second, adding assets to the homestead or educating children are investments in future security. For instance, in a country where banks and the (former) currency are unreliable, it is far better

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30 The “rural homestead” refers to land occupied by a Zimbabwean or his or her family in the communal areas of Zimbabwe, including the houses, huts, livestock and crops within the homestead boundary. It also refers to the extended family living in or around the homestead.

31 *Kugadzira ramangwana* is often pursued by Zimbabweans precisely so that they can more effectively attain *kuvaka musha*. For example, obtaining training or certificates from a college will enable one to get a better job, earn higher income, and thus support the rural home even more.
to buy a cow, which can be used for plowing and potentially sold in times of difficulty. Third, as in many other contexts, the dominant notion of masculinity is tied to effective provision for one’s family. I was told on many occasions that a man who arrives home without having acquired significant funds or goods can become the target of scorn and derision at home. For many migrant workers, *kuvaka musha* is linked to a broader objective: attaining enough rural assets to sustain a permanent livelihood in Zimbabwe, most often through small-scale farming or starting small businesses. If the Zimbabwean homestead is neglected, the individual risks severing ties with family, and not having assets to build upon if the job at the farm is lost.

Among Zimbabwean farm workers, the term resonates everywhere. It is reinforced in daily discourse and in church formations. *Kuvaka musha* orders a certain moral code, in which finances are supposed to be channeled towards projects in Zimbabwe, almost as a matter of principle. Many informants define happiness as experiencing “success” with one’s plans in relation to *kuvaka musha*. One strengthens and maintains bonds with relatives and has greater peace of mind regarding the future. *Kuvaka musha* also grants lower status workers a sort of moral ammunition against senior workers. For instance, Clayton is often ridiculed in relative secrecy for failing to build anything substantial in Zimbabwe, despite earning a high salary and operating several businesses at the farm. With the exception of pick-up truck, he has no exceptional wealth in Zimbabwe that stands him apart from other households in the communal areas of Mberengwa. The vast majority of his income has gone to paying for innumerable girlfriends. While he is something of an extreme example, this manager is not alone in using the bulk of his income on women.
Yet, as each worker tends to be so preoccupied with his or her plan to *kuvaka musha*, they may be disinclined to engage in collective struggle to improve conditions at the farm. According to many informants, there is just too much at stake with achieving individual targets, so that it is better to accept low wages and poor conditions, than to risk losing one’s job by challenging them. The fixation on improving one’s homestead encourages business practices that divide the farm community even further, as seen in *chimbadzo*.

**Chimbadzo**

On the last Friday of every month, workers at Heddon Estates gather at the farm workshop to receive their monthly pay. Outside the workshop gate, a chaotic scene invariably unfolds. As each worker exits the gated area, having collected his or her pay, he or she enters a swarming mass of people, a mob frantic with account-settling. If a worker has incurred debts, the creditor encounters him or her in this mob, hoping to be paid back before other creditors find the person. Tense conversations and arguments ensue, with debtors desperately trying to negotiate down the amount owing. In most cases the creditors are money-lenders, a popular business in the farm compound known as *chimbadzo*.\(^{32}\) The standard rate for *chimbadzo* lending is one hundred percent interest, due to be paid at the end of the month. Apart from money-lending, some creditors are shop owners in the compound selling goods on a credit basis, and women collecting money for sexual encounters. Generally, the payments are made without too much physical resistance, with debtors finally agreeing to pay their debts. That said, each

\(^{32}\) As with the term *kudiza*, *chimbadzo* is another term that informants claimed is used exclusively at the farm.
month there are some reluctant debtors who, after failing to run away, their envelopes containing pay are forcefully torn from their hands, the money divided up between fortunate creditors. It is very difficult to escape creditors, for the latter can report cases to farm security if people refuse to pay.

It is this aggressive settling of accounts that make pay-day, in the words of one informant, “a day of stress…you see how little you are paid, and you are forced to give most of it away.” In effect, pay-day renders visible a series of desperate economic transactions made in previous months – notably money-lending at extortionist interest rates – which transform the community of farm workers into an assortment of creditors and debtors, often sparking conflict and lasting tension between people. Moreover, these economic practices, in particular chimbadzo, reflect a form of moral compromise.

At least one-third of my interview participants claim to participate in chimbadzo as money lenders. When asked if they view it as morally problematic or sinful, or if the practice causes them to feel guilty, most reply in ambiguous terms. A typical response is “it is sinful but it is the only way to get money in this place,” or “the wages are too low here, you can get money with chimbadzo.” Another informant linked the practice directly to border crossing: “when people come this side [of the border] they just do things as they like.” Informants state that money lending rarely occurs in Zimbabwe, and if it does, it cannot be with such high interest rates.

In addition to chimbadzo, economic practices among farm workers are characterized, as one put it, by a general “stinginess” (kuomera). “A guy can survive with five rand down here,” one informant states, “so that he can save more to bring home.” But frugal saving also translates into less willingness to share with others. “You
do what you can to help somebody else, but you think about yourself here. I buy fish far away from where I stay, so that people will not see me eat it.” The economic environment in the farm compound is characterized by hustling, an environment where practically everything is for sale. It is similar to the crisis and inflationary urban context of Zimbabwe itself, which Jones (2010) characterizes as a “kukiyakiya” economy – a term also used among Zimbabwean farm workers in the compound. Kukiyakiya suggests “cleverness, dodging, and the exploitation of whatever resources are at hand, all with an eye to self-sustenance” (Jones, 2010: 286). It refers to the proliferation of informal ways of “making do” and “getting by” in place of formerly more predictable, transparent economic transactions.

An exception to this stinginess of kuomera and self-sustenance of kukiyakiya is the hospitality shown to new Zimbabweans entering the compound, usually for the first time. As the compound is situated directly on the border, migrants frequently pass through the compound, even if they are seeking destinations further south. These migrants will often try to acquire food and accommodation for a few days. One informant states: “Them (migrants) staying with us not that big of a deal, no one harms them. It is about being Zimbabwean, we are the same people, we are in the same fight. It is just an act of humanity (to accommodate them).” And yet, other informants suggest that a migrant can only be accommodated if you find someone from your home area or a relative. My own observations suggest that a migrant without connections or money can find accommodation in the compound for one or two nights only.

Apart from the above example of hospitality occasionally shown to new migrants, the farm community is characterized by deep divisions. Other social practices in the
compound, such as Christian worship, generate a measure of unity among workers.\textsuperscript{33} However, churches can reinforce the farm hierarchy. For instance, often the leading preachers or church elders on the farm are also senior foremen. While workers engage in a wide variety of social practices at the farm, few are as widespread as high-interest money-lending. This practice may support livelihood strategies, but they do little to challenge the farm power structure.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In this chapter, I have outlined how workers at Heddon Estates are sharply divided along ethnic, linguistic, occupational, gender and political lines among other markers of difference. These divisions are reinforced and accentuated by the assemblage of practices I describe as delegated despotism. As I illustrated through the example of Clayton, this production regime grants a small clique of black managers vast powers over the rest of the work force. Competition is fostered between workers by incentivizing production, paying piece rates and assigning bonuses to foremen and managers who exceed targets. Workers are encouraged to spy on one another, to report any subversive murmurings to management as a means to promote themselves. On this divisive farm workers have few avenues to improve their livelihoods apart from individualistic strategies, such as Chimbadzo. Chimbadzo lenders increase their personal income, but to the detriment of other Zimbabwean workers, encouraging animosity between lenders and borrowers.

While these strategies are situated by the production regime and wider divisions on the farm, the prevalence of chimbadzo is also related to how Zimbabweans privilege

\textsuperscript{33} I explore the churches in more detail in Chapter Four.
kuvaka musha in Zimbabwe over improving conditions at the farm. Paradoxically, kuvaka musha can encourage discipline and frugality among workers, but it simultaneously individuates the work force, whereby each worker has his or her own projects or plans in Zimbabwe for which much is sacrificed. Thus, management practices and the ideal of kuvaka musha work together to diminish the possibility of collective action, such as strikes, that could improve conditions on the farm for the majority of workers. With higher wages, workers may feel less need to borrow from chimbadzo lenders.

Thus far, I have considered kuvaka musha as a constraining force that diminishes collective action and effectively reinforces existing hierarchies on the farm. However, under certain conditions Zimbabweans do act against the interests of management, even on a collective basis. Delegated despotism is not a totalizing regime that completely precludes resistance. On the contrary, it provokes certain forms of opposition that may shape the contours of the regime. I consider these forms of opposition in the next chapter.
Chapter Two: “Their Heart is not in the Farm:” Stealing and Striking as Forms of Resistance

In early October, a conflict among workers on the spray team erupted after the morning roll call. After most workers had vacated the work shop area for the fields, the spray team remained in the vicinity awaiting orders for the day. Unexpectedly, a confrontation broke out between Oliver, the spray team manager, and Farai, a senior tractor driver for the spray team. I heard Oliver shout as he sat on his motorbike a few feet from Farai, “What is your problem, do you want to fight me?” A semi-circle of workers from the spray team, usually vocal and expressive in the morning, silently observed. Farai stepped back and responded, “No I can’t fight, you are stronger than me.” As I learned from my research assistant who was also standing nearby, the tense exchange started when Oliver informed Farai that he was being demoted from the spray team and assigned to the loading team. Farai received this news with disbelief and accused Oliver of “telling lies to Philip” for his own personal gain. The fact they almost came to blows testified to the seriousness of their conflict; fighting was often grounds for dismissal at the farm. Though I could not appreciate it at the time, this conflict would have far reaching implications for my research at the farm. It marked the first in a series of events that revealed extensive chemical stealing and culminated with my temporary eviction from the farm.

While stealing from Philip is rampant, the theft of chemicals is particularly diagnostic for understanding resistance to delegated despotism because of its scale, the nature of people involved and the violent reaction it provoked. Unlike more quotidian theft, such as chopping down trees on hilltops for firewood (a practice officially banned)
or taking excessive tomatoes from the fields, the chemical theft involved a well-coordinated network of farm workers that over the course of a multiple seasons cost the farm perhaps over three million rand. Yet, this cost is not by itself exceptional: one manager, commenting on how Zimbabweans help themselves to the crop, remarked with some consternation: “whatever we manage to grow for a season, we have to expect that 50 percent of the crop will be lost to the blacks.” The financial impact of tomato pilfering is thus at least comparable to that of chemical theft. Workers frequently take more tomatoes than what they can carry in their hands, and some sell them on the roadside some distance from the farm or in Zimbabwe. While these actions may solicit punishment in rare cases, for the most part excessive tomato-taking is tolerated by Philip, perhaps because it is attached to a paternalistic hold-over he provides his workers, and retracting it could produce too much discontent. In contrast, the chemical theft is defined as a “crime” and involved some of Philip’s most trusted workers, including my two roommates Emmanuel and Arthur (although the latter only indirectly). The outrage and disappointment expressed by Philip and other whites suggests that personal bonds have not entirely dissipated between white and black workers. Instead, what has taken place under delegated despotism is that only select workers are granted personal access to Philip, expressed in terms of having “trust” with him. Yet, even in the context of these

34 Philip’s rule is that workers can take tomatoes equivalent to whatever they can carry in their bare hands when they have finished their day’s work. As he explained to me on one occasion, his intention is that they have enough to accompany their evening meal.

35 In fact, during my fieldwork Philip did attempt to change the tomato policy in response to what he felt was excessive tomato selling by his workers. For one week, he ordered workers to collect their tomatoes at a fixed distribution point (the pack shed) after work, but this policy was ignored and workers continued taking tomatoes directly from the field to the compound. Philip never followed up his initial action during the rest of my time at the farm.
selective affective attachments, many Zimbabweans subject to them feel compelled to increase their income in illicit ways because of low wages. As a result, the middle ranking workers (those between black managers and ordinary laborers) are potentially the most subversive: they are incorporated just enough to have access to farm resources, to have a degree of permanence and security on the farm – yet they are not close enough to feel they have too much to lose. Often, the middle managers are drawn into individualistic acts of stealing, or they focus on gaining favor with Philip. The option of organizing their fellow workers to challenge Philip does not appear to them as a possibility.

While delegated despotism channels resistance into individualistic, illicit forms of resistance, it cannot entirely foreclose the potential for collective strikes among workers. For most Zimbabweans, striking is an abysmal strategy because it almost guarantees being fired and replaced. And yet, strikes and work-stoppages by Zimbabweans are not uncommon in northern Limpopo. These strikes are almost invariably “reactive” in that they arise in response to some violation of pre-existing expectations. As the example I discuss below suggests, strikes can be successful (in a limited way) if they involve large numbers of farm workers, are conducted at peak times of the harvest season, and do not demand too much by way of wage increases. Unlike the more individualistic stealing of chemicals, such strikes demonstrate the potential of Zimbabweans to act collectively against the interests of management.

I examine each of these manifestations of resistance in turn, beginning with chemical stealing. My account centers on Arthur, who became an unintended casualty of the chemical stealing debacle. His actions leading up to Philip’s discovery of the
chemical stealing illustrate the limits of appealing to Philip as a way of belonging and achieving security in the farm environment. At first, Arthur strove to appeal to Philip’s paternalism as a basis for realizing his objectives. Yet his position was too precarious and fragile to be sustained. His outrage at his brother being beaten by Philip led him to reject paternalism and confront Philip directly.

**Arthur’s Dilemma**

On the same day of the altercation between Oliver and Farai, it was not until nightfall that I grasped the significance of the conflict. During the evening I attended a worship service on the outskirts of the farm with my roommate Arthur, and as we walked back towards the compound I asked him about the fight. I knew he would have some insight, because as the farm scout he worked closely with the spray team to identify areas that needed pesticides. He responded in hushed tones, indicating sensitivity towards the matter under discussion. “You know Lincoln, we are having a problem at this farm. You cannot tell anyone, or I will have to leave this place.” He explained that for months he and Oliver had been spraying chemicals on infected crop areas, but nothing was happening. Suspecting that chemicals were being stolen, he started to ask around the compound to try and find who is responsible. His investigations led him to one individual in Compound One who was storing chemicals in his room. “Someone came to me, and he showed me the *mushonga*\(^36\) that was being stored in his room. I cannot tell you his name, but now we have evidence.” He suspected that many other people were storing chemicals in their rooms or in hiding places in the bush.

\(^36\) *Mushonga* typically refers to medicine, but on the farm it also refers to chemicals and pesticides used in the fields
He went on to indict Farai as ultimately responsible for the stealing because “he is supervising the whole of the spray team operation,” but also stated that “the whole spray team is involved or at least knows about it.” Yet, no one will report the issue to Philip because, in Arthur’s terms, “it is not worth selling out.” Seeking to end the stealing without revealing the full scope of the problem to Philip, Arthur and Oliver advised Philip to remove Farai from his position because of lax discipline:

We had an opportunity to punish Farai because he has committed other infractions, like knocking off too early before the work is done. So Oliver and myself told Philip about him leaving work too early, and then Philip demoted him to the loading team. It is only that he appears too weak for that job so he is going to be a general worker in weeding.

As I furiously scrawled Arthur’s testimony in my notebook by the light of the moon, I sensed the conflicted position he was in. As the farm scout, he was responsible for identifying pests on the crop and ensuring that the spray team was given the proper orders. If pest activity went unchecked – because instead of spraying the chemicals, members of the spray team taking the chemicals for themselves – he would be held accountable by Philip. Arthur knew that chemicals he ordered to be sprayed were being stolen, but he could not report this information to Philip. I asked him why it was “not worth selling out” and telling Philip about the stealing. Pausing for a moment, he stated “It is only that I fear for my security. I want to be faithful to boss Philip, but he cannot do anything to protect me.” He speculated that if he did “sell out” the whole spray team, members from this group would ambush him on one of the pay days and take all his money. For this reason, he says he can only “drop the truth bit by bit,” because “if it is all at once they will be frightened.” He added confidently, “We have shown them that we know about it and are willing to act. They will come to see Farai is a liar and a cheat.”
Caught between the ire of Philip and the potential retribution of the spray team, Arthur balanced these concerns by – in collaboration with Oliver – targeting Farai and thereby hopefully “sending a message” to others involved in stealing. His quiet and nervous manner with me as he shared his thoughts, saying “I am scared that I told you [about the chemical stealing] and if possible you should not write about it, because if it leaks…,” testified to the high stakes involved. If Philip learned about the chemical stealing, Arthur could be punished for not reporting the matter sooner. He could also be resented by the spray team if they knew about his role in ousting Farai. Yet, almost as an after-thought, he added another dimension to his account, revealing other personal reasons for ousting Farai. For several months, a woman farm worker – Eunice – had been cooking and washing clothes for Arthur and Emmanuel, in exchange for a slight subsidy in her grocery bill. Ostensibly, the brothers understood Eunice as a “Christian sister” with whom they did not have sex. Yet, Arthur accused Farai of spreading rumors that the former was “taking a wife on the farm.” He summed up his opinion with a retributive after-thought: “This made me angry, but I just ignored it. So now the people will know he is a liar.”

Notwithstanding this admission, which suggests personal motivations behind the ousting of Farai, Arthur’s narrative portrays him as an anti-hero or protector of Philip’s interests. He does not report the stealing to Philip directly, as this would jeopardize his personal safety and standing on the farm. Still, he acts to minimize the stealing of chemicals by punishing one of the people involved. While it is clear that Arthur is acting

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37 Namely that Arthur was angry at Farai for spreading rumors about his relationship with Eunice. We will learn more about this relationship in Chapter Three.
in his own self-interest, his actions also suggest a measure of loyalty towards Philip and are indicative of paternalistic bonds.

**Uneven Paternalism**

If any Zimbabweans were thought of as having paternalistic attachments to Philip, Arthur could be a prime candidate. A four-year veteran of Heddon Estates, Arthur had worked his way up the farm ladder to the point where he was now the farm “scout,” responsible for monitoring the crop on a daily basis to counteract pests and other diseases threatening the crops. Perhaps more significantly, this position was reserved for more educated workers who not only could read and write English, but could study thick manuals regarding the treatment of farm pests. Arthur was qualified: he obtained his Form 6 certificate in Shurugwe. He had also worked for several years in Bulawayo as a waiter in an upscale restaurant. These qualifications distinguished Arthur from most other workers, who lacked such education and work experience. As the scout, Arthur was among a select few workers who met with Philip on almost daily basis to discuss the prevalence of given pests and diseases. In addition to his connection to Philip through work, Arthur’s evangelical Christianity encouraged close ties with Philip. In 2006, his first year at the farm, Arthur founded the Interdenominational worship group (known locally as Inter-D) as an alternative to the existing Zionist group, an endeavor for which Philip expressed support. In 2008, Arthur and his brother Emmanuel were among the twelve workers chosen by Philip to travel to Angus Buchan’s “Mighty Men” conference in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Philip provided transportation in one of the farm delivery trucks.

