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White commercial agriculture and the reproduction of racial order: Understanding the field of social relations on a Limpopo Citrus Farm

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Abstract: Economistic approaches to understanding relations between farm owners and farmworkers in South Africa's agricultural economy tend to make sense of these in terms of the value chain, with the argument generally being advanced that the state's failure to properly understand the value chain prevents it from properly recognizing that the fate of farmworkers is interwoven with that of agricultural producers. The claim is that it is only with state support of the latter that the fortunes of the former can be altered. This paper is based on the critical discursive analysis of the narrative statements of one white commercial agricultural producer in the export-oriented citrus industry regarding the government, his workers, wages, debt and conflict in the 'micro field' of the farm ('field' being used in the Bourdieusian sense), to speak back to the central claim in the economistic literature. In doing so, we place the micro field of the farm within the 'macro field' of the national agricultural economy, while seeking to expand the scope of literature relevant to making sense of the 'macro field', thereby offering an interdisciplinary approach to analysis.

Keywords: White commercial agriculture; farmworkers; racial order; export-oriented citrus industry; South African agriculture; critical discourse analysis (CDA); post-apartheid

Introduction

The violation of farmworkers' human rights in South Africa has been widely documented across a range of studies by human rights organisations, academics and even documentary filmmakers (Atkinson, 2007, SAHRC 2008, Human Rights Watch 2011, Wisborg et al 2013, Visser and Ferrer 2015, Heinemann 2016, South African Government 2017, Devereaux 2020). A key claim in some of this literature (see for instance, Visser and Ferrer 2015: vii) and other more 'economistic' literature has pivoted around the state's responsibility for the failures in upholding basic human rights for farmworkers.[1] This literature suggests that the state has failed to appreciate the ways in which farmworkers' fortunes are intricately tied up with the fortunes of beleaguered agricultural producers, and that there is an urgent need for the state to provide more support to the *latter*. It is state support (through agricultural subsidies, etc.) that would enable the producers to pay higher wages and offer better working conditions (producers having been reduced to price-takers vis-à-vis powerful local and global retailers, and rising production costs, being some among many producer woes). The state-regulated minimum wage increases, agricultural producers claim, increase farmers' production costs, impact their profitability and result in them recouping that cost through cutting back on the range of non-wage 'benefits' previously offered to workers.

Paradigmatic of the kind of argument linking the fortunes of the agricultural producer to the farmworker and the role of the state in this would be the following two examples. In eliciting the 'underlying structural problems' producing the living and working conditions of farmworkers, Visser and Ferrer assert that government policies have resulted in farmers becoming more pressurised and "increasingly [passing] on risk [and cost-cutting] to farm workers" (Visser and Ferrer 2015: vii). It is government's failure to "take a value chain perspective of the industry's woes" that has

[1] We are aware of the fact that there are different categories of people who labour on South African farms besides those categorised as 'farmworkers', including farm dwellers, labour tenants and migrant labourers. These differences (often non-substantive) is outlined in different literatures and lies outside of the scope of this work.

resulted in it "supporting farm workers without simultaneously supporting producers", which culminates in government efforts to protect farmworkers being "an exercise in futility" (Ibid). Similarly:

> "The South African state's policy of deregulation *destroyed* producers' collective bargaining power in the marketplace, and therefore their ability to demand higher prices and, *at least theoretically*, pay higher wages. However, having deregulated, the state has failed to make any effort to mediate power relations between lead [retail] firms and local producers. *This has directly impacted on the bargaining power of farmworkers to demand improved labour conditions*" (Visser and Godfrey 2017: 43 – emphasis added).

There have been critiques of these kinds of claims from within an economic paradigm. Perhaps exemplary of the position is the book *South Africa's Agrarian Question* (Cochet, Anseeuw and Freguin-Gresh 2015), according to which, "In spite of [the] deregulation process, white agriculture remained heavily supported by public authorities, regardless of white farmers' claims..." (Cochet 2015: 253). State support for white agriculture involves a) "permitting access to property that is as extensive as ever, barely questioned by the agrarian reform process, and almost exempt from property taxes", b) "access to irrigation…Irrigation water is still practically free for (mainly white) irrigators, and sometimes with unlimited use", and c) the fact that "measures to provide support to emerging black farmers have sometimes taken the form of disguised subsidies to agricultural service providers, former cooperatives that supply inputs and marketing (now privatised), and the agro-industrial sector as a whole, which is controlled mostly by white people" (Ibid).