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38 The details of this church and how it clashed with the Zion group is discussed in Chapter Four.
Since Arthur started working at Heddon Estates, at the end of each season Philip would write a letter addressed to pastor of Arthur’s church at home, explaining how Arthur had been a good Christian and followed good behavior at the farm. Moreover, I am persuaded that Philip’s toleration of my residence in the compound was due in large part to the fact that I was staying with Arthur (and Emmanuel), workers that he “trusted” (in addition to the other factors I speculate about in Chapter One).

However, I learned that these paternalistic credentials were also compromised by Arthur’s frustration over his low pay, especially the fact that he never received bonuses like the top four or five black managers on the farm. As I became aware of Arthur’s attempts to secure a bonus, chemical stealing unexpectedly resurfaced once again. While Arthur prepared to return to his homestead in Zimbabwe in mid-November – the picking season had ended and his scout duties were no longer required – he expressed anger that he would likely not get a bonus. “Others they have always got bonuses, but what about me? Philip always forgets.” He spoke of it with some bitterness. “I run around the fields for Philip, but he gives me nothing all these years.” After discussing the problem with me on several occasions, he decided to appeal to Philip to directly. In the past, he had raised issues with Philip in the letter form, because “otherwise he will not let you finish talking” he claimed. The matter had to be handled with some delicacy, as appealing directly to Philip contravened the farm hierarchy – normally any complaint had to be addressed to a senior manager. Eventually, Arthur composed a letter and shared it with me – even allowing me to make a copy of it. He uses Biblical references to open the letter:
Like what King Hezekial did after the lord sent Isaiah to say to him “set your house in
order, for you shall die and not live.” Hezekial turned his face to the wall and prayed
saying “remember now, o lord, I beseech you, how I have walked before you in truth
and with a whole heart and have done what is good in your sight.” In the same way,
Your Excellency, I turn my face to the wall which is writing a letter, not to the
manager, but to the managing director. To say please, your excellency, remember
now how I have walked before you since 2006 in truth and with a whole heart and
have done good in your sight. I never ran away from Heddon Estates since I started to
work here and trying within the frailities and limitations of being human to do the best
in the world of scouting. I have been trying to be everywhere in 160 ha in order to
give the best security. I can’t remember the day I came to your office to sign a
warning after disturbing peace in the compound. Now what I don’t know is the reason
why I am not getting a bonus, as one of your top structure as you once said I am.
Remember Max the former scouter before me? What were you doing for him? Your
excellency, I am ready to come to your office and answer for the cost I that I am
negatively affecting Heddon Estates in its journey along the line. If the coming in of
worms here and there is my responsibility then together we can discuss the way I can
raise my standards to meet your will, but I can ask may be this one question. I can’t
forget what you mean to my life. For I have built my foundation on you. I have
learned a lot from you and I am still learning, so your worth is very dear in my
regards,

Your Arthur Simbarashe

Arthur submitted the letter to Philip but did not hear from Philip for over a week,
so eventually he decided to approach Philip directly in his office. Returning to our room
in the compound one afternoon, he was somewhat unsatisfied with the outcome of the
encounter, but unsurprised. When he asked Philip directly whether he would receive a
bonus, Philip dodged the issue by elaborating on the example of Bill Gates. “He [Philip]
said successful people start small, exercise patience, before rewards come.” Arthur again
quoted from scripture in his presence (2 Kings/Chapter 20)\textsuperscript{39} and reiterated many the

\textsuperscript{39} Verses 1 through 6 from the New International Version of the Bible read: “In those
days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz
went to him and said, ‘This is what the LORc says: Put your house in order, because you
are going to die; you will not recover.’ Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to
the LORc, ‘Remember, O LORc, how I have walked before you faithfully and with
wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.’ And Hezekiah wept
points he made in the letter. The conversation took an awkward turn when Philip mentioned that “we give bonuses after seeing results,” alluding to the exceptionally large outbreak of pests on the tomatoes that Arthur’s scouting had failed, thus far, to counteract. Arthur defended himself by saying that his job is only to report the pests, not apply chemicals. But at this point Philip interjected, “I know we have one or two guys stealing chemicals.” Although Philip was probably pressuring Arthur to reveal any knowledge he had about stealing, Arthur pleaded ignorance. He advised Philip to “shift people” if that’s what he thinks is happening. Yet, the meeting ended with a seeming affirmation of their paternalistic understanding. Philip stated, “Thank you for coming. We will only get answers to our problems when we come together.” Arthur responded “I respect you. I do not want to create problems for the goose that lays the golden egg. I will not run away. If I find greener pastures, I will first come and thank you for helping me build my foundation.”

The exchange seemed to confirm mutual good will, even if Philip’s mentioning of the chemical stealing cast a shadow of the conversation. But Arthur was not overly excited about the possibility of getting bonus. “Otherwise, according to what he said, I will get something. But he is cheap.” His comment was prescient: Arthur did end up receiving a R 500 bonus on his last pay for the month. This was a far cry from multiple thousands paid out to the managers, and it did little to assuage his nagging frustration bitterly. Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: ‘Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the LORD. I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.’”
about low pay. However disgruntled Arthur remained, as he left the farm in late November he could have no idea of the plans afoot to counteract stealing at the farm, and how these would radically alter his future.

**The Chemical Plot Thickens**

In mid-December when practically all workers returned to Zimbabwe, I travelled to Gaha in Southern Zimbabwe where most workers come from. As I visited one of my key informants and eventual research assistant, Leonard, he gestured towards a white container and said, “this is Selecron chemical, from the farm.” He said he needed it to treat his cattle for ticks. “Ticks are a big problem, they can cause a lot of diseases. The government used to provide chemicals and dip tanks, but now it’s a different story.” By this time, Leonard had developed into one of my most central informants and friends, so his candidness did not surprise me. I asked him how he obtained it and his reply revealed broad participation in chemical stealing. He recounted how he had scoured the compound for several weeks, trying to find the best prices among chemicals being sold out of people’s rooms. He mentioned how Emmanuel offered to sell him 5 liters for R 1000, but he ultimately found another purveyor in the Johanne compound who sold him 2.5 liters for R 130. All in all he consulted eight people, all of whom were “small fishes” in his estimation. Had he consulted more senior managers, such as Simeon or Oliver, he suggested the price would have been much higher.

He also explained how the chemicals were actually taken directly from the workshop, involving more people than just the spray team, as Arthur had initially suggested. Leonard stated the chemicals are placed inside the water tanks on tractors, while the vehicles are still inside the workshop gate, so security will not notice the
chemicals leaving. Still, some security guards are bribed to go along with the practice. His comments showed the crucial role of the workshop storeman, Emmanuel, in distributing the chemicals. Ordinarily, he keeps a record of all chemicals leaving the store room, but in this case he was giving them to spray team partners without noting it. Leonard indicated that this stealing has been going on for a long time, possibly over multiple seasons. He revealed that the chemicals are not only being sold to Venda farmers in Nwanedi (some 30 km from Heddon Estates in the former Venda homeland), but also sold to other farm workers for their own use in Zimbabwe. The revelation of Emmanuel’s involvement did not surprise me, but it revealed a dilemma in that given my friendship with Emmanuel, what would happen if he was caught? I did not dwell long on this thought, presuming that he would get away with it, as before. Like others, I was unaware of the gathering storm that would disrupt my research at Heddon Estates.

**Purging the Farm**

In early February, I returned to the farm compound after a brief hiatus in the nearby town of Musina, to rapidly developing situation. Months had passed since I last discussed chemical stealing with anyone and I had almost forgotten about the issue. My car stocked full of groceries purchased from town, I expected to be greeted warmly by Arthur and Emmanuel. As I pulled up near our block, Arthur was absorbed in washing his clothes, aggressively rubbing them together to remove stains. Emmanuel was nowhere to be seen. I greeted Arthur but he turned to me, eyes downcast and visibly shaken. “Lincoln, something terrible has happened. Emmanuel has been arrested. He was beaten in the office by Philip this morning. The police have taken him and three others to jail for stealing chemicals.” Stunned, I pressed Arthur for more details but he
replied “there are too many people around now, let us talk when the time is right.” As I strolled around the compound, a strange quiet hung over the community. Residents gave customary greetings, but eschewed conversation, not inviting me to sit down as per usual. It was not until I walked over to the workshop and encountered the senior farm security guard, that I gathered more details about what had taken place. Feigning ignorance about the turn of events, I greeted him and said “Why is everyone so quiet today?” He informed me that Sibanda, one of the tractor drivers, was caught attempting to sell chemicals in Musina. During his interrogation by police and Philip, he gave the names of several other farm workers as accomplices, including my roommate Emmanuel. Earlier, he had witnessed Philip confronting to accused workers at the office: “It was bad. Philip was furious. He beat all of them.” He said that his security guard counter-part, identified by Sibanda, was ordered by Philip to remove his uniform and was arrested in his underwear, perhaps to underscore how he had “disgraced the uniform.” Three other farm workers, including Emmanuel, were arrested by the police and taken to jail in Musina.

As our conversation ended, the white farm mechanic Logan drove by and, upon seeing me, screeched to halt and called me over to his truck. By this time in my fieldwork, I had established considerable rapport with Logan; many times I dined with him and his wife Dolores at their home. He must have been keen to see me, as Emmanuel was known to be one of my closest friends. A grizzled man in his early 50s, his normally jovial attitude was instead reflective, even resigned. Allowing his truck to idle, he leaned out the window and spoke with concern:

Lincoln, did you hear about the guys stealing the poisons? Unbelievable. I don’t understand it…those were good okes [guys]. No, I can handle almost anything. I’ve done a lot of crap, but stealing’s not one of them. If a guy’s got a problem and needs
money, I have no problem giving it to him. But I cannot stand for stealing. Stealing is out, if you’ve got to steal, you’ve gone down the wrong path. You know, the guy I like is Gift. There’s a guy who is hard working, if he wants something, he asks for it. And I always try to help a man. If he needs a shirt, I will fetch it for him, go up to my house and get it for him myself. But if I catch a guy stealing, that’s it. I draw the line there. I don’t know why I do, but I suppose I draw it.

It was significant that as Logan condemned stealing, he felt it necessary to hold up Gift as the example of a good worker. The revelation that workers he considered “good okes” were involved in stealing disturbed him. He believes they should espouse a strong work ethic and positive attitude even in the context of low wages and arduous labor. In his view, they should be patient for incremental wage increases and, if needed, ask for charitable assistance in the meantime. Logan feels Gift, a long time irrigation worker at the farm, personifies this ideal Zimbabwean worker. Those who steal, in contrast, have chosen a morally degenerate path and deserve little sympathy.

Just as the chemical stealing provoked melancholic reflection from Logan, it also solicited rumination from another white employee, Heinrik. As I walked back to the compound, Heinrik confronted me on the roadside. A tall Afrikaaner man in his mid-40s, Heinrik was the most senior manager on the farm after Philip. He seemed strangely perturbed by the events. After mentioning that he was “unhappy” with Philip’s violent reaction, I encouraged elaboration by responding that “Philip must have been very angry.” He replied with sudden vigor: “Of course, 4 million rand! And it’s been going like this for four or five years.” At the same time, Heinrik seemed shaken by Philip’s acts of violence towards the accused workers. Apparently, he was at the office when Philip confronted the workers named by Sibanda. “You know, today I had to step in front of him, to hold him back, and shout at him “Philip, Just stay calm!” I had to tell him that.
He was rushing at the guys. He’s not handling it well. The problem there is love of money. Philip says he is a believer, a real Christian, but he’s got that problem.” He was not sympathetic towards those involved in theft, but instead felt there was a more proper way to handle the stealing that Philip was not following.

**Arthur’s recollection of the day**

Later that evening, I sat in our hostel room with Arthur, on the concrete floor. He lit a candle and finally felt comfortable enough to convey to me his thoughts. His account of the day, how the beatings and arrests unfolded, filled in many of the blanks that remained in my picture of what happened.

Well, as I told you before, there is a sensitive issue that touched my heart. I was working by the boosters around 11 AM. I was on my way back to the compound for lunch. Clayton came driving past in a bakkie, he was going fast, and he said “guys, get in”. So we drove fast to the office. I saw Boss Philip at the office, he was very cross. Just before I started to realize what was happening, I saw Emmanuel sitting in one of the chairs. His eyes were swollen and bruised. Clever was naked. Onsen was behind them...Philip shouted “Onsen, you are stealing chemicals!” And he started beating him with a fist. He was beaten in my presence.

At this point I interrupted Arthur and asked him why Onsen and the others did not defend themselves, especially considering they were physically stronger than Philip. He replied, “he is a small man, but if you understand you are guilty you cannot return fire.” Arthur continued his narrative, recounting how Philip shouted at him, “Do you know your brother is a criminal!” Philip accused Arthur of knowing about the stealing but not informing him. Arthur looked him in the eye and denied any knowledge of it.

Emmanuel and Onsen began apologizing to Philip, claiming that this was the only time they ever participated in the stealing. They blamed the black manager Simeon, also among the accused, for pressuring them to steal. According to Arthur, Philip shouted at
Simeon, “Simeon, this is a second time! You put pressure on these guys… I forgave you before!” He grabbed Simeon’s radio violently and punched him. After one hour of this interrogation, the police came and Simeon, Emmanuel, Onsen and Clever were arrested for attempting to steal chemicals. Arthur said to the white men standing in the office, Heinrik, Logan, Philip: “Guys, I’m sorry about this, I know I no longer have a good name at this farm. A continuous song will be made of the fact that I’m guilty, and as a consequence, I will resign.” But Philip replied, more composed after witnessing the accused workers driven away by the police, “No Arthur, you were not part of the deal.” But by that time, Arthur had started to cry and Heinrik drove him back to the compound, with Philip saying that they will talk Monday.

At this stage, I asked Arthur what his next move would be and how he was feeling:

As for me, I would like to know what is actually happening. I want to know the day of court. Even police who came, saw that these guys were beaten. And so when penalizing them, they must start from there. I’m wondering what to do to support my brother. My blood is thicker than water. Right now I want him out of there. I already phoned my sisters and asked for money. If he will be given the option of paying a fine, or going to prison, and I want to pay for him…

Arthur was committed at this stage to helping Emmanuel get out of jail. I told him I would do whatever I could to help him, without appearing to be in conflict with Philip. I made an ethical decision in this moment to assist Arthur in freeing his brother. I suggested to him that Philip could be charged with assault, and offered to put him in touch with a legal advocate that I knew in town. Arthur replied positively: “Lincoln, this is why you are here.”

Our Visit to Jail
As part of my effort to help Arthur, I drove him to Musina the following morning to see his brother in jail and enquire about legal charges against Philip. The town jail, known locally as *chitokis*, was a tin rectangular building, divided into individual cells in which prisoners were packed in.\(^{40}\) We were able to see Emmanuel for a few minutes during visiting hours. Amidst the taunting yells of fellow prisoners, we passed Emmanuel some bags of food which he quickly consumed for fear, he said, that others in cell would take it. His face was gigantically swollen. Dazed, his eyes were blood shot and he was not completing sentences. Arthur spoke to him quickly in Shona, reassuring him that all would be well, that he would take care of the legal problems. He also told Emmanuel that he was going to press charges against Philip, but Emmanuel hesitated and disagreed. Our visit was broken up by the guards and we then met my contact who works operates a legal advice office in town, and regularly assists Zimbabwean migrants. He arranged a meeting between us and the station commander of the Musina police. The commander stated that when Emmanuel and the others were brought in, he asked them if they had been beaten, but they denied it. To this, Arthur responded, “they are hoping they will be forgiven by Philip.” The police informed us that they will be taken to court the following day for sentencing and Arthur decided to wait for the outcome before taking action against Philip. As we left the station, Arthur was more disgusted than ever. “The boss beats people, But I’m going to tell Philip, what he is doing is not good at all…I will talk to him nicely at the meeting, And despite what a person does, the issue must be settled humane way.” On our way back to the farm, I dropped Arthur off some

\(^{40}\) The harsh conditions in *chitokis* are recognized as worse than the detention centers many Zimbabweans were familiar with for immigration violations.
distance from the farm, so he could walk to the compound and my role in assisting him would be unknown. Feeling somewhat insecure about my standing on the farm, I proceeded straight to Logan and Dolores’ place.

**Dolores’ interpretation**

I was reassured upon encountering Dolores. As was usually the case, Dolores’ greeted me warmly and welcomed me into her living room. As the television blared, she reflected on recent events. She informed me how the “sting” operation was organized over a two week period. The man who offered to buy the chemicals from Sibanda in Musina was an undercover policeman. As the scene unfolded in the taxi rank, Philip and other policemen watched from a bank across the street. She then revealed that the whole incident caused her emotional pain:

I just can’t believe they stole. It is so sad. Every time I passed Onsen, we used to clap hands. It is very disappointing that they felt they should subsidize their income in this way. What they were getting selling the stuff was a month’s wages in one day… I don’t know what to think. Over the last two weeks, Clever had changed. He became demotivated. I noticed him lying around… He went from being a happy person to someone who never smiles…My heart is sore. I loved those guys. The fact that they felt it necessary to steal, I don’t understand it. They never stole from me. They didn’t give me heck the time Emanuel gave Logan two cartons of cigarettes. I felt they didn’t make any difference just because I was white. I knew last year something was up with James, he had too much on his mind…it must have been the stress of stealing.

Mid-way through our conversation, the sound of a vehicle pulling into the driveway prompted Dolores’ to step outside and greet the visitor. As it turned out, it was Philip, who was apparently quite distraught. After a few minutes, Dolores returned and told me of her encounter with Philip outside:

Philip was just here out in the yard. He told us Arthur was at his house! Philip feels like he is being threatened... It will all depend on Arthur from here. Arthur did have a huge role on this farm, but with him coming to approach Philip like that, trying to threaten him about something…to go to somebody’s house on a Sunday, when their
resting! I mean it’s not your Sunday afternoon!

Evidently, Arthur chose to approach Philip after we parted. Feigning agreement with Dolores, I concurred that Arthur was impolite to disturb Philip on the day-off. Given my well-known friendship with Arthur, I felt it important to express solidarity with the whites and to give a false pretense of distance from Arthur. Several times, Dolores enquired with me what Arthur’s plans were, but I told her I did not know. Feeling I was somehow near the center of a brewing storm, I returned to the compound to consult with Arthur.

**Watson’s Confrontation with Philip**

When I arrived at our room, I greeted Arthur and he affirmed that he had gone to Philip’s house and confronted him directly. Initially, Philip told Arthur he would not see him, because “it is not working hours.” But Arthur insisted, saying “No, the problem is that Emmanuel’s face is swollen, and I have gone to the police – if he is going to serve his sentence, the time must be reduced.” Philip became angry, and shouted that he beat Emmanuel because he had, at first, denied his guilt. Philip slammed the door in Arthur’s face, saying finally, “tomorrow you can come and pick up your money.” Reflecting on the encounter with me, Arthur mused “He is afraid that I will open a case against him, for beating those guys... I would like to sue him for beating these people. He can come out thinking we are all fools, boasting that he is a lion. He must face justice, even if he is saved by money.” With a tone of finality, he said “I no longer want to work here.”

Whatever paternalistic bonds once existed between Arthur and Philip were broken. Arthur’s position on the farm was now highly tenuous. By saying he can “pick up his money,” Philip effectively fired Arthur. Yet, as Arthur’s comments convey, he no
longer wished to stay at the farm. Within the compound, Arthur was not ostracized.

Although other residents knew there was growing animosity between him and Philip, they overwhelmingly sympathized with Arthur and the workers who were beaten. Many times over the previous two days visitors to our room enquired empathetically how Emmanuel and the others were, and expressed disagreement with how Philip beat them. In particular, Leonard expressed this general view in stark terms: “Everyone says the boss is the best person to steal from. They sympathize with fellow workers, they know what caused the stealing is the low wages. What’s bad for stealing is getting caught. *Mbudzi inochikira yakusungiriro*, the goat will graze where it is tied. Us as workers need to graze.”

The sympathy extended towards Arthur, even as he fell out of favor with Philip, suggests that delegated despotism does not involve the same kind of commitment to the white farmer that would lead workers to shun Arthur under traditional paternalism (see Du Toit, 1993). Denunciation by Philip did not translate into “outsider status” for Arthur in the farm worker community; the farmer’s “final word” encounters real limits within his own domain. The tension that results from Philip’s inability to impose his will throughout the community, into the spaces of the compound, perhaps accounts for his often capricious behavior and decision-making.

**Monday’s Roll Call: Philip’s Speech**

At roll call the following morning Philip attempted to impose his authority through his speech and important symbolic actions. Upon seeing him emerge from his bakkie near the workshop, I quickly approached him with the idea of greeting and assessing where I stood with him. We shook hands and exchanged a brief “good
morning," but his mind was clearly elsewhere. It seemed for the moment that my
association with Arthur did not strike him as a problem. He rushed up to the podium and
indicated for Malvin, a senior foreman for the tomato pickers, to stand alongside him and
translate his message to the hundreds of people standing around. The disavowal of
Clayton, his usual translator, signaled Philip’s disapproval of him. After a quick prayer
by Malvin, Philip began a long narrative, pausing at times to allow Malvin to translate.

I want to talk to these people about what has been happening for a few years on this
farm. I will talk first about what happened last week. We had a storeman here that I
trusted, his name was Emmanuel. We had a security here at the gate, named Clever.
We had a driver named Sibanda. These guys had a deal here: Emmanuel would take
out mushonga from the stores, and he was helped by Onsen. They would wait until
lunch time, when everyone is out of the shed area. Then they would put that
mushonga in a checker bag, they would come to the gate where the security is, and the
security would say “no problem.”

As he mentioned the words “no problem,” he slapped his hands together and waved
another through the air, as though to emphasize the severity of the matter under
discussion. The crowd became increasingly solemn as Philip expounded on the stealing,
unsure what his pronouncements would amount to. He recounted how the mushonga was
given to Sibanda, who tried to sell it in town, but was then arrested, and how the latter
“told us everything that was happening on the farm.” He then discussed various
infractions that had come to light, such as people being marked present at the roll call
even though they were not showing up for work. He indirectly implicated Clayton in this
practice: “Many girlfriends are getting marked present, sent to town in a private bakkie
of someone who is in a high position at the farm, then getting paid for being at work,
when in fact they were absent.” Philip thus publicly rebuked Clayton, but he did not link
him to the chemical stealing. Through the use of Malvin as translator, perhaps Philip
intended to demonstrate his independence from Clayton – to show that even the latter could be demoted or fired from the farm. For the entirety of the roll call, Clayton did not stand on the workshop podium, but stood a few meters off to the side with other foremen, in a sulking posture. Ultimately, however, this was only a temporary shunning of Clayton – he returned to his usual “head” position alongside Philip the following morning, and remained there from then on. His transgression was not serious enough to warrant anything more.

Sounding like a disappointed father, Philip’s speech then took on a more personal tone. The following excerpt reinforces a previous point I made about Philip’s “ethic of the farm.” He appears, in this section of his speech, to be surprised that people would steal from the farm. It is as if he is only just discovering that workers on his farm do not share in the ethic he espouses. Even if in practice Philip does not bestow many paternalistic benefits on his workers, his own sense of being a father-figure on the farm is still an important part of his subjectivity. This aspect of his subjectivity arguably nurtures naiveté concerning the extent of his workers’ grievances and sense of injustice.

It makes my heart sore because I thought that I was looking after people after well…The thing is people think that when the farm is selling the tomatoes, all that money is going to my pocket, that is what they are thinking. They forget that each season we’ve got nearly six hundred people to pay, each and every one of them gets given money. They forget about the diesel that I have to pay, they forget about the electricity and power I have to pay, they forget about the mushonga I have to pay, they forget about all those things I have to pay. Most of the money is going to pay costs. When something is left over, we buy a new tractor, or buy a new pipe, we buy new pumps, things like that, to make the farm grown bigger. But the problem is that people - their heart is not in the farm.

Philip then announced that “things are going to change on this farm.” He outlined how a new roll call process would be organized. According to the previous practice,
supervisors and foremen simply checked off who was present from their respective
groups on the general roster. Now Philip ordered that all workers had to gather inside the
workshop area behind the closed fence. When a person’s name is called, they must walk
out of the gated area in front of the podium and form lines according to their work group.
This way, Philip announced, “then we can see, okay, that person is here.”

At this point, Philip directed all employed people to stand inside the workshop
gate, and the crowd silently shuffled into the gated area. This group numbered no more
than two hundred people, yet hundreds of others remained outside. These were
Zimbabweans still waiting for employment. The farm gradually added re-hired people
starting in January, but not until harvest time in March would the roster reach 600. Until
then, hundreds of migrants waited and hoped for a job. Incidentally, to be given a job in
these early period, one would need an influential relative as well as pay a substantial
bribe. Philip, noticing how many people were staying on the farm and looking for work,
exclaimed with a tone of incredulity: “all these people are not working?” Through
Malvin, he ordered all those not working to move to the southern end of the loading zone.
Speaking quietly, he directed Logan, who was standing off to the side, to call the police
in order to round up all the “illegal immigrants” on his farm. This was a puzzling
decision by Philip: he benefitted from the presence of so many potential workers on his
farm as it made it easier to pay low wages or replace problematic workers. Moreover, the
presence of so many job-seeking migrants in the compound was a regular occurrence
each season, so his surprise at the large number was perhaps somewhat fabricated. His
punitive reaction – calling the police to arrest undocumented migrants – was more of a
capricious decision made in a moment of anger, a decision that also reflected how he felt
all Zimbabweans were at least partly responsible for the chemical stealing. It was a form of collective punishment.

While Logan called the police, Philip turned his attention to instituting the new style of roll call. In the past, attendance was taken through individual foremen and supervisors, who would report who was present in their respective groups. Now, Philip instead took charge and began calling people individually. As he instructed, when their name was called, each person walked out of the gated area in front of the podium and then stood in lines behind their foremen. The process reflected Philip’s attempts to bring a new spatial order to the roll-call, one in which white managers could feel greater control over the attendance-taking process. Yet, this attempt at spatial disciplining also encountered limits. For a few days, the new procedure was observed, but it gradually broke down over the next few months until the former method re-emerged.

After roll call ended I drove to Musina, inconspicuously picking up Arthur from the edge of the road. He had stayed in the compound during roll-call, and we had arranged that I would again take him to town so he could attend court. “No one saw me,” he said. “Lincoln, you have been so good to us, keeping the secrets, helping us in everything, there is nothing I can say about which is bad. If the devil had not come in, we were supposed to stay together. But I can’t work at Philip’s farm anymore.” He had plans to go to Pretoria and seek work there with his relatives. I dropped Arthur off in town and elected not to attend court with him, as I suspected that Philip might attend. Later Arthur contacted me by phone, notifying me that all the workers were released without charges. Arthur had to only pay a R 1000 processing fee. According to him, the black judge had sympathy with the Zimbabweans, saw them as victims of white
racism and, having witnessed their bruises, was inclined to free them. He may have taken into account that no one had charged Philip with assault, and so the workers deserved to be set free. The released men including Emmanuel apparently returned to Zimbabwe.

When I picked up Arthur in town to travel back to the farm, the men had already dispersed.

**My Confrontation with Philip**

The following morning on the farm I was greeted with troubling news that people on the farm believed that I was responsible for freeing the men from jail. The farm was abuzz with news that the men had been released. The news had reached the farm yesterday – apparently some of the released men had visited the compound during the evening to retrieve possessions. Leonard informed me that most workers believed that I had somehow arranged their release, either by paying their fine or hiring a lawyer.

During lunch hour, I was visited by the chief security guard, who informed me that Philip wished to see me: “Philip wants you to come to his office when it stops raining. I think it is about the situation with Arthur and Emmanuel. You need to set the thing straight.”

When I arrived at the office, I was stunned by a hostile reception. Dolores, seated at her desk, turned and glared at me when I entered the office and spoke with indignation: “I got reprimanded this morning. Philip was angry with me for giving you information, saying that I made a breach of confidentiality, by telling you how the guys were caught stealing.” She punctuated these anxiety-inducing remarks by quoting Philip: “He says, ‘Lincoln is good friends with these people and so we have to keep quiet.’” She nodded her head as she spoke, as though I was somehow to blame, as though all this time had been tricking her into giving me information. But she also exuded frustration towards
Philip, so for the moment it was unclear to me where I stood in her eyes. Logan, standing silently off the side, avoided greeting me, just raised his eyebrows when I looked at him, as though trying to convey the gravity of Dolores’ remarks.

She continued in a less offensive, but still agitated, tone: “Now I’ve told Philip that I invited you and your wife to stay in our house in March, and he says ‘I don’t think so.’ He says he doesn’t want you back at the farm.” Several weeks prior, Dolores had agreed to accommodate my wife and I for a few weeks in March, when my wife would be visiting from the United States. It was unfathomable to Dolores (and other whites on the farm) that my wife and I would stay in the compound together. I attempted damage control in response to her comments: “Oh, that’s terrible. I need to speak with him.” Meanwhile, Douglas muttered in the background, “yes, to straighten him out.” I detected a measure of empathy in his remark, that all was perhaps not lost for me. Heinrik then entered the office and, upon seeing me, stated abruptly, “I’m not saying anything,” and then stepped slowly towards me, as though I was an unpredictable animal. Heinrik had witnessed Philip rebuke Dolores for talking with me, and so exercised caution. I tried to level with him: “I don’t know what is going on. I’m trying to meet with Philip to clear my name.” Heinrik replied, “yes, there is much talking, they’re even saying you paid the bail.” I stated quickly “these are lies…I just hope he gives me a chance to explain.” Heinrik responded supportively, “yes, you can’t just leave, you have your work to do.” I began to feel some reassurance that Dolores, Logan and Heinrik ultimately did support me, even if they were somewhat skeptical, and needed to be reassured. Perhaps in my absence, the rumors of my collaboration with the arrested men seemed plausible and compelling, but when I was physically present in front of them they felt aligned to my
interests. Without essentializing “whiteness,” there was a sense in which being of the same race created almost instant connection and sense of camaraderie.

In the depth of my uncertainty, Philip finally appeared in his truck outside the office. He approached and asked me to accompany him into his office. Sitting across from me at a long table, he spoke with cold calculation. “Let me start just by telling you the magnitude of the syndicate that has been operating here. In one month, the farm could lose R 100,000 easily with the stealing, and we know that this was going on for three or four years.” “Yes, it’s terrible” I replied. As we talked, I felt the tension in the room lessen, sensing that Philip was becoming less stern and more conciliatory. Again, it seemed that my physical presence eased Philip’s fears and suspicion of me. For moment, it was as though he was confessing his sins: “So when I first heard it, I was filled with this uncontrollable rage. I feel bad about it, until last night when I finally gave myself up to the Holy Spirit and let it go. But when I first heard about the stealing,” he continued, “the rage was so bad, that when I saw Emmanuel I hit him.” Yet, whatever optimism I felt building inside was quickly dispelled with Philip’s next remarks:

I know it’s wrong, but for these primitive people, sometimes that’s the only language they understand. At first he was denying it, saying “no, no,” but after I hit him, he confessed to it. Now the problem with Arthur is that he is bluffing with me, saying that he will charge me for hitting his brother. But that’s small in comparison to what they did. The one is a minor charge. Now I am trying by all means to have these guys arrested. There is a problem in our justice system. Now all of this involves you because you were friends with these guys, you were eating together, sharing a room.

At this point in his narrative, I felt compelled to interrupt. This was my last chance, I reasoned, to salvage my fieldwork and prevent my eviction from Heddon Estates. Looking him in the eye, I spoke quickly but firmly: “Yes and let me interject, just to set the record straight. I am not involved with these guys in any way…I feel like
my reputation at the farm is being ruined by this.” A moment of silence followed my plea, and Philip nodded his head while I spoke. It seemed I had at least partially rebuilt a connection with him. He replied slowly, with a sympathetic tone:

So, just because of this, I feel we have a conflict of interest, and I think it is best if you put your studies on hold. Now I understand Dolores said your wife is coming in March. Why don’t we say that you come back with us in March and we will go from there?

As the discussion concluded I added, “well, it’s unfortunate that Emmanuel was tempted to steal. I suppose it is because of poverty. He and Arthur are still good people.” Philip replied assertively: “No. He has been at this for three years. And Lincoln, I would ask that you no longer associate with them. I will be having them arrested and sent to jail.” I feigned agreement with his request. He added as I left the office, “Just allow the dust to settle here, then you can come back here with your wife.” I then collected my few belongings from the compound and did not return to the farm for nearly two months.

**Following up with Arthur and Emmanuel**

During my hiatus from the farm, I had the opportunity to visit with Arthur and Emmanuel after they relocated to Pretoria and Johannesburg. Emmanuel found work as a mechanic’s assistant near Soweto. I asked him to tell me how he became involved with stealing chemicals. He started by differentiating himself from other workers at Heddon Estates: “Most people at the farm are afraid of losing their jobs. They don’t want to take risks. Their brains are on Heddon Estates.” He also explained how he was initiated into the practice of stealing chemicals from Oliver – a black manager left unscathed by the arrests. “When I came into the stores job three years ago, Oliver is the one who taught
me, and he was taught from long back. He said “Philip does not pay us the proper things…you mustn’t work for nothing.”” Knowing Emmanuel to be an avid evangelical Christian, I asked him if the stealing made him feel guilty or morally compromised.

Stealing is a bad thing. You will be feeling guilty. What will strengthen you is the treatment. Philip is stupid! To work with those chemicals, to be affected by them is worse than a life time smoker. And after all that, he tells you that you are doing something important! Then he gives you little money, and tells you he gives you a “fat salary!” If we are working together, we do it together, not insulting, telling you that you come from the bush…Philip can insult as if he knows where you come from. Ahhh that guy! He insults you as if you are his relative. He is malicious, full of shit.

When I visited with Arthur in Pretoria, who found work as a waiter in Spur restaurant, he presented a more hardline interpretation of the stealing. I also asked him why he chose not to press charges against Philip: “I knew that the guys did steal, and it was not fair to Philip. Stealing is a sin. I never had a problem with him [Philip] over the years. My victory was to take the guys out of prison. To press charges against Philip would have accomplished nothing.”

Although Arthur’s critique of stealing is stronger, even Emmanuel describes stealing as morally compromising on some level. These reflections shed light on how stealing by Zimbabweans can be theorized. For Scott (1985) and others, stealing is one among many “weapons of the weak” that peasants use to resist exploitation. It is just as “political” as peasant uprisings or other “on-stage” actions in that it stems from a basic sense of injustice, and shows the determination of the subaltern to act against the powerful. Genovese (1972), in contrast, presents stealing as more ambivalent in his analysis of slavery. Stealing among black slaves legitimized the paternalistic ethic among white masters, as it confirmed what they perceived as the depraved condition of
blacks that needed moral uplift. Stealing could help blacks by, for example, off-setting hunger but it also contradicted their Christianity which was essential for constructing a moral critique of slavery and laying the foundations for future liberation.

Taking a cue from Genovese, stealing at Heddon Estates seems self-defeating for Zimbabweans. Not only does stealing undermine the moral high ground for workers, it also invites reprisal from management that results in potential leaders being removed from the farm. If stealing is a common strategy under delegated despotism, in part due to the lack of direct oversight from the white owner, it also tends to reproduce the logic of the regime. Resistance is channeled into individualistic, divisive activity that diminishes the construction of relatively autonomous institutions needed for more sustained, collective struggle. One could argue, in contrast, that most Zimbabwean workers live in an itinerant condition in which farms are nothing more than temporary stopping points along broader patterns of migration. In this perspective, individualistic “weapons of the weak” are all that could be expected of Zimbabweans. This argument overlooks, however, the prevalence of strikes by Zimbabweans. The next section provides an analysis of one such strike.

The Strike

One April morning a cry was heard as people gather at the roll-call, “Pamberi ne Zanu!” (Forward ZANU-PF!). This slogan, common at ruling party rallies in Zimbabwe, was yelled by a lone worker amidst the mass of workers as they entered the gate. Uproarious laughter erupted in response while Clayton, absorbed in consultation with other senior foremen, angrily yelled, “get behind the gate, you drunkard!” Dismissing the cry as a drunken outburst, Clayton did not grasp its significance. In fact, the shouter was
not drunk. His slogan was part of a loosely concocted plan by several tomato pickers to initiate a strike. Having been paid a few days earlier, pickers were angry that their wages were not increased as had been promised by Philip.

In any event, the roll-call proceeded as usual, and the over two hundred pickers boarded their respective tractors and trailers, and went out the fields with no outward signs of discontent. But on their arrival at the designated land for picking, people refused to disembark. A spokeswoman, Mai Rudo, conveyed the picker’s grievance to Clayton and expressed that people will not work until they are given confirmation from Philip that their pay has been raised. Clayton incredulously responded that Philip was away and nothing could be done at the moment. Not persuaded, pickers began singing and dancing in the fields, while Clayton and other foremen stood around awkwardly. At some distance, the pack shed stood silent and its workers idle, while the cargo of several large trucks parked by the road – customers hoping to buy tomatoes and get to markets in Mozambique, Johannesburg and Durban by the end of the day – remained empty.

For once, it seemed the workers at Heddon Estates were rising up, challenging Philip’s power structure. Upon closer inspection, however, the strike was conducted within the boundaries of this power structure, even as it placed limits on that power. As with the stealing of chemicals, my intention is to use the strike diagnostically to learn more about the shifting production regime. In the context of delegated despotism strikes appear increasingly common, yet they are rarely successful unless they are conducted along “conservative” lines by appealing to an existing expectation structure, and involve large numbers of workers. This strike also suggests how important gender divisions are
to maintaining labor control as well as the unique leverage enjoyed by women in labor conflicts of this sort.

The strike emerged at an inopportune time for me. I had recently returned to the farm after a two-month hiatus due to the controversy around stealing. Upon my return, it was incumbent on me at this time to demonstrate allegiance to the white community, to regain Philip’s trust. Thus, I had to stay away from the labor issue, to avoid my name arising in any association with it. This made it difficult to research the strike as it unfolded. Most of the questions I asked workers came from later on, after the event itself had passed on. Yet, I was able to witness some crucial encounters, such as Clayton’s speech to striking workers where he pleaded with them to return to work. Most of the data presented here are based on re-construction from interviews rather than my own eye-witness account.

**Increasing Labor Unrest?**

In contrast to other labor regimes in commercial agriculture, delegated despotism seems especially prone to strikes from workers. The lack of personal ties between the farm owner and mass of workers perhaps contributes to labor unrest. This point is not novel: decades ago, scholars such as Wolf (1959) and Mintz (1959) as well as Genovese (1972) pointed out that as plantations adopt more impersonal, business-like labor relations, strikes and unionization among workers become more common-place. Yet, their assumptions were based on a narrow teleology that perceived increasing proletarian consciousness among workers as a function of plantations becoming less family-orientated.
It is true that under apartheid-era paternalism on South African farms, many workers were deferential and saw themselves as family members joined with the farmers’ interests. Yet, this ideological consent was supplemented with an important “objective” source of labor control, namely the threat of eviction. For many resident farm workers – the dominant farm labor category throughout the apartheid period – the farm was their home and location of their families. Eviction was tantamount to destitution. Therefore, most workers did not strike because the potential consequences (eviction) were too difficult to face. On the other end of the spectrum, some farms relied almost entirely on migrant labor and had few if any paternalistic practices (the notorious large farms in Bethal or sugar estates in Natal). In these cases, farmers had not only a free hand to beat and whip their workers, but also frequently locked them in chains during the night or killed workers on the spot. The routinized brutality of farmers foreclosed the possibility of strikes, and channeled resistance into acts of desertion and escape which aggravated persistent labor shortages (Bradford; 1993; Harries, 1996).

Farms in northern Limpopo where Zimbabweans predominate exhibit important differences from these examples. As I discussed in previous chapters, these farms are not totalizing “families” in the sense implied by traditional paternalism. Preoccupied with the pursuit of kuvaka musha in Zimbabwe, few Zimbabweans think of the farm as “home” and so the threat of eviction does not have much force against them. They are more educated than most farm workers and have little shared history with the farmer. Nor do white farmers enjoy an unlimited scope of action against migrant laborers as many had under apartheid. Farmer brutality is mitigated by a global discourse of human rights, state oversight and Global Gap certification programs that partially regulate the
treatment of labor. Whites themselves are less cruel taskmasters than distant authorities who express mild humanitarian sentiment. Although dehumanized in some ways, Zimbabweans are not chattel to them – at least not to an extent that workers are chained at night or routinely suffer physical violence. They have more freedom of action than migrants in the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, Zimbabweans perhaps have higher expectations for their lives than typical farm workers in the past. Many have a familiarity with resistance to white farmers as participants in occupations of white farms in Zimbabwe since 2000.

If the forces noted above contribute to strikes, what farmers have to their advantage is arithmetic. For Heddon Estates, there is almost an endless supply of workers sitting in the compound or can be gathered from southern Zimbabwe within a matter of a few days. A calculation of being highly replaceable hangs over most workers heads. It is then all the more striking that large scale strikes seem relatively common in northern Limpopo. In 2005, I witnessed a strike by over 400 orange pickers at Maswiri farm, 40 km south of Heddon Estates (Addison, 2006). Near the beginning of my fieldwork at Heddon Estates, I witnessed a smaller strike by a group of 20 irrigation workers. Yet, both of these strikes were crushed and workers were replaced in a matter of days. In contrast, the tomato picker strike was “successful” because it did not push the boundaries of paternalistic authority too far and, crucially, it involved large numbers of women. Let us now return to the origins of the strike.

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41 Illustrative parallels are found in the California farms portrayed in Steinbeck’s (1969) *The Grapes of Wrath*, the coal mines in Zola’s (1970) *Germinal*, or even the packing plants in Sinclair’s (1988) *The Jungle*, where workers are kept in line by an awareness of their expendability, by a reserve army of labor literally waiting at the doors for work.
Background to the Strike

How did the strike actually start? As indicated, Philip told the workers a few weeks earlier that the piece rate for crates of tomatoes would be raised, although he did specify how much. Up to that point, pickers were being paid R 1.50 per crate. Since the late 1990s, Philip has increased the rate per crate between 10 and 20 cents per season, increases that would take effect for the March pay, usually the first full month of picking. Pickers thus had the expectation in their mind that he would raise their wage. The context of the strike was then a broken promise by Philip. Over the period of a month, pickers earn anywhere between R 900 and R 1500 – strong pickers occasionally earn more than their foremen. However, tomato picking is extremely hard work.

Consider how much labor goes into filling a crate of tomatoes. On a typical day, each picker is assigned a row of tomatoes that sprout out from ground level bushes divided by narrow trenches. After the morning dew is lifted, men and women race bent over along their rows, furiously filling plastic crates with tomatoes as the sun reaches its zenith. Pickers cannot be indiscriminate in selecting tomatoes, but focus on particular grades according the day’s orders, or risk having foremen dump their crate without receiving credit for it. When a picker has filled his or her crate, he or she hoists the over 50 lb. crate on their shoulder and quickly return it roadside (women carry the crates on top of their head). If the needed variety is plentiful, a good picker can fill a crate and return it in less than 10 minutes. Most pickers average between 25 and 35 crates per day. The job requires considerable physical strength and determination. As I mentioned in chapter one, I idealistically intended to join of the “picking teams” as way of facilitating my research. This ambition proved short lived, as I could not tolerate the arduous labor.
I experienced heat exhaustion, sun burns, sore back, strained muscles, and the embarrassment of dropping filled crates of tomatoes as I struggled to carry them back to the edge of the field. I persisted for a few weeks expecting my body to adapt to the conditions, but instead I became ill and lacked energy to conduct research after work hours were finished. Moreover, I discovered that my efforts to engage in menial labor alongside blacks alienated me from other white informants, as my actions implicitly challenged the racial hierarchy of the farm, in which whites are automatically managers or skilled laborers.

To get a better sense of how the strike was organized, I interviewed a senior female picker several weeks after the strike. She explained how the strike was organized in advance. I asked her how people avoided the ever present threats of “selling” one another to management, and how the strike seemed to catch Clayton by surprise. She replied in hushed tones, “People only discussed the issue in small groups…It started in a group of four people, after we did not see the increase in our pay. These people discussed in secret and then negotiated with other senior men and women to tell their groups that there will be a strike on Monday.” Thus, the strike started as discrete rumblings of discontent. Then the word was passed along privately to other pickers. As she informed me of this, she added, “People are selling one another to the manager. Will you keep these things quiet, you won’t give me problems? People are selling the country.”

As with the shouting of pamberi ne Zanu to inspire strikers, her reference to people selling the country (vanhu vanotengesa nyika), conveys how Zimbabwean migrants utilize political discourse associated with ZANU-PF to further their cause at the
farm. Paradoxically, most farm workers I spoke to do not support ZANU-PF, including the shouter of that slogan. I asked him why he shouted “pamberi ne Zanu,” and he replied: “We just want to appear as if we are going to a rally…it draws comparison to home, people go to rallies even if they are not supporting the party. People are doing different jobs, so it can unite them. They were quickly reminded by it.” Zimbabweans can thus selectively draw on material and symbolic resources given from the past, and put these to different usage. They can draw upon ZANU-PF’s traditions of resistance to white rule and use it on the farm, even while disassociating themselves from political allegiance to the party in their home country. In this case they are not occupying farms for resettlement as occurred in Zimbabwe since 2000, but striking for higher wages on a white-owned farm in South Africa. They have, in a sense, flexible political affiliations to suit the conditions of the farm.

Clayton’s Strike Breaking

Let us return to the subsequent events that followed the confrontation in the fields. After Clayton pleaded with the pickers for several hours, the male pickers returned to work first and were followed by women more than an hour later. Women that I spoke to later claimed that “men were weak” and returned to work first because of fear. Clayton promised the workers that Philip would meet with them the following day to discuss their pay, but they had to continue their work for the day. In fact, when the strike broke out, I was amidst conversation with Dolores, and I overheard Clayton reporting the matter to Philip over the radio. Philip gave a short reply, saying only “Clayton, take care of it.” Philip was on his way to Musina and did not plan to return until much later. His
dismissive attitude towards the strike suggests that he did not take it very seriously, perhaps underestimating the resolve of workers.

This resolve was displayed the following day, when the pickers once again refused to work. Pickers had gone to the roll-call expecting Philip to address their concerns about the raise. He did not, apparently thinking that the strike issue would be resolved on its own. The pickers elected to strike once again. A similar scene unfolded, in which the pickers were transported out to the fields, and yet they refused to get up and work. I happened to be in the vicinity of a heated exchange between Clayton and the pickers. The pickers demanded to hear confirmation from Philip about their wages, while Clayton attempted to assuage their concerns and encourage them to return to work. The pickers were seated on the ground, while Mai Rudo continued to act as a spokesperson.

Transcript of Clayton Talking to Striking Workers:

Clayton: “Philip can’t talk where there is a lot of people, so you must pick, and afterwards I will call him, and call you, so you can negotiate, like I said this morning. [He had given them this instruction at roll call].

Mai Rudo: He must come if we are to pick, so we can get the full amount

Clayton: That’s true. But you just have to pick, he is not here.

Mai Rudo: He must come and speak to us.

Clayton: That’s true, he will come, but now he’s busy.

Clayton: He doesn’t want to speak where there is a lot of people, he will speak to you after we finished picking, I will call him so he can speak with you…I spoke with him and he agreed to raise the price, so if you are now refusing to work, you are playing with his mind.

Mai Rudo: That’s it, my God, if he can come for 5 minutes that will be excellent.

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42 I recorded this interaction on a video camera and translated the interaction in English with the help of my research assistant.
Clayton: He is no longer here, he went to Musina.

Mai Rudo: May his wife come.

Clayton: that’s impossible.

Clayton: You are just confusing yourself, by the time I will call him, he will come. And if he fails, then the problem will be mine.

Mai Rudo: It can’t be your problem, you are also a child like us.

Clayton: Why is it that Mai Rudo you are the only one speaking while others are silent?

Mai Rudo: We can’t speak at once.

Clayton: You are now the spokeswomen of all the ladies, because they are silent.

Mai Rudo: We can’t speak together at one time.

Clayton: Just give me one more day, if he fails to come in the afternoon, or tomorrow morning, you can continue with your strike. Tomorrow you must start it from the workshop.

Mai Rudo: Tomorrow you will come and give us a different story.

Clayton: It won’t be possible.

Clayton: You must go and work, if I phone him and inform him you people are no longer interested in working, it will be another story. This will be your last time to come to the field, if he doesn’t come and address you. Stay there at the workshop in the morning if he doesn’t come.

[Break]

Clayton: If he fails to come, you will realize I was lying. But I am telling the truth. Most of the time I speak the truth, I am yet to lie to anyone amongst you. Let’s go.

Clayton: Stand up Mavimba [a long term male worker seated on the ground], stand up ladies…let’s go to work. Do you think I can lie to you?

[Break]

Clayton: Now you are giving me problems, but when he comes most of you will be silent, only two or three will speak. Why don’t you save yourself trouble and come to work now. We need to look at the job now.
[women start standing up]

Clayton: Get away from behind that tree and let’s go and pick.

[Ladies whisper as they walk away: “why is it that the old men are not able to strike?” Discussion soon turns to picking, choosing rows, etc.]

As can be seen in this interaction between Clayton and the striking pickers, he uses a combination of threats and cordial reassurances to win the workers over. On one level, he presents himself as a common worker, joined to the picker’s cause. They should trust him to relay their concerns and resolve the problem, he suggests, because he can relate to their grievance. However, Mai Rudo cleverly points out a contradiction in his approach: the problem cannot be resolved without the involvement of Philip, precisely because Clayton is a “child” like them and without decision making power concerning wages. Frustrated that his appeals to shared interests do not lead workers back to the fields, he resorts increasingly to thinly veiled threats such as potential reprisals and efforts to identify spokespeople.

On the following day, Philip finally addressed the pickers. Instead of doing so at the general roll-call assembly, he chose to have them march up to the office and wait for him there, after other workers left the vicinity. I gathered from pickers who attended the meeting that he made a few simple remarks. He began his speech by briefly recounting the history of the farm, how it built up slowly over the years and how people who have worked hard have been rewarded. He then gave pickers an ultimatum: he offered to raise the price per crate to R 1.70, and those who accept the new rate can form one line, while

43 Unfortunately, I avoided this meeting because I did not want Philip feel threatened again by my presence near a “labor problem,” especially given that I had only recently returned from my temporary exile.
those who disagree can from another. I was told that no picker stood aside and chose to reject the offer. All pickers returned to work and no one was fired.

**Conclusion**

The manner in which the strike is resolved affirms the argument concerning labor control under delegated despotism. If under apartheid-era paternalism, white farmers’ power rested largely on the ability to evict workers, this power is diluted as migrant laborers with strong ties off the farm become dominant. Power is exercised less through the direct orders of the owner (although these are still significant) but percolates throughout the hierarchy, particularly in figures such as Clayton. The strike underscores the critical and awkward position of black managers as they are tasked with maintaining order and stability within a highly transient and exploited work force.

Another important and much commented feature of the strike was the prominent role played by women. As indicated, women were on the forefront of initiating the strikes and were more persistent in their willingness to hold out for their demands. As one woman commented: “it was revealed in the strike that the men are afraid of being expelled, and women are more united than men.” Another woman stated: “Women are stronger, the men should be wearing skirts. Most of the ladies are looking after children without the help of anyone, they are more desperate and will strike more.” Because women are more focused and committed to supporting their families, this latter comment suggests, they are more militant when it comes to strike action. There is truth to this claim, but another factor also allows women to be more assertive: the sexual economy. As one man commented after the strike, “it is difficult to fire women because they might be wives or girlfriends with the manager. Women are very more important than men.”
Women have added leverage because they may be the sexual partners with high-ranking men on the farm – at least five of the striking women were known to be girlfriends of Clayton’s – a possibility many women informants also acknowledged. The sexual economy emerges as crucial terrain through which women hope to enhance their livelihoods while working under conditions of delegated despotism.
Chapter Three: “The Babies Are Dying!” The Sexual Economy, Gender Relations and Narratives of Infant Death

One brisk May morning during my fieldwork, Philip announced at the roll-call that all “farm mothers,” women with children at the farm, must gather at the main office to “have a word” with him. Thirty or so women, many with babies on their backs, strolled up the road to the office, and sat on the ground awaiting Philip. Most women did not know what he would speak about. Some speculated quietly, as I stood among them, that he would address the topic of babies dying: two died in the farm compound over the weekend. Eventually, Philip emerged from his Toyota pick-up and, as was the established practice, addressed workers through his senior black supervisor, Clayton, who translated his message into Shona.

Clayton, first of all, tell the women that my heart is very sore about what has been happening at this farm, with the babies dying. We used to have a very good name at this farm, no babies died here for years and years. So now we have to look at it. Why are babies suddenly starting to die? We need to look at hygiene, we need to look at feeding, we need to manage the babies more carefully.

Philip went on to emphasize that women coming from the fields must make sure to shower and wash their hands before handling babies. He told the women they should get tested for HIV/AIDS, that if they are positive they must not breast feed. He announced that he will buy powdered milk formula for all farm mothers so that they could supplement their babies’ diets. “The only thing is,” he added, “we need to figure out how dispense it. We can’t just hand them out, otherwise women will just end up selling the
tins.” He seemed unconcerned or unaware that Clayton and three other black managers standing off to the side, were the fathers of more than half of the babies present.\(^ {44} \)

In subsequent days, speculation and gossip regarding the baby deaths were rife on the farm. Two dominant explanations emerged. First, similar to Philip, other white employees attributed the deaths to poor hygiene and HIV/AIDS. Second, an alternative explanation surfaced among mostly male Zimbabwean workers, that of “blood mixing” \((kusanganisa ropa)\). In this explanation, pregnant women who have sex with men other than the partner whose child they are carrying fall victim to “bad luck” or evil spirits that can kill newborn babies. A third interpretation, expressed by only a few workers, viewed the baby deaths as cases of infanticide. According to male and female informants closest to the women involved, the babies were most likely killed by their own mothers. Of the two cases, it was claimed that one died of deliberate neglect during sickness and the other was strangled by its mother. Over the next several months, this infanticide narrative gained more credence among workers, even as the other explanations persisted.

Initially, it was curious that the baby deaths provoked such public proclamations. Philip seldom took interest in the private affairs of his workers and the Zimbabweans rarely discussed sexual matters so openly. For Philip and the exponents of blood mixing, it was as though the deaths touched a sensitive place, as if they posed some kind of threat. In Philip’s case, the deaths could lead to criticism of the poor living and working circumstances on his farm. His explanation emphasizes the individual hygienic practices of mothers perhaps to minimize the role of farm conditions in infant mortality. For the

\(^ {44} \) This assertion is based on observations by other farm workers employed at Heddon Estates, who mentioned this point to me during interviews.
predominantly male exponents of blood mixing, their accusations are possibly motivated by frustration at the loss of breadwinner status to their female counterparts. Though expressed more quietly, the rumor of infanticide implies a desperate position for mothers employed at the farm. Yet, it is not so much the explanations themselves that are of interest, but what they reveal about sexual economies in commercial agriculture.

Scholars have explored the political economy of sex elsewhere in South Africa, but few have addressed the specific conditions on farms. The need to know more about this context is urgent. As a recent publication from International Organization of Migration (IOM) (2010: 26) reports, populations inhabiting commercial farms in Limpopo and Mpumulanga provinces possess among the highest HIV/AIDS rates in South Africa (39.5 per cent). Additionally, some evidence suggests that rural wage employment is a more effective means of poverty alleviation for African women than small-holder agriculture and other forms of self-employment (Sender et al. 2006; Oya and Sender 2009). Given that the sexual economy is such a prominent feature of social life on commercial farms, in what ways does it influence the livelihoods and welfare of women working for wages?

In other South African settings, scholars point to growing unemployment, increased migration and changing gender identities as forces which contribute to transactional sex (Shishana and Leickness 2002; IOM 2004; Collinson et al. 2006; Hunter 2010). These factors also apply to commercial farms, but what remains to be examined is the role of changing labor relations. As I outlined in Chapter one, since the 1990s a vast transformation has occurred in the northern Limpopo valley, according to which the sector has consolidated around large scale farms, and Zimbabwean migrants have steadily
replaced Venda families as units of employment. Farm employment includes unprecedented numbers of female workers and a high degree of turnover among workers. These demographic shifts suggest a potentially greater variety of people participating in the sexual economy than in the past. Families as units of employment have declined, and black supervisors increasingly serve as a primary locus of coercion on the farm and in the sexual economy. Moreover, the monetization of erstwhile benefits that were once given free of charge places pressure on women to earn income however they can, including transactional sex.

Each discourse surrounding the baby deaths provides a point of departure for analyzing the implications the sexual economy presents for women farm workers. Philip’s donation of formula appears emblematic of traditional paternalism, but it also has the effect of distancing him from transactional sex on the farm. His reliance on predatory supervisors for the control of labor makes him indirectly responsible for coercive aspects of the sexual economy. The discourse of blood mixing underscores the differential economic impact the sexual economy has upon men and women. As a commentary on women’s behavior, blood mixing is one of many ways that men express resentment over women’s successes in the sexual economy. While this section presents data supporting the economic gains of women, the third section complicates this picture by sharing the story of Eunice, a farm mother who allegedly committed infanticide. Her story conveys an inherent disadvantage for women in the sexual economy: the ease with which men can deny their role in cases of pregnancy and leave women without financial assistance.

Before returning to the story of baby deaths, some historical context is necessary. To examine how the sexual economy has changed, the next section reconstructs how
gender relations were constituted under traditional paternalism in the northern Limpopo valley. Until processes of agricultural restructuring began to unfold in the 1980s, women farm workers were situated by a “patriarchal agreement” between male heads of households and white farmers. As I explain below, the unraveling of this agreement produces contradictory implications for the status of women on farms.

**Gender Relations in Northern Limpopo**

In the arid Limpopo valley north of the Zoutpansberg Mountains, white agriculture did not establish a firm foothold until the 1930s. The relative lateness of this development – in comparison to other parts of South Africa – was due to the prevalence of tropical diseases, long distances from markets and armed resistance from Venda groups, among other factors (Wagner 1988; Lahiff 2000). By the 1930s, government subsidies for white settlers, the extension of railway and military subjugation and displacement of the Venda established the conditions for white farming. In the north east portion of valley scores of white farmers relied upon Venda people as labor or cash tenants (Mulaudzi, 2000). As elsewhere in South Africa, tenancy required Africans to work a certain portion of the year in exchange for access to land and grazing (Maliba 1939; Keegan 1987). Throughout the mid-20th century, labor tenancy often coexisted with other labor forms, such as migrant, prison and wage labor, yet tenancy remained the

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45 The Limpopo valley has fallen under different jurisdiction in the past, including Zoutpansberg District, northern Transvaal, Northern Province and (presently) Limpopo province. The area I focus on is the north east corner of the Limpopo valley, bounded by the Limpopo River in the north, Tshipise to the south, Weipe in the west and Malala Drift in the east.
dominant form until it was eventually surpassed by resident wage labor in the 1950s at the earliest (Marcus 1989; Mulaudzi 2000: 287). As I argued in Chapter One, in this context both tenancy and settled wage labor were governed by “traditional” paternalism.

As Van Onselen (1992) observes, a central conduit of paternalistic power was the role of labor provisioning played by black male heads of households. In the Limpopo valley and elsewhere, paternalism depended on a patriarchal agreement between white farmers and the male heads of households on their farms. Farmers recognized the authority of male workers over their own families while the latter provided the labor of their wives and children during peak harvest times (Mulaudzi 2000, 260-261; Van Onselen 1992: 134). In this context, women were dependent on their husbands for accommodation and access to land. In addition to their work for the white farmer, women were required to perform unpaid domestic and agricultural labor for their tenant household (Orton et al. 2001: 472). The patriarchal agreement was contested primarily through desertion or movement off the farm. Wives and children frequently fled the farms in search of better paid employment in cities (Bradford 1987, 50; Jeeves and Crush 1997: 21).

In part, the problem of securing a reliable labor force led farmers to support the abolition of tenancy in favor of wage labor confined to the farm. In northern Limpopo, the rise of resident wage labor in the 1960s and 70s diminished only

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46 Resident or settled wage labor refers to workers that live most of the year on the white owned farm, but do not have access to land for grazing and cultivation as under tenancy.
47 In the Western Cape, Waldman (1996:74) describes how adolescent girls were less vulnerable to threat of eviction than other workers – a central aspect of labor control on farms – given their greater capacity to find employment off the farm as domestic workers.
48 See Marcus (1989) for a more detailed discussion of the shift from tenancy to wage labor throughout the Transvaal.
partially the role of male household heads as conduits for obtaining labor. Farmers continued to employ Venda families who lived on their farm property, even as they increasingly supplemented these workers with seasonal Venda workers from the nearby homeland or villages in southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Many seasonal workers were independent or unmarried women, but most women living on farms remained dependent on their husbands for jobs and accommodation. As was the case under labor tenancy, if a husband was fired the wife was often told to leave the farm as well. Gender relations remained largely defined by the patriarchal arrangement described above until the onset of agricultural restructuring in the 1980s, involving the removal of agricultural subsidies, new forms of labor market regulation, and the casualization and externalization of labor.\footnote{These processes are described in detail in the “Theoretical and Historical Framework” of the Introduction.}

How gender relations on farms have changed amidst these processes is a matter of debate among scholars. Kritzinger and Vorster (1996) assert that farm women gain greater independence, given the breakdown of male-headed families as units of employment. As already indicated, in the past the employment of women workers was tied to the status of their husbands. To a large extent, the shift towards a more flexible labor force has unraveled the patriarchal agreement characteristic of paternalism since many women are now employed as independent individuals. Relatedly, Orton et al. (2001) argue that gendered assumptions about feminine “nimble fingers” and patience ensure employment for women in restructured agriculture, given its focus on export led production and high quality produce. Yet, the same authors suggest, these very gender
ideologies also impede women from advancing into supervisor or management positions. In contrast to these relatively optimistic perspectives, Marcus (1989) and Segal (1991) emphasize that the restructuring of agriculture increases opportunities for sexual abuse by managers and senior figures towards women workers, given that unprecedented numbers of independent women are present. While each of these perspectives reveals something important about the changing status of women on farms, they do not specify how the restructuring of agriculture shapes the sexual economy and the contradictory opportunities that this presents for women.

The restructuring of agriculture transforms the sexual economy in several ways. The composition of farm worker populations in the Limpopo Valley has changed dramatically since the 1990s. Instead of Venda families living more or less permanently on the farm, there is a larger proportion of casual workers from Zimbabwe, including unprecedented numbers of independent female migrants. The temporary and seasonal nature of employment ensures a high degree of turnover among workers, as does the tendency for migrants to use the farms as “rest stops” before proceeding southwards (Rutherford 2008; Bolt 2010). As has been argued in other African contexts, the lack of family ties and greater anonymity among such migrant populations can allow for greater sexual freedom (De La Torre, 2009; IOM 2010; Kwena et al. 2012). The withdrawal of paternalistic entitlements, such as free accommodation, food and other forms of assistance by white farmers may compel women use sex to meet material needs. The point is analogous to recent research on a sugar plantation in Tanzania, where the withdrawal of social welfare following privatization encouraged transactional sex among workers (Norris and Worby 2012: 367).
Women’s participation in the sexual economy can bring them substantial economic reward, but they are not necessarily “empowered” in this process. Often, high ranking figures such as Clayton abuse their position by demanding sexual favors from women. The increasing delegation of authority is therefore one way that Philip is indirectly complicit in the sexual economy, a process connected to a broader withdrawal of services and benefits at the farm. The manner in which whites responded to the baby deaths obscures this complicity and gives a false impression of widespread paternalistic benevolence. I therefore deconstruct the donation of formula below.

“The Babies Are Dying!”

Following Philip’s speech to the farm “mothers,” I stayed in the vicinity of the farm office and conversed with Dolores, the white office manager. Among her responsibilities, she served as the de facto farm nurse, although she had no official training. Since Heddon Estates was relatively isolated – the nearest town is fifty kilometers via a dust road – her nurse role was important. Apart from weekly visits by a Doctors Without Borders mobile clinic, she was the only medical service provider for farm workers. On an almost daily basis, she dispensed medication to workers with common ailments, such as flu, diarrhea and syphilis. Dolores applauded Philip for offering to purchase milk for the mothers. Still, she expressed consternation regarding the baby deaths, and for not being consulted by the mothers: “The babies are dying! I don’t get it! What’s wrong with these women? There is a free health service here. Is it because I’m white?”

Like Philip, Dolores indirectly blamed the mothers themselves for the deaths. It was their lack of education, their “primitive” African customs and poor hygiene:
Look at how they feed their babies. They lay that baby flat on their laps, and force feed it *sadza*, but this way the porridge goes straight to the lungs, and if the baby has the flu, they can die. It is soft-food asphyxiation. They are feeding them this stuff at three months, which is far too young. It’s just so in them.

What exactly, I asked her, is “in” them? “Well,” she replied, “it is just the way they are brought up, and it’s hard to get rid of. The way people are brought up has a big effect.” She later added: “It’s not the black people’s fault they are uneducated. They were minding their own business when Van Rieback landed at the Cape. If the whites never came, they would still be running around in their buckskins.” Her response did not rebuke the mothers, but conveyed frustration and sympathy for them. Likewise, Philip’s donation of formula may have shown genuine concern for the health of babies on the farm. These reactions are indices how of traditional paternalism continues to be relevant for the self-perception and ideology of white farmers. Yet, the donation is also an exceptional gesture that goes against a general tendency of withdrawing paternalistic entitlement, as argued in Chapter Two.

The formula donation also distances Philip from the promiscuous behavior of black managers. As I described in Chapter Two, these “top structure” figures frequently abuse their authority by extorting other Zimbabweans for bribes and sex. Virtually every new worker at the farm pays a bribe to a senior manager, in amounts ranging from R 200 to R 500. Women are often compelled to “pay” their employment debt through sex, or to provide sex if they wish to gain other work-related benefits. Yet, high-ranking men also pay for sex. I was told by several farm workers that each of the senior foremen maintains one or more “regular” girlfriends residing in Compound One, to whom they pay cash,
groceries and other goods not exceeding the usual amounts in the sexual economy.\textsuperscript{50}

Informants reported that these senior figures have fathered many of the children in the compound. Philip gave evidence of being aware that the top structure figures on his farm are highly promiscuous:

Unfortunately, the higher the person’s position, they’ve used that to their own benefit, I think, because they believe they are now a king in their own domain, that they are entitled to the best of the women, which is unfortunate. But bear in mind also that it’s acceptable to have more than one wife in their culture, it’s a norm to send their wife home, the wife that they have paid lobola and they’ve got their children with, and then take on a mistress to do the cooking and other services.

While Philip acknowledged that the senior leadership he appointed was involved in many sexual relationships, he stopped short of connecting his strategy of indirect rule with widespread transactional sex on his farm. His comments imply that promiscuity was related to African culture, disguising his own responsibility for the coercive aspects of the sexual economy.

In sum, Philip’s donation of formula following the death of babies distanced him from the realities of the sexual economy. The gift of formula implicitly assumed that the death of babies results from poor hygiene or the transmission of HIV/AIDS through breast milk. In other words, the responsibility for the baby deaths was placed on the mothers themselves, while farm conditions were ignored. The gesture removes the sexual economy from discussion and instead directs attention towards the individual behavior of mothers, obscuring the highly unequal power structure that leaves most people, specifically women, with few other options than to participate in the sexual economy.

\textsuperscript{50} The amounts paid in the sexual economy are discussed more fully in the next section.
In multiple ways, the changing production regime at Heddon Estates cultivates conditions for the sexual economy. The reliance on Zimbabwean migrant laborers, most of whom are unmarried, marks a radical departure from a labor force centered on male-headed households characteristic of traditional paternalism, in which workers and their wives and children lived more permanently at the farm. Philip takes only partial interest in the social or off-work activities of his workers, and feels little moral responsibility for his workers’ behavior. Low wages paid to most workers, particularly women, encourage the latter to seek other income opportunities in secondary economies, including transactional sex. Moreover, a small clique of black managers empowered by Philip often use its influence to solicit sexual favors from women, even if at other times they also pay for sex. More broadly, promiscuous black managers set an example that other men emulate. As Bolt (2010) notes in a study on another Limpopo farm, lower ranking men gain favor and develop camaraderie with senior managers by imitating the latter’s sexual behavior, a process also evident at Heddon Estates.

Yet, if the production regime contributes to the conditions for the sexual economy, women are not simply helpless victims coerced into sex. Certainly, in cases where managers or senior figures demand sexual favors, women risk losing their job or angering powerful figures if they refuse. Yet, most relationships are far more consensual and women are known to be initiators in some instances. Many women have turned the sexual economy to their advantage, demanding payments and grocery subsidies from their male counterparts. It is their successes in the sexual economy that provide the context for accusations of blood mixing.

**Blood Mixing**
At a morning roll-call the day after Philip spoke to the farm mothers, Clayton addressed the entire work force:

There is an issue of children dying in the compound. Yesterday, the white man spoke with you mothers about the children…If you are pregnant by a man, and he goes to Joburg, then don’t take chances to sleep with another man, because the blood will not mix. Don’t look for other men if you are pregnant, his blood will not mix with the child’s blood.

As he raised the point about blood mixing, several hundred people applauded, shouts of “that’s right!” and “one hundred percent!” were heard from the crowd. Most who shouted in agreement were men, but one woman yelled “that’s true, the child will be burnt.” Later, as I spoke with my Zimbabwean informants about the meaning of blood mixing, I learned that it is a common belief in southern Zimbabwe where most workers originate. Many people believed that for a pregnant woman to have sex with someone other than the father of the fetus invokes angry ancestral spirits that create “bad luck” for the people involved or harm the new born baby. My purpose is not to question the validity of this belief but, by probing the sentiment behind it, assess how the sexual economy affects gender relations among farm workers. The blood mixing narrative revealed deep anxiety among men as their ability to support their rural homesteads in Zimbabwe is undermined by payments they give women in the course of transactional relationships. To illuminate this argument further, I provide more details on the sexual economy below.

The sexual economy at Heddon Estates comprises a spectrum of transactional relationships, ranging from temporary cohabitation or long term partnerships, known as *kuchaya mapoto*, to pay-on-the-spot, private encounters known as *chiback*. Literally
translated as “knocking the pots around,” *kuchaya mapoto* \(^{51}\) connotes the domestic labor performed by women in the relationship. In addition to sex, women often cook, wash clothes and clean the hostel room or mud hut for their male counterpart. \(^{52}\) Men pay for these services typically by purchasing groceries for their partner. *Chiback*, in contrast, refers to a form of cash-and-carry transactional sex. Men pay the on the spot for sexual intercourse at an agreed-upon price. This usually occurs at night or during the day in secluded, bush areas. As the term implies, they are secretive relationships carried out “behind the back” of one’s wife or cohabiting partner. A man or woman can have any number of *chiback* partners.

*Kuchaya mapoto* and *chiback* relationships are confined to the farm and only in rare instances does a long term partnership develop into “official,” culturally-sanctioned marriage. Marriage is still an important aspiration, especially for younger workers, but most workers do not expect to marry another farm worker. During conversations, men frequently characterized women on the farm as *mahure* (prostitutes) unfit for marriage, while women often critiqued men for not supporting their children and families. Many male workers are already married, but their female spouses remain in Zimbabwe and visit the farm infrequently and for short periods, usually to collect their husbands’ wages. These visits can be fraught with conflict as wives often discover their husbands’ indiscretions, while other wives seem to tolerate extra-marital liaisons so long as effort is

\(^{51}\) *Kuchaya mapoto* is also discussed in other works. For historical context see Jeater (1993), for its practice in urban settings see Muzvidziwa (2002), and for analysis of it on Zimbabwean farms see Rutherford (2001).

\(^{52}\) The collection of firewood, one of the most labor intensive activities, was done by both partners in the relationships. This perhaps represents a compromise over how much labor women can be expected to perform in these relationships.
made to hide the relationships. In contrast, most women workers are divorcees and widows. Divorcees stated that their marriages fell apart primarily due to their husband’s infidelity. According to many of these women, marriage is a failed institution, and they do not expect to be married again except as a second wife in a polygamous marriage, something most are unwilling to accept. For most their primary focus is on supporting children and their own homesteads in Zimbabwe. As one woman put it, “It’s not time for marrying, it’s time for working for kids and parents.”

While I found respondents to be open about their marital history, they were less willing to discuss the non-marital sexual relationships they have on the farm. Despite their commonplace occurrence, most workers felt these relationships were still inappropriate because they deviated from proper behavior as understood in rural areas of Zimbabwe where most came from. For this reason, it is difficult to determine precisely how many workers are involved in *kuchaya mapoto* or *chiback* relationships. However, when I asked workers in general terms how many people participate in these relationships, the answer invariably was “everyone” or “almost everyone.” While these responses contain perhaps some exaggeration, they nevertheless suggest that the majority of workers participate.

Given such large scale involvement in the sexual economy, there is substantial economic impact that shapes gender relations on the farm. As indicated, the sensitivity surrounding *kuchaya mapoto* and *chiback* made it inappropriate to ask workers how

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53 For instance, men who were involved in kuchaya mapoto relationships could insist that their partner move to another hut or room in the farm compound before their wife arrived. This would not work in occasional cases where the wife showed up at the farm by surprise.
much they paid or received in their relationships. One way around this problem was to ask workers how much they spent on average each month at the farm. On average, men reported spending R 480 per month and women reported R 150. What accounts for the lower spending (R 330) of women? Wages for male and female respondents were almost equal, so men did not have “extra” income to spend. Some informants stated that women were disciplined at saving money because “they think of their children and families back home,” in contrast to men perceived as prone to spend money on drinking, gambling and other “wasteful” hobbies. However, the difference in spending seems not only due to women’s discipline, but also to the resources men provide them in the sexual economy. These payments add to the expenditure of men, and in some cases (as with groceries, clothing or other expenses women would otherwise buy on their own) result in savings for women. How much do men pay? Informants commented in general terms that payments vary depending on the people involved. I was told that in some cases a chiback encounter can cost several hundred rand, but in others chicken pieces and coca-cola suffices. In kuchaya mapoto, I was told men commonly pay for shared monthly groceries that cost approximately R 300, but some also give gifts of jewelry, clothing or cell phones or additional cash payments.

In an environment characterized by low wages and scarcity, what appear to be small payments are actually quite significant, particularly when one accounts for the accumulation of these payments over the usual nine or ten months spent at the farm. Income that women earn in kuchaya mapoto and chiback increases their savings above that of men, and it is widely claimed that they return home to Zimbabwe with more cash and goods. The tendency for women to return home with more goods and savings to
show for their time at the farm produces great anxiety among Zimbabwean men. This anxiety is produced by the strong emphasis Zimbabweans place on the improvement of their homesteads and support of those family members left behind, what I have identified as the widespread sentiment of *kuvaka musha*. As I argued in Chapter One, men in particular told me that good standing with friends and relatives and prestige in the rural areas depends on demonstrating *kuvaka musha* improvements. I was told on many occasions that a man who arrives home without having acquired significant funds or goods can become the target of scorn and derision at home. I was also told that some men, failing to save enough money, do not return to Zimbabwe at all. As one worker put it, “a man is measured by what he brings home.”

Men are aware that their participation in the sexual economy undermines their ability to *kuvaka musha*, while bolstering that of women. One male worker stated: “if your sister comes with you to the farm, she will build a bigger house than you at home.” Consider the following comments from a farm worker preacher at a church gathering in the farm compound:

This year we must be open to one another in order to prosper. Your actions will be rewarded. Some of us will have prostitutes here, while keeping our wives in Zimbabwe. Who then is your wife: the one for two weeks or the one for a year? The one in Zimbabwe will receive a plastic bag and the one here will receive a *shangaan* bag. We will face it in heaven….You ladies, you can build everything you want but you won’t sleep in that house due to death and diseases. It will be of little significance.

The preacher’s comments not only provide warnings against immorality, they also reveal anxiety over the emergence of women as more robust homestead supporters. Farm women, referred to as prostitutes, receive the much larger “shangaan bag” of groceries than the “real wife” at home in Zimbabwe. These women will build houses in rural
Zimbabwe, so says the preacher, but they will die of diseases or “bad luck.” Similar to the accusation of blood mixing, women are threatened with a form of spiritual retribution for their economic successes.

As men fall short of the social expectations implied in *kuvaka musha*, they tend to blame women for their failure (c.f. Ferguson, 1999). Most men view women as experienced divorcees seeking to lure young men as their sexual victims. Women are accused of using witchcraft or other magic (*Mupfu hwira*) to seduce men. One said: “The problem is, if you look at the ages, we have smaller guys and the women are more mature. They are drawing them in.” In contrast, women attribute blame equally or blame men for promiscuity on the farm. As one female informant explained: “Men are the initiators, they pretend as if they want to help you.”

Related to the narrative which blames women for promiscuity is widespread suspicion among men that women with whom they cohabit have *chiback* relationships with other men. As one man put it, “you have to expect it, that someone will be with my woman. You have to put in place measures.” Such measures might include asking a friend or relative to “watch over” one’s partner while the man is at work, or trying to restrict the partner’s movement around the farm compound. If a woman is caught “cheating” with another man (or possibly even suspected) she is likely to be beaten by the man she cohabits with. Men seek to justify these beatings by emphasizing that they pay the women to stay with them and that, in addition, they can demand back whatever money they have given. Beatings occur during the night to avoid the attention of the farm security guards who, even if they notice, are unlikely to intervene unless there are serious injuries. Like charges of “blood mixing,” this violence against women is an
expression of deeper frustration among men, in part rooted in their perception that women undermine their ability to save for *kuvaka musha* in Zimbabwe.

The explanation of blood mixing alerts us to how the sexual economy channels resources towards women and generates anxiety among men. This is not to deny the extent to which blood mixing is a sincere belief among its exponents. The fact that some women agree with blood mixing suggests that it is not only an expression of male anxiety, but a widely held belief in its own right. Yet, because blood mixing primarily blames women for sexual permissiveness – suggesting that they should know better than to seduce men while pregnant – it represents a convenient tool with which men reproach women in the face of their relative success. Moreover, the collective male resentment towards women (implied in blood mixing) generates a measure of patriarchal solidarity among men, despite the large inequality between ordinary male workers and managers.

In sum, women are widely assumed to return to Zimbabwe with more savings than men, largely as a result of transactional relationships in the compound. Most women use their income to buy clothing and pay school fees for children they have left with other relatives in Zimbabwe. Some women, particularly those in their 30s and 40s, own homestead and livestock in Zimbabwe. As divorcees or mothers out of wedlock, many women could be described as social outcasts in their home communities, but by working at the farm they have enhanced their status. While many women are able to utilize the sexual economy to their advantage, there are negative consequences. The labor performed in the course of *kuchaya mapoto* (cooking, cleaning) relationships adds to the existing work-load women endure during their employment at the farm. The specter of diseases like HIV/AIDS, alluded to by the preacher above, do in fact loom large at the
farm. A study by a local health organization estimated the population of Heddon Estates to have a 30 per cent HIV infection rate.\textsuperscript{54} I was told on many occasions that women in *kuchaya mapoto* and *chiback* are unable to insist on condom usage, and men prefer not to use them.\textsuperscript{55} Women can be left with unwanted pregnancies that undermine their economic progress or damage their social standing at home in Zimbabwe. Such negative consequences caution against blanket descriptions of the sexual economy as a productive source of “agency” for women. They suggest instead a more critical perspective in which women’s economic gains are balanced against the inherent risks in the sexual economy. The story of Eunice, a farm mother suspected of committing infanticide, illustrates sharply the contradictory implications of the sexual economy on the status of women. Eunice was proactive at initiating relationships in the sexual economy but her plans did not turn out as she intended.

**Eunice**

I did not learn about the possibility of infanticide until a few days after Philip and Clayton spoke publicly regarding the baby deaths. I interviewed a senior woman, Ambuya Rachel, the aunt of one of the women, Eunice, who lost her baby. She lived in her own mud hut, less than ten meters from Eunice’s hut. Recently, Ambuya Rachel had buried Eunice’s baby in the banks of a nearby river. Eventually I asked her how Eunice’s child died. She replied in hushed tones: “You should know the truth. It’s a secret…but

\textsuperscript{54} This estimate was based on voluntary HIV/AIDS tests that were conducted by the organization at the farm over a period of several weeks, and involved over one hundred workers. Because the tests were voluntary, this figure is likely conservative.  
\textsuperscript{55} Similar to other research on transactional sex in Africa, the fact that women are the recipients of cash and goods appears to diminish their negotiating power to insist on condoms (Dunkle, 2004; Kuate-Defo, 2004; Luke 2011).
Eunice killed the baby. She throttled the child inside her hut.” By this time in my fieldwork, I had established a friendship with Ambuya Rachel, but her candid testimony still surprised me. She continued: “I am pained. The child did not need to die. I will tell Eunice father at home, these are my relatives, I have a responsibility to tell them.” Initially, I was perplexed as to why Eunice would potentially commit infanticide. Yet, as I reflected on events that transpired during her pregnancy, her reasons for possibly doing so became clearer.

The context in which I first met Eunice suggested that such an outcome was unlikely. From the start of fieldwork at Heddon Estates, she performed domestic labor for Arthur, Emmanuel and myself when I moved in with them. Ordinarily, if a woman performs domestic labor it is within the confines of a farm relationship like kuchaya mapoto, but in this case she was termed a “Christian sister” by Arthur and Emmanuel, who saw themselves as missionaries in the farm environment. Because Eunice did all the cooking and sweeping of our room, we collectively covered her monthly grocery costs, so the “Christian sister” relationship retained a transactional element. Arthur and Emmanuel led Pentecostal services on the outskirts of the compound on certain evenings, in which Eunice was an active participant. My roommates offered her the job, they claimed, to surround her with Christian influence and preclude her from “backsliding” or becoming involved in the sexual economy on the farm. When I heard rumors from other farm workers that Eunice was the girlfriend of one of my roommates, Arthur, I interpreted it as false gossip.

56 Recall, however, that Emmanuel was involved in stealing farm chemicals at this stage, although I did not know about it. Arthur was not, to my knowledge involved in stealing.
As it happened Arthur was, as he put it, “defeated by the devil” on one occasion, and had sexual intercourse with Eunice. As he confessed to me later on (explored in more detail in Chapter Four), he felt that Eunice had been trying to seduce him for many months. He stated that she repeatedly invited him to her hut to have sex after church services, and flirted with him by placing her leg over his when they were seated together a few times. In his account, he was eventually overwhelmed by these temptations and had unprotected sex with her. A few months after the event, she told him she was pregnant. Arthur denied responsibility. He accused her of having other boyfriends, and of accusing him of the pregnancy because she wanted to force marriage on him, or at least receive a hefty compensation. He was also already engaged to another woman in Zimbabwe and with his limited income, he did not want to be compelled to support her. In the meantime, she told others around the farm that he impregnated her, shattering his image as an example of a respectable Christian man who stood above the farm’s sexual economy. Yet, he persisted in his denial of responsibility for the pregnancy. One day I gave Eunice a ride to the health clinic in town. Later, her friend informed me that she attempted to get an abortion at the clinic. The medical staff refused, however, either because she was too far along in her pregnancy or that she failed to pay a bribe, which is apparently sometimes required.

Problems mounted for Eunice mid-way through her pregnancy. Eunice returned home to southern Zimbabwe over the Christmas period when the farm closed. Her friends informed me that, upon her arrival at her parent’s homestead, she was chased away by her own father. Her parents were angry with her for becoming pregnant again when she had already left two children behind at their homestead, born out of previous
relationships. With nowhere to go, she returned to the farm practically destitute and subsisted in the farm compound until Philip began hiring for the New Year. When Arthur returned to the farm for the new season, she continued to tell others that he was responsible for her pregnancy and asked financial help from him. As Arthur confessed to me in Chapter Four, his humiliation as a result of this gossip could have led him to leave the farm. As it was, the arrest and beating of Emmanuel by Philip occurred just at this time – thus forcing Arthur to leave in any case.

With the departure of Arthur, Eunice now faced the prospect of supporting her baby alone, and made efforts to secure additional financial assistance. She began cohabiting with another man in a *kuchaya mapoto* style relationship. According to her neighbors in the compound, she also took on various *chiback* boyfriends. It is unclear what material support she received in these relationships, yet any amount of food or income were crucial for her at this stage, since as her pregnancy advanced she was unable to work in the fields (there is no “pregnancy leave” policy at the farm, though women are advised to stop working after they are eight months pregnant). After she stopped working, her only source of income was the sexual economy in the compound. Yet these relationships also made her vulnerable, later on, to the accusation of blood mixing.

As Eunice approached her delivery date these relationships appeared to end, leaving Eunice without financial support. She was too tired to do the cooking and sweeping required in *kuchaya mapoto* and men, I was told on another occasion, are not often attracted to women in the late stages of pregnancy. When she delivered at the hospital in town, I visited her after the birth and provided what Zimbabweans call “preparations,” blankets, baby clothing, baby creams and money. She told me she had no
money and there was no one to support her. On a few occasions, she tried to reach
Arthur by phone but he ignored her calls. After a few days in the hospital, she returned to
the farm with her baby. I assumed after visiting with her in the compound that she was
adjusting to the baby, but her disposition raised concern among those living near her.
One of her neighbors stated to me shortly after she returned: “Each time I see Eunice by
her hut, the baby is sleeping in the room. Most of the time I go to the hut, I see her seated
by the fire, but the baby is in the hut. So this shows people she don’t have care about her
baby.” During this time, Eunice reportedly told friends “ah, this child is going to give me
trouble,” and even admitted to one that she hoped it would die. One afternoon, Eunice
reported to a senior man in the compound that her child was not breathing. He
investigated and found that the baby was dead. Later, this man commented to me “if the
child was sick, she only waited until it was far too late to tell him.” In subsequent days,
others commented that Eunice showed no signs of guilt or sadness. She returned
immediately to work at the farm. In other cases where babies died at the farm, mothers
“appeared pained and missed work for a few days,” as one informant put it.

terms the “pragmatics of motherhood,” in which mothers divest themselves from
unhealthy babies or those born under unpropitious circumstances. Cases of mortal
neglect or infanticide can be viewed as survival strategies that enhance the life
prospects for healthier older siblings, or babies yet to be born in a more supportive

57 Scheper-Hughes choice of this term, instead of alternatives such as “benign neglect,”
reflects how mothers have developed a stoic acceptance towards the death of their babies
whom they believe are born are already born predisposed to death.
environment. Yet, Eunice never said to me that she committed infanticide, stating only that her child died from “sickness” and she avoided elaboration. However, from conversations with her, I knew she was trying to establish a business in Zimbabwe selling clothes and groceries. Farm labor was supposed to generate her enough start–up capital for this endeavor. It is clear for women in Eunice’s position that a baby can be an enormous burden. With no extended family willing to help her with the baby, it interfered with her ability to earn wages and her relationship prospects, generated conflict or disapproval from extended family, and required energy and resources that were in short supply. The possibility of infanticide suggests the terrible cost of highly unequal labor relations on the farm, as women like Eunice engage in the sexual economy from positions of extreme desperation.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined how the shift towards delegated despotism transforms the sexual economy, particularly through shifts in the composition of labor and management practices in the northern Limpopo Valley. The casualization of labor dissolves the patriarchal agreement upon which the employment of male-headed farm worker households was based. Instead of relatively stable farm worker households living more or less permanently on the farm, there are more independent and often unmarried Zimbabwean workers, including unprecedented numbers of women. The resultant production regime involves less paternalistic entitlement than in the past and grants more power to black supervisors, allowing them to exploit other workers for bribes or sex. Although this dynamic of supervisors exploiting women for sex is not directly illustrated through Arthur’s relationship with Eunice, the relationship does exemplify how women
seek to use the sexual economy to enhance their livelihood, and the contradictory implications that often result.

Although women often return to Zimbabwe with more goods and cash to show for their time at the farm, exposure to HIV/AIDS threatens to undo these successes and shorten life spans. Participation in the sexual economy can also involve additional physical labor, produce unwanted pregnancies and undermine a woman’s social standing at home or leave her no better off than she was before, as appears to be the case with Eunice. More broadly, the sexual economy may reinforce divisions among workers and contribute to what Henry Bernstein describes as the often “introverted politics” of rural South Africa: “that the pressures of everyday reproduction (for many) and petty commodity accumulation (for some) mean that political energies are absorbed (and exhausted) in struggles between and within…communities (1996:39).” In other words, the sexual economy may encourage individualistic livelihood strategies to the detriment of collective struggles aimed at improving working conditions on the farm. In this sense, the sexual economy is another index of fragmented belonging, alongside such practices as chimbadzo, described in Chapter One.

In the absence of such struggles, interventions aimed at “empowering” women or improving their bargaining position in the sexual economy will be limited in effect. In northern Limpopo, such interventions include educational campaigns on farms by organizations such as Doctors Without Borders, and birth control services being made available through government mobile health clinics. More fundamental and difficult to uproot is the highly unequal power structure that allows senior managers and supervisors to pressure women for sex. In this respect, the gender question is deeply entangled with
the labor question on the farm. Improving the status of women on farms is thus partly contingent on addressing wider class inequalities that empower Philip and his managers above the vast majority of ordinary workers.

If the sexual economy tends to reproduce the fragmentation of labor on the farm, what about other forms of association in the community? The most well organized associational form on the farm are churches and worship services. The next chapter examines the place of these spiritual practices under delegated despotism.
Chapter Four: Sinful Harvest: Farm Churches under Delegated Despotism

After a long day of traversing tomato fields in search of pests and diseases among the crops, Arthur returns to the compound. Without pausing to rest, he methodically gathers wood and builds a fire for dinner, begins to sweep the room and sets clothes in a bucket for washing. Following these tasks, he sits on a metal bench and reads a weathered King James Bible, copying portions of scripture into a small notebook. Allowing only a few minutes to consume sadza with tomato gravy, Arthur climbs the nearby mopane-covered hill and entered a clearing to worship with his Pentecostal prayer group. His industriousness and disciplined attitude towards domestic labor, and the sentiment of respectability that underlies it, is not unique among compound inhabitants. Nor is it uncommon to see men in the compound performing this (traditionally gendered as female) work, particularly those not involved in kuchaya mapoto. What appears to set Arthur and his brother Emmanuel apart is their fervent Pentecostalism and sense of Christian mission. In Arthur’s own words:

Our mission is to create opportunities for people to hear the word of God. There are so many things that people can get involved in, so many doggish behaviors...they can be involved in prostitution, others are drinking. But the more you attend worship the more you can run away from worldly things.

Before Arthur was accused of impregnating Eunice, and Emmanuel was fired for stealing chemicals, the two brothers appeared as frontier missionaries engaged in a “war” on sin. Yet, the revelation of Arthur’s involvement in the sexual economy, in particular, suggests the limits of Pentecostalism on the farm. How does delegated despotism shape religious practices on the farm? Most related scholarship suggests that Christianity not only allows for coping with suffering, but provides a basis for organization and activism.
For instance, recent literature on Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe suggests that it offers a powerful set of practices for coming to terms with dislocations brought on by neoliberalism. It is not an opiate that mystifies relations of exploitation, but “provides a language for discussing these forces, embodying them and breaking them down in ways that they can grasp and confront” (Maxwell, 2006). The argument is similar to claims by scholars of plantation slavery in the American South: that religion played a progressive role among the slaves by fostering community and ethical norms that ultimately equipped blacks for their eventual liberation (Genovese, 1976). In South Africa, Jean Commaroff (1987) provided a ground-breaking argument that African Initiated Churches, long viewed as apolitical or complicit in apartheid, were spaces of autonomy and symbolic counter-hegemony for South African blacks. Among Latino farm workers in the United States, a strong case can be made that the Catholic Church provided resources and activists essential for social movements and unionization, as in the case of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers of America, and the more recent Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida.

In contrast to these examples, the argument of this chapter is that delegated despotism discourages such progressive articulations of Christianity. The chapter focuses on two different church groups. The more prominent group is the United African Apostolic Church (UAAC), an example of an African Initiated Church that appears widespread on farms throughout the Limpopo valley (see Bolt, 2010). Known locally as

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58 As I indicated in the methods section of this dissertation, a third church group Johanne Masowe was also part of spiritual life on the farm. But because I was not permitted to attend their services, I have not included it in the discussion. This is not a significant loss because it did not attract large numbers of people.
the “Zion” church, it draws the largest number of participants. The second group among workers is the interdenominational church (hereafter referred to as Inter-D) which is Pentecostal in orientation. While the Zion church is closely linked to the farm management, the Pentecostal group represents an alternative center of power. The demise of the latter group suggests that when religious associations exist outside of the power structure, they are unsustainable. It is not only that independent groups risk marginalization. The stringent moral requirements of Pentecostalism, particularly its call for sexual purity, are poorly suited for the farm environment. Church leaders face constant pressure and temptation to participate in the sexual economy, undermining their legitimacy as potential leaders in wider struggles on the farm. Before comparing the two church groups, I outline how the labor regime restricts church involvement more broadly.

Curtailing the Kingdom

At the most basic level, the labor regime of the farm restricts participation in church by requiring people to work long hours without leaving much time for reproductive labor and other pursuits. During the picking season, most people work 12 hour days (or more), Monday through Saturday. Sunday, when both churches hold services, is the usually the only day-off. That fact that the farm population exceeds 600 people during the picking season, but participation in either church on a Sunday is rarely more than 50, is a testament to the pressures of work and the variety of competing activities. Many workers told me they are too physically exhausted to attend church, including the night services held by the Inter-D explored below. If workers return to Zimbabwe during the picking season, it is almost always during Saturday and Sunday, leaving fewer people on Sunday to attend church in the compound.
Church participation competes with numerous tasks, pursuits and pressures. The laborious task of gathering firewood for cooking can take several hours and is therefore often reserved for Sunday. Washing clothes is also time consuming and saved for Sunday. Although men involved in kuchaya mapoto relationships do not typically wash clothes, they do frequently gather fire wood. Other less essential activities compete with church. Soccer games held on the pitch at Heddon Estates or at other farms in the area are popular attractions that involve dozens of workers as spectators and players. Church leaders often complain in their sermons about members who chose to go fishing rather than attend services. Fishing in the Limpopo provides an important source of food or income if the fish can be sold. Dozens of young men pass their Sundays huddled in front of Clayton’s television, watching sporting events or soap operas. Several workers operate businesses on Sunday, such as small spaza shops selling bread, candy and cigarettes, as well as cutting or plaiting hair. I was told by many workers that Sunday is also a popular day for pursuing love affairs. As the only day off, Sunday is the only day for indulgences like a leisurely breakfast of scrambled eggs or sleeping in past 5 AM.

Despite these competing pressures, the churches are still the largest organizations among farm workers. Worship in the form of prayers, preaching, singing and dancing helps workers cope with stress in their lives. Workers’ attempts to overcome stress and insecurity can be witnessed in the most common prayers during services: prayers for continued employment at the farm, healing from disease and sickness, for success in future plans to kuvaka musha (“build homesteads”) in Zimbabwe, for protection from evil spirits and to resist temptation on the farm. Moreover, participation in the Zion service is one way to build friendship with senior figures on the farm. This friendship could
prove useful when these senior figures are deciding who to lay-off as the picking season
draws down. The composition of the Zion church and its role on the farm is explored
below.

The Zion Church

Although the labor regime discourages church participation in the ways noted
above, it nevertheless privileges participation in the Zion church over the Inter-D. The
Zion church can be considered the official church of the farm because it is deeply
integrated with the management hierarchy and draws the largest number of participants.
The head pastor and founder of the church on the farm, Moses, is the brother of Clayton
and supervisor for the loading team. Trained as a church leader by a local UAAC branch
in Gaha, Moses said that when he arrived at the farm in 1997, there were no church
leaders and people were praying in a “disorganized way.” He added, “So I said to
myself, why don’t I carry the name of Jesus and let me catch all the fish and put them
together?” The second most prominent leader, Malvin, is the senior foremen for tomato
pickers. Other influential figures in the church, including prophets and regular preachers,
are long term workers and foremen. In contrast to UAAC branches in Zimbabwe itself,
where women are sometimes important prophetesses, women are wholly excluded from
the church’s leadership and are never given the opportunity to preach. On any given
Sunday during the picking season, between 40 and 70 people (at least 30 percent of
whom are women) attend the at least 4 hour long services held under open-air iron roof of
the crèche. The crèche is favorable site not only for the shade provided by its roof, but
also its central location in the compound ensures that many passers will notice the
services and potentially join in (see the maps in the appendix). Moreover, since the
crèche is an official farm building, the site reinforces the impression of Zion as the most legitimate source of religious authority among farm workers. While most members are aligned with different branches of the UAAC in southern Zimbabwe, at least 25 percent of the active participants are part of the ZCC church. Both groups are examples of African Initiated Churches that have spread rapidly throughout southern Africa in recent decades. Even though accustomed to different songs and dance styles, they share a similar worship format and practice that make the two groups compatible.

The typical Sunday service starts around 10 AM, when there is an initial gathering of between 10 and 15 men at the crèche, where they begin singing and dancing, beating a large drum and blowing a horn made from a kudu antler. The songs involve the repetition of a few phrases or words, sung out while dancing in different styles. There are several different dance styles, but the two most common include taking a few steps forward, then turning and leaping backwards, repeating this movement continuously (women do not leap, but turn back, shaking their hips). Alternatively, people dance closely together in a circle around the horn blower, shuffling feet in small steps while rotating hips, allowing the circle to rotate. The music sends a signal to the other people in the compound that church is about to begin. After an hour or so of this music, a more sizable crowd gathers, and one of the pastors (Malvin or Moses) will start the proceedings by shouting “Rugare!” (praise God!) to which people shout “Rugare!” in response. At this everyone sits down, with men seated along a stone bench under the shade of the crèche, and women on the concrete floor exposed to the sun for most of the afternoon. Several chairs and stools are placed against the northern wall of the crèche, the front of the church, where pastors, prophets and senior men sit. The leaders and
prophets wear purple robes, with Moses also a wearing stole with the markings of UAAC. Women are required to cover their hair, usually with a head wrap or more rarely a hat.\textsuperscript{59} After everyone is seated, Moses says a short prayer, usually asking for the presence of God in the service, and for people to worship in a worthy and acceptable manner.

During the next several hours at least four different men preach, each interspersed with long periods of dancing.\textsuperscript{60} Invariably, the sermons are delivered without the use of notes and preachers punctuate their remarks by shouting “Amen” or “\textit{Rugare”} (Peace or Praise God) which the crowd repeats in unison. The sermons are usually connected to a passage from bible which is read out by another man during their talk. Normally, each preacher offers a different bible reading, making each service lack thematic unity. Nevertheless, in the many sermons I observed during fieldwork, preachers always spoke against different transgressions and instructed people on how to behave appropriately. This instruction was based on literal interpretations of scripture or norms and customs from rural Zimbabwe, which they felt were not being observed, particularly regarding sexual relationships. Although the church allows male adherents to have multiple wives, it only accepts officially sanctioned marriages, denouncing \textit{kuchaya mapoto} or other forms of prostitution. As demonstrated in chapter four, the problem of transactional sex is regularly blamed on women during these sermons. However, on occasion a preacher will criticize the more senior leadership for their transgression. While Moses is not as

\textsuperscript{59} A requirement that was strictly observed: on a few occasions my wife attended services several church members insisted to her that too covers her hair.

\textsuperscript{60} The preachers are selected by the leadership committee of the church, which is made up of Moses, Malvin and three other senior members of the church.
notorious for having transactional sex as Clayton, he did impregnate a teenage girl (unclear exactly how old) who was working at the farm during my research. Several people criticized him for this during interviews with me and a mid-ranking foreman, Mafuta, indirectly rebuked him during a sermon. He speaks metaphorically of a “river bird” which is found in a granary, an example of matter out of place similar to church leaders being with prostitutes.

If you sin recklessly we are wasting time. If a river bird can be found in a granary, it will be a shock to everyone. You can deny your evil doings to the prophets but to God you don’t have a chance. Women will be having several men, but what are they looking for? Only the name of a well-respected person. It is better you leave the clothes or go fishing than spend your time here but your heart is somewhere else. You leaders are our guidance but you are not doing your job, it’s a great sin.  

At this point, the speaker was interrupted by Malvin, who started singing a song. It was not unusual for other church members to stop the preacher by singing; for instance, if they felt he was going too long or, as in this case, he made the leadership uncomfortable. Although Moses goes unmentioned, the reference to a “well respected person” could only be him or Malvin. Both leaders were known for having transactional sex, but Moses’ indiscretion was a prominent topic of farm gossip during this period. In any event, Malvin’s singing marked the end of the sermon and sparked a long period of dancing.

In the moments of dancing, prophets occasionally take a person aside to convey a dream or vision which relates to the person’s life. They often give specific instructions, such as to eat particular foods or wash in particular way, as means of preventing or resolving a certain problem. At some services, people who are sick are prayed over by

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61 This quotation, and the others from church services that follow, are originally in Shona. I have translated them with the help of my research assistant.
the prophets and leaders while the singing continues. Those praying over sick often appear to fall into a trance and speak in tongues, even involving animal noises. The style of dancing mostly follows the two forms mentioned above, except that after three hours or so, Moses will lead a small group of men on a different dance outside of the crèche. Men form a line behind Moses and he takes them towards the showers and new houses. As the group follows him, arms are kept up in a jogging stance, swiveling back and forth to the beat of the drum and horn blast. The rest of congregation remains at the crèche, with most dancing and singing as a group but others simply stand or sit. Occasionally, Moses spreads his arms like an airplane and quickens the pace, with each followed mimicking the movement. The routine reaches its climax by reverting to the few steps forward, few steps back and jump maneuver, gradually increasing in speed until reaching the limits of exertion. Eventually, Moses stops the routine by placing his staff in the air. The drum and horn sounds cease, and a slow, reverent song is sung in unison as everyone returns to their starting places at the crèche. The song ends when Moses shouts Amen and receives the customary response. Moses then gives the final sermon of the day, building on or responding to the previous preachers. Mafuta’s criticism, and the wider gossip on the farm critical of his behavior, led him to respond in the following way: “If there are some adulterers here, it won’t affect others to go to heaven. A person can preach good news, and can remain behind, while those he preached unto go to heaven.” He also went on to emphasize how he is a good pastor, never asks for people to tithe, and so they should not go to another prophet, but should keep coming to church. Clearly, he was trying to reestablish his authority, emphasizing the positive aspects of his leadership. After Moses completes the final sermon, the service concludes with a final prayer in
which everyone kneels towards Moses. In the final prayer, Moses gives thanks to God for the service and other blessings, such as work on the farm. He also asks for God’s protection over people as they begin another week of work.

While Philip’s policy towards the farm churches is largely one of non-intervention, in practice he tacitly supports the Zion church. In his personal life, Philip himself is a “born again” Christian and regularly attends a white Pentecostal church in Musina. When I told him I was attending services of the Zion church in the compound, he expressed surprise, stating: “But are they really Christians, Lincoln? Are they not also worshipping ancestors?”\(^62\) Despite this skepticism, Philip effectively endorses the Zion group by giving their leaders control over the morning devotion. As discussed in Chapter Two, the morning devotion comprises a bible reading, prayer and sometimes a short sermon by Moses or Malvin (although more often it is Malvin because Moses usually works in the early morning). More than half of the morning devotions I attended emphasized humbleness and showing respect for superiors. In the course of messages and prayers, people often talk and appear inattentive, prompting senior figures closer to the podium to call for silence, often during the prayer itself. When I asked workers what they think of the devotion, typical responses suggest disinterest: “People are not participating, they are not that interested…they take it for granted.” Or “The morning devotion is used for different things. People don’t see how it will benefit them. They think it is just for the top structure.”

\(^{62}\) Incidentally, scholars debate the extent to which ancestral worship practices inform African initiated churches. During Zion services, I never heard any explicit references to ancestors, although several farm workers told me that church members, including the church leaders, appease their ancestors (kupiwa midzimu) by offering sacrifices and attending ceremonies while they are at home in Zimbabwe.
The morning devotion was not always utilized in this way by the Zion church to reinforce discipline (preaching was not instituted until 2007, before then it was a just a prayer). For several months in 2007, Philip preached regularly at the devotion alongside Arthur. Philip would read a passage from the bible, and then give a brief reflection on how it applied to his life. Arthur read the same scripture in Shona and translate his message. This practice was started after Philip attended a “Mighty Men” conference organized by Angus Buchan. After this conference, Philip experienced a conversion and has since then identified as a Born-Again Christian. His messages during this period conveyed not only respect for authority – to be sure, this remained a prominent theme – but also that men should be faithful to their wives, and support their families. Yet, after 2007, he stopped preaching to the workers. In an interview, Philip suggests that his Born-Again Christianity is incompatible with his need to discipline workers:

What I found difficult is that if I had to preach about forgiveness, and somebody has stepped over the line in a serious offence, say it’s the second or third time and I had to take action against that person, in firing him or whatever, it became difficult sort of to practice or to show that I am also conforming. It became difficult in that line, that’s why I encourage another guy like to speak to them, like Malvin, who reads from the bible and has a short message.

In the same season, Arthur was not only translator for Philip, but also regularly preached on his own at the devotion. He told me that he used the devotion to preach about the Holy Spirit, but ultimately felt rejected and excluded by the other leaders.

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63 The Mighty Men Conference, organized by Buchan’s church “Shalom ministries”, is a gathering of mostly white men and boys, camping out in the open on Buchan’s farm in Greytown, Kwa-Zulu Natal. The gatherings started in the early 2000s with only a few dozen people, but by 2010 attendance was 400,000. Metaphor and anecdote derived from farming experience are central to Buchan’s sermons. See Buchan’s book and film Faith Like Potatoes (1998).
During one morning devotion towards the end of the season, his morning prayer inspired several people to speak in tongues and fall on the ground. The following morning, Clayton cut short the devotion by saying “just pray,” preventing Arthur from preaching. Since that day, Arthur has never preached again at the morning devotion. According to him, he feels his strong messages offended the leaders: “I preached aggressively and for true repentance. But I always felt a tense atmosphere and rejection…. They never asked me to do it again.” The senior leadership had other reasons to reject Arthur. During the same period, he had started a different church group, the Inter-D, which was rapidly gaining followers. His preaching at the morning devotion was giving him an additional platform from which to attract people to his alternative group. It is possible that Clayton felt threatened by his growing influence and sought to block it. The emergence and eventual decline of the Inter-D reveals how churches independent of the senior leadership of the farm are severely constrained.

**Origins of the Inter-D**

The Inter-D was started in 2006 by Arthur and Peter, a friend of his no longer employed at the farm. Initially, Arthur had been attending the Zion church, but felt he was not fitting in. “I was not used to the way they were doing things. They were not having time for prayer, not having time for preaching the word.” The fact that so much of the service was dancing seemed to him inappropriate. At first, it was only Arthur, Peter and a few others, and they would go off into the tomato fields near Compound One and pray and sing. Arthur says that the Inter-D style of worship was unprecedented at the farm: “Many people had never seen this kind of praying before, and they were surprised.” The model for the Inter-D comes from prayer groups that Arthur and Peter were exposed
to in Harare and Bulawayo. A summary of a typical service gives a sense of how this model is different from Zion.

In contrast to the formal hierarchy of the Zion church, there are no official leaders of the Inter-D. Each service has a chairperson and one or two preachers, who in turn appoint the chairperson and preachers for the subsequent service. Services begin with upbeat clapping and singing intended to signal to others that service is starting and, according to some participants, put people in a “happy frame of mind.” The occasional use of English and the absence of drum, horn and customary styles of dancing make the Inter-D services appear more Westernized than the Zion church. Following the songs, a person says “Amen!” and people yell Amen in return, after which the gathering comes to order. The chairperson will also shout “up, up!” and people reply collectively “Jesus!”, followed by “down, down!” and a reply of “Satan.” At this point the chairperson welcomes everyone, and says an opening prayer, normally asking for God to be present and to respond to people’s needs. This introduction is followed by an unstructured prayer session in which each person prays out loud to him or herself, creating a cacophony of voices for several minutes. The chairperson then invites people to give testimonies, which can take the form a song or statement, usually giving thanks to God for some helpful turn of events, such as gaining employment, safe passage travels from Zimbabwe or recovery from an illness. After the testimonies, the speakers deliver their messages. Unlike the Zion church, women occasionally preach during Inter-D services. Yet, similar to the Zion church, preachers adopt a didactic approach that rebukes people for sinning and implores them to behave more appropriately. While the Zion preaching is grounded
in respect for “laws” and tradition, Inter-D preachers reference the apocalypse or “last days” in their calls for improved behavior, as one women preacher suggests:

We are nearing the end of the World. We have to move forward. One step forward will result in one’s upbringing and closeness to God. God has a plan for you. We are getting paid little but one can buy a car…don’t cheat. Strange things happen in the compound\(^6_4\) and without God’s help we may end up in the wrong.

In addition to the didactic element, there is an emphasis on the individuality and exceptional status of worshippers absent in the Zion church. As suggested by the next except from a sermon by Emmanuel, preachers motivate their listeners by instructing them to be different than the dominant environment around them.

Let God be with us, God has a purpose for us. Let us not be affected by the environment. God overpowers everything, all the evil things are controlled by him. You may be angry but God has a purpose in your life. Let us touch Jesus’s garment and not rise and fall, but we have to be changed from stage to stage and not backsliding. Our plans cannot be fulfilled if we are not trustworthy.

Services conclude with a healing ritual, in which people with sicknesses kneel on the ground while others lay hands and pray. Those praying sometimes “speak in tongues,” but unlike in Zion group where only prophets and leaders perform healing prayers, anyone willing to pray does so in the Inter-D. Occasionally, people being prayed over will roll on the ground and scream unintelligibly. These occurrences, as described in the example given in Chapter Three, are interpreted as demon possession by church participants. People continue praying over the affected individual until the demon is cast out, a process that – as I witnessed on more than occasion – can go on for several hours.

\(^6_4\) That the women says “strange things in the compound” rather than more direct references to prostitution, drinking and other perceived forms of immoral behavior, suggests an observance of gendered norms of respectability. In contrast to men, women rarely spoke directly of these issues in the services.
into the night. Notwithstanding such exceptional events, services formally end with a closing prayer and a softly song worship song.

They called themselves a “cell group,” to indicate that they were still under the rubric of the existing Zion church, and not forming an independent or separate church. They made a decision to stay away from the crèche shed, the space associated with the Zion group. To use this space for different worship practices could be interpreted as a threat to leadership. The spatialized distinctions in where worship takes place, reflects how power is territorialized in the compound (Rutherford, 2001). Despite these distinctions, Arthur and Peter felt pressure from the Zion group. Arthur said “Many people never liked it from the beginning. They were against the idea of doing an extra service and they questioned why we were doing it at night. During their service, they preached against it, saying it is evil and “why do some people select themselves out of others.” Arthur also encountered spiritual resistance. During one service at night, Arthur made a very long prayer, which continued straight for several hours. During the prayer, several people slipped into tongues and spoke foreign languages. “I did not know it then, but we were fighting against evil spirits.” That night, Arthur could not fall asleep. He heard strange sounds outside his room:

Then I heard someone outside my room, and I felt him come in. The sensation was…evil. Then it lay on top of me and strangled me, I felt the fingers on my throat. It was only when I was able to say “Jesus Christ!” that its grip loosened and finally was thrown out of the room.

The next day, Arthur felt an extremely sore throat and, after reporting his experience to Peter, discovered he had a similar demonic encounter during the night. This event convinced Arthur that the inter-D was embroiled in a spiritual war with evil
spirits on the farm. He was not entirely sure where the spirits came from, although they were aligned with Satan. It could be spirits spatially rooted to the farm, or they could have been sent by witches who opposed the Holy Spirit. “We were afraid of this, and of what people were saying about our group, but the Holy Spirit told us to be free. We prayed for the future and they could not manage to stop what we were doing.”

The Inter D grew significantly in 2007 and 2008, and they began doing morning services between 6 and 9 AM, again to avoid overlapping with the Zion group, that starts at 10 AM. During these years, at least 40 people would attend services on a regular basis. The success of the Inter-D at this point was also due to Philip’s conversion and the participation he did at the morning devotions. A second worship site was established at the edge of the Johanne compound. In 2008, the group started to have its first all night prayers in the back of the tomato fields. At one of these all night prayers involving over 50 people, a small group of Zion supporters made an attempt to disrupt the service. The followed the group to the worship site, and shouted and taunted the group while they prayed. Arthur said “There was a war of words between the two groups. They yelled at us and called us drunkards, but they had no points to make, just false witness.”

According to Arthur, the prayer night was highly successful: “so many people were delivered from demons. So many people spoke tongues, some for the first time.” More broadly, 2007 and 2008 is when a “big change” occurred on the farm. Some Zionists started “converting,” or at least attending Inter D church. “Even those who did not convert, they were changing, the whole place was changing.” How, I asked, were they changing? “The way they were preaching at their own services, the way they were living, the way they were praying and singing…People were start to live in the fear of the
lord, it was a renewing of the mind, the people were scared to sin before the Lord.” They prayed for Philip to hear the word of God, and they claimed his conversion though Angus Buchan was an answer to their prayers.

However, starting in 2009 the Inter D began a decline in membership and influence from which it has yet to recover. There are at least two reasons for this decline. The first reason is changing demographics on the farm. The growth of the inter-D between 2006 and 2008 coincided with the peak of Zimbabwean “informal” migration to South Africa. If members left the farm in search of higher paying employment further south – as was the case with Peter – they were replaced by the steadily increasing number of border jumpers seeking temporary refuge or employment at the farm. In 2009, South Africa’s migration policies became less restrictive. Zimbabweans could now claim asylum at official border posts, allowing them entry even if they did not have documents or passports; moreover, a moratorium was placed on deportations of Zimbabweans. Because of these changes, significantly fewer Zimbabwean migrants travelled through Heddon Estates after 2008. Although this reduction was not extreme enough to cause a “labor shortage” for Philip, it did mean that the inter-D had fewer potential recruits. Additionally, the composition of migration after 2008 was not favorable to the Inter-D: most new migrants were relatives of existing workers and from Gaha or other rural areas near Mberengwa. More urbanized and educated Zimbabweans – those more likely predisposed to the Pentecostalism of the Inter-D – were entering South Africa through border posts, bypassing border farms like Heddon Estates.

A second reason for the decline of the Inter-D is that many members, in the words of Arthur, “fell.” To fall, in the context of the farm, most often refers to sexual
transgressions which violate the Pentecostal standard of morality. As Arthur explained, “Some of our members fell and became pregnant.” Falling applied to both men and women. Such people “became involved in prostitution” and stopped attending church. At least five of these former – now “fallen” – members (two of whom are women) are still employed at the farm but do not attend services. When asked why they no longer attend, each pointed to a lack of time and being tired after work. When I asked Emmanuel, he gave a different reason: “You see Lincoln, if someone is sinning, they do not want to attend church and repent, because they know people will be preaching against fornication. So they would rather not attend and talk badly about the church.” Arthur also explained why such people are not welcome in the services:

If someone is doing something funny, he can give us a bad name. We want these people, we want them to change, sometimes we encourage them. I visit them outside the services and say, “hey what’s going on guys, Jesus loves you.” But we cannot change our lives, to change the way we are living, to create a happy place for sinners.

The requirement of moral purity places tremendous pressure on the two effective “leaders” of the Inter-D, Arthur and Emmanuel. This pressure is more extreme than the sort Moses and Malvin confront in the Zion church. For the latter, their positions and church are not fundamentally threatened by the fact that they are involved in the sexual economy. Yet, because their church’s identity depends on being different from the overall environment, it is undermined when they “backslide.” In the case of Emmanuel, as illustrated above, the pressure he experienced was to give a public sense to people that he was doing the right type of courtship. In Arthur’s case, his own backsliding led him to leave the farm. The context of his “fall” was explored in Chapter Three, but here I return to the story to focus on the confession he made to me.
Arthur’s Final Testimony

“Lincoln, I have something important to discuss with you.” With these words, I sensed a new conviction in Arthur’s voice indicating that he would finally address the ongoing rumors that he impregnated Eunice. For months he simply denied involvement, refusing to elaborate or give his side of the story. We left the compound and walked alongside the Limpopo River, finally sitting on some large rocks near the river edge, where Arthur felt enough privacy to begin his tale. Arthur started by saying, “This is the testimony about how the devil attacks people, how evangelists are brought down.”

His testimony spanned the entirety of his relationship with Eunice, from when he met her selling shoes in the compound to the present time when the relationship was leading him leave the farm. From the very beginning, when she started attending Inter-D services and coming to wash and cook for him and his brother as a “Christian sister,” he suspected that she was trying to seduce him. “I said to myself I have to be careful, she is not just looking for Christian things. She is looking for a husband...She wanted to keep after me because I told her that God is going to give her a husband again. I told her ‘Grace will not lead you where Grace will not find you.’” As discussed in Chapter Three, he described how she started flirting with him, falling asleep on his lap one day, placing her legs over his on another. He recognized this flirtation as temptation from the Devil. “Perhaps because I was the role model of the farm, the devil was at my back, something just happened as we were going on, she was arousing feelings in me…one of the days, I made a mistake and slept with her.” Before they had intercourse, Eunice told him that there was no risk of getting pregnant because she had made provisions for birth control in the form of an injection that was good for six months. Yet, one month or so after they
had sex, she informed him she was pregnant. The injection had failed. Eunice, who had two children at her parent’s homestead from previous relationships, said she was frightened at the prospect of informing her parents. She suggested that they get married. Although Arthur felt “guilty” for having slept with her, he refused to marry, stating that he was already engaged to another woman in Zimbabwe. He also doubted that the pregnancy was caused by him, suspecting Eunice of sleeping with other men on the farm. Nevertheless, he advised her to get an abortion, a decision he came to regret. “Well, that was another sin again, a sin of killing.” For the next month until he returned to Zimbabwe for the Christmas period, Arthur removed himself from leadership roles in the Inter-D. “At this place I don’t want to disturb the word of God. I don’t want to let people down. So I decided to give bigger roles to people until things are better. It was a very big blow in my life, a very striking blow.” He did not find any feeling of true forgiveness for his sin, until he confessed to an evangelist preacher at home church in Shurugwe. “I told him the whole story and said I’m guilty of fornication and murder. He taught me a lot of things, and I felt delivered in my heart.”

When he returned to the farm in January, he had made up his mind that this would be his last season on the farm. Ongoing gossip that he was responsible for Eunice pregnancy reinforced his decision and made him feel like his presence on the farm undermined the word of God. He no longer felt legitimacy in the eyes of other farm workers who was formerly on a mission to save. “It was a heavy thing inside me. I don’t want to see the word of God being blackened because of me. It’s now hard to save all these lost ships…they will finally believe that everyone is in it.” His mission, as he saw it, was premised on leading a disciplined life of example and of abstaining from the
farm’s sexual economy. This abstinence made him an exceptional figure and allowed him to preach that not everyone must participate in the sexual economy. Now that he was widely known to have fallen, he could no longer claim this exceptional status upon which his mission was premised. He now had no purpose on the farm: “The theme that I was teaching to people is that it is a war. I was starting a war with the devil, and unfortunately I lost the war before God and the thing that will help is his forgiveness…. ”

He said that all he can do now is use this story as “weapon to fight the devil,” but he felt strongly that this could not happen on the farm.

While it may have been possible in another context, he said, to publicly confess his sin and go on with the mission, the farm is “too different.” He was unable to specify exactly why the farm is different, except to say that “What is in their minds that a Christian must never fall…They will believe that a Christian living sinfully is okay.”

Arthur now had an unshakable affiliation with the sexual economy, no matter what he could do or say. The only solution as he saw it was to “find another place and go there.” Arthur was therefore already committed to leaving the farm when Emmanuel was arrested and beaten. After Arthur and Emmanuel left, the Inter-D persisted with less than 10 participants for the remainder of my research. Communication with farm workers in 2012 suggests that the group disbanded entirely, and only the Zion church remains on the farm.

**Conclusion**

In a number of ways, delegated despotism curtails the role of Christianity on the farm. At the most basic level, the labor regime requires people to work long hours and leaves them little time to perform reproductive labor or other recreational pursuits. Most
Zimbabweans able to attend church participate in the Zion group. The worship practices in this church, especially the dancing, remind participants of home and help attenuate feelings of stress and insecurity. While spiritual practices in the church cannot be reduced to strategies of labor control, the church is deeply integrated with the management hierarchy and the messages of most preachers reinforce the authority of “top-structure” figures on the farm. The morning devotion, which is largely controlled by the Zion church, similarly reflects how Christianity on the farm is tied to disciplining the labor force.

The rise and fall of the Inter-D illustrates the limited space for alternatives to the Zion church. From its origins, the inter-D was met with hostility by top-structure figures, who blocked Arthur’s participation in the morning devotion and spoke against it in Zion services. The marginality of the church is reflected in its services held on the outskirts of the compound, rather than the prominent center of the crèche. The growth of the Inter-D between 2006 and 2008 reflects how more urbanized and middle-class Zimbabweans – people more likely to participate in Pentecostal rather than Zion worship – used the farm as a crossing point into South Africa and a temporary space of employment. Yet, due to changing migration policies of South Africa, people of this background were less present on the farm after 2008. That top structure figures continue to hire workers from rural Mberengwa suggests that new workers are more likely to participate in the Zion services. Finally, the emphasis on sexual purity within Pentecostalism, as it manifested on the farm, makes this denomination poorly suited for the farm environment. The “fall” of Arthur and several other erstwhile members suggests that abstinence from relationships in the sexual economy – *chiback* or *kuchaya mapoto* – is unlikely over a long period of
time. Once a member of this church is known to have “fallen,” he or she is unlikely to participate and invalidated as Pentecostal leaders. This stands in contrast to the Zion church, where sexual transgressions are criticized but not condemned in such stark terms.
Conclusion

This dissertation has argued that labor relations on border farms in northern Limpopo province, South Africa are characterized by practices I term “delegated despotism.” As I explain in Chapter One, this production regime involves at least four dimensions: First, a growing casualization of labor, involving the increased employment of migrant workers from Zimbabwe on a seasonal or part-time basis. The preference for Zimbabweans, rather than South African citizens, is related to the latter’s demands for higher wages, their more likely trade-union involvement, and the greater probability of state agencies to enforce labor legislation where its own citizens are involved. The second dimension involves new forms of private and public regulation, including the rise of certification programs such as Global Gap, as well as minimum wage laws mandated by the post-apartheid state. Even while farm owners ignore some of these regulations, their compliance is sufficient to create legitimacy with high-end retailers and avoid excessive state intervention on farms. Farm owners’ partial compliance with these new forms of regulation situates the third dimension of delegated despotism: the monetization of previously “in kind” benefits and services for farm laborers. The rising costs associated with for example, minimum wage laws, encourages farm owners to charge workers for accommodation and food, things once provided for “free.” Fourth, the shifting forms of labor recruitment and growing distance between farm owners and workers, expands the role of black intermediaries on the farm. As the interface between the farm owner and mass of temporary workers, black managers are tasked with containing the instability attendant upon the employment of a highly divided, fluid and disaffected work force. These four processes reproduce the authoritarian legacies of
paternalism, but minimize the potential for benevolence. It is in this sense that the production regime is “despotic,” even while in important respects “delegated.” In these conditions, most farm workers achieve a kind of “fragmented belonging” through their relations with senior managers and activities in the parallel economies of the compound.

Subsequent chapters examine the varied responses by workers to this production regime. As I demonstrate in Chapter Two, low wages and abject circumstances on the farm encourage theft as well as relatively frequent strikes. But what appears to be growing labor unrest on farms in northern Limpopo does not herald, as it were, some kind of organized migrant farm worker labor movement. I demonstrate that such strikes are episodic and essentially reactive – that is, they arise in response to some violation of pre-existing expectations. Such strikes can place limits on the degree of exploitation, but if they demand too much in the way of wage increases or transforming the conditions of employment, they typically fail – in the sense that all participating workers are fired and eventually replaced by other Zimbabweans.

Apart from these “formal” examples of resistance, Chapters Three and Four investigate how the production regime is contested through the sexual economy and farm churches. While women occupy the lowest paid and lowest ranking positions on the farm, they gain additional income through transactional sex with male farm workers, enabling them to often return to Zimbabwe with greater income than their male counterparts. Yet, participation in the sexual economy also has negative consequences, such as increasing women’s domestic labor and exposure to HIV/AIDS, resulting in contradictory implications for the status of women under delegated despotism. Worship practices afford Zimbabweans a measure of solace and comfort amidst abject living and
working conditions, but on a broader organizational level farm churches project the
interests of management. Churches that exist independently of the farm hierarchy, such
as the Pentecostal Inter-D group on Heddon Estates, are unlikely to be sustained.
Worship practices are therefore an important terrain through which delegated despotism
is stabilized and reproduced.

In the end then, this dissertation paints a grim picture of the prospects for
Zimbabweans to transform their working conditions. In presenting this picture, though, I
have tried to abide by Gramsci’s maxim, “pessimism of the spirit, optimism of the will.”
That is, I have confronted – without any idealistic pretensions – the realities of
oppression on border farms, precisely so that through a fuller understanding, they may
one day be overcome. In spite of the bleak picture of resistance, I believe the dissertation
has shown the farm environment to be, in another sense, alive with personality and
possibility. There is a tendency in the scholarly literature on farm and plantation workers
to be completely dominated by political economy – rarely are we given a sense of farm
worker’s lives and activities in detail. Through my ethnography, I have shown the sense
of struggle and resilience that animates workers’ lives on farms, including the diverse
social practices that bring vitality to these occupational spaces.

I have filled a significant gap in the ethnography of farm workers in South Africa.
This literature has been primarily concerned with conditions on wine farms in the
Western Cape, a focus that has led to the labor relations enmeshing migrant temporary
workers to be largely ignored. To the extent such workers are discussed, they are
simplistically represented as being outside the “paternalistic contract.” My ethnography
demonstrates how such workers continue to be situated by paternalism – albeit a form in
which moral or social obligations towards workers are minimized, while the scope for arbitrary decision making by owners and management remains largely intact. To understand how this production regime is reproduced, it is crucial to analyze the relations between ordinary workers and senior black intermediaries, particularly as these relations manifest in social practices within compounds or the “work-residence” nexus.

Yet, it cannot be claimed that labor relations associated with delegated despotism apply everywhere in South Africa—although such conditions do appear to hold throughout the Limpopo Valley where the employment of Zimbabweans predominates. The significance of Heddon Estates does not lie in its “representativeness” of rural labor relations in South Africa. Rather, as a border farm with a high degree of temporary labor, it allows for connections to be made between South African agriculture and other forms of enclave capitalism dependent on migrant labor throughout the world. Within such contexts, my analysis shows the importance of attending to what Tania Li (2009) terms the “series of agencies” through which workers come be recruited and stabilized in such zones of employment, and of including workers’ domestic, leisure and recreational practices within understandings of the labor process. In so doing, my ethnography illuminates how migrants are selectively connected with spaces of labor absorption, and thereby contributes to the anthropology of surplus populations.

Large-scale agriculture is becoming more prevalent throughout the African continent. Following sharp commodity price increases in the early 2000s, international investors have shown growing interest in acquiring land in Africa for purposes of large-scale farming and plantation agriculture. According to Gibbon (2011), between 5 and 7.5 percent of all cultivated area in Sub-Saharan Africa currently falls under large-scale
agriculture.\textsuperscript{65} This number is likely to increase by over 50 percent in the next ten years, as concessions for palm oil and (to a lesser extent) ventures for high-value crop\textsuperscript{66} production come to fruition (Gibbon, 2011). Following this “land grab” for large-scale agriculture, most scholarship has focused on the politics of land acquisition and the dispossession of small-holders and pastoralists (White et al. 2012)). Less attention has focused on the patterns of labor recruitment, stabilization and management that characterize contemporary large-scale agriculture in Africa. My case study of the labor practices at Heddon Estates – a tomato farm that exemplifies higher value crop production – begins to address this lacuna, and in this sense contributes to African studies broadly construed.

What does the future hold for Heddon Estates? During a recent phone conversation with Leonard, a farm worker and my research assistant during fieldwork, I learned that Philip no longer resides at the farm. In previous years, Philip would spend the summer months in Port Elizabeth, but now it appears he and his family have moved there permanently. While his motivations for leaving are undoubtedly complex, I suspect that the politics of delegated despotism became too stressful for him and his family. As much as he delegated authority to black managers, and in a sense buffered himself against labor conflict, perhaps the basic sources of instability on the farm became too disruptive. Events like the chemical stealing incident and tomato picker strike may have continued taking place, forcing Philip to adopt the role of disciplinarian too often.

\textsuperscript{65} Large-Scale agriculture refers in this estimate to crop production (i.e. excluding livestock) under “Large-scale farming” and “plantation farming.” The difference between these two forms is discussed in the introduction to this dissertation

\textsuperscript{66} High value crops refer to fresh fruit and vegetables, citrus and cut flowers.
Alongside this instability, there were few ways for Philip (and his wife and children) to achieve meaningful belonging on Heddon Estates. As I have described, Philip did not socialize with workers and even avoided white employees after work hours. In an isolated occupational setting like Heddon Estates, such social distance is a recipe for loneliness. Moreover, the cropping patterns of the farm may have prevented Philip from “belonging to nature”; that is, realizing a sense of purpose in the improvement or experience of nature, as Hughes (2010) describes for whites in Zimbabwe. The intensive production of tomatoes and other crops, and the relatively large labor force that this production required, meant that – even given the vast expanses of the farm – escaping from intensive agriculture and black people was relatively difficult.

Leonard told me Philip still visits the farm for brief interludes, but left another (new) white manager in charge of the farm for most of the year. Delegated despotism, it appears, is evolving into a more extreme form. Even with the appointment of a new white manager, this turn of events probably increases the autonomy and discretionary authority of Clayton, who I’m told is still the head black manager. I would stop short, however, of seeing in this shift the realization of Mamdani’s “decentralized despotism.” Clayton is still constrained by a white presence living in close proximity, and the dynamics of racialized paternalism will continue to shape the labor system, albeit in an increasingly socially thin and authoritarian form.
References


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