Additionally, such scholars claim that the 'burden of wages' is an "alarmist representation" more than it is "an objective analysis of the economic situation on white-owned farms" (Cochet 2015: 263). The "very high level of farm income" on most white commercial farms is a result of "the high level of labour productivity", but the value added by labour is being used to remunerate farm owners and farm managers (Cochet, Anseeuw and Freguin-Gresh 2015: 342), enabling farming "families to maintain a very high standard of living, not only compared to the cost of living in South Africa, but also by international standards" (Cochet 2015: 256). Thus, "there is plenty of room for a wage increase without risk of affecting the profitability of commercial farms" (Cochet 2015: 256; see also Anseeuw, Liebenberg and Kirsten 2015: 49 who suggest the steady decline of labour costs as a percentage of input costs since 1947). Corroborating increased farmer incomes, particularly in the export-oriented fruit sector, Devereaux states, "…even if labour costs have been rising, incomes of many commercial farmers have been rising even faster. Between 1996 and 2013, South African exports of fruit and vegetables more than doubled in real terms (Greyling et al. 2015)" (Devereaux 2020: 385).

Our focus in this paper is on an export-oriented citrus farming enterprise. Driven by the shifts in agricultural outputs towards horticultural products including citrus (Anseeuw, Liebenberg, and Kirsten 2015: 44), "the commercial, traditionally white farming sector has consolidated, becoming more and more globally integrated, and characterised by increased concentration" (Anseeuw, Liebenberg, and Kirsten 2015: 48). The citrus sub-sector's success is starkly represented in a graph showing the steady growth in citrus exports from South Africa between 2012 and 2021 (WCO 2022: 3). In terms of specific citrus products, while being only the 5th largest producer of grapefruit (far behind the leader, China), *South Africa is the largest exporter of grapefruit outstripping China and other top producers by a significant margin* (CGA 2022: 42). While not ranking among even the top ten producers of mandarins in the world, South Africa is the *5th largest exporter of mandarins* (CGA 2022b: 41). Not surprisingly then, *revenues from exports are considerable*, in relation to the comparably low earnings from local sales (CGA 2022a: 11). In terms of farm owners, "Production of citrus in South Africa is in the hands of around 1,400 commercial farmers of varying farm sizes who grow primarily for the fresh export markets…" (Chisoro-Dube and Roberts 2021: 19).

Comparing black-owned citrus farms in the Kat River Valley areas of the Eastern Cape, with white owned citrus farms, de Monjour and Busnel (2015: 143) find that: "Family incomes on black-owned citrus farms vary between R35 000 and R70 000 per annum. On white-owned citrus farms, they vary between R1 million and R2.8 million. Here again, this difference depends mainly on the areas of orchards." They explain these disparities in the following terms:

> "Historically, the unequal access to land and irrigation water between black farmers and white families who have owned the land since the 19th century explains the very acute disparities in terms of family agricultural income. White farms have been settled since around 1820 and, most of the time, have been owned and managed by the same family up to now. The capital inherited by the current farmers (land, access to irrigation, fences, buildings, watering network, stock and orchards) has been accumulated incrementally for almost 200 years. On the other hand, the black farms were settled about twenty-five years ago, with very poor equipment and no individual title deeds. Low capital endowment, related to short and constrained accumulation patterns, explains the difficulty in generating high income" (Ibid).

Given these historical disparities, attempts to produce a class of black commercial citrus producers have been be-set with difficulties despite the Citrus Growers' Association's (CGA's) creation of a black empowerment initiative to transfer knowledge and expertise to black farmers (see Roberts and Chisoro-Dube 2021 for elaboration on the challenges and difficulties faced by black farmers in citrus production). The Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) represents the high level of organization of white citrus producing farms/ farm owners since its establishment in 1997 (suggesting the level of organization that had *already* been established in an industry that had been exporting citrus since 1907). The level of organization afforded by the CGA is represented, for instance, in the various schemes, trusts, committees and forums, that report to the CGA Board of Directors, including for instance the Citrus Marketing Forum (CMF) and the Market Access Committee (see CGA 2022b: 10), which suggests that despite the deregulation of the agricultural economy, citrus as a sub-sector had the resources necessary to regroup and re-establish collective bargaining power.

It is worthwhile then to consider the export-orientated citrus subsector, given that this subsector has enjoyed immense success in the past two decades at least; this is the kind of success that has garnered it significant attention both for the prospects and possibilities of 'inclusion' (black citrus producers) within the subsector (Chisoro-Dube and Roberts 2021) as well as its potential for creating more jobs in agriculture (Genis 2018). According to statistics regarding levels of employment for each of fifteen different fruits in South Africa, *citrus accounts for the largest number of employees* (140,000 in 2022, increased from 120,000 during the previous two years) with table grapes a distant second place (FruitSA 2022a: 6). According to a report by CCRED, "Citrus in South Africa stands-out in terms of its export-led growth and employment generation" with the authors suggesting that a conservative estimate of the total number of employees across the citrus value chain was 250,000 in 2020 (Chisoro-Dube and Roberts 2021: 46 and 13).

As an undoubtedly "prosperous industry" citrus has been deemed *capable of paying higher wages without reducing the number of workers* (Genis 2018: 57). However, the fact that *even the most successful producers* in Limpopo's citrus exporting sector insist the minimum wage is 'unaffordable', or have gone out of their way to make up for paying the minimum wage through cutting jobs, casualising and externalising labour and removing all non-wage benefits, and/or requiring a level of productivity from labourers that appears to be *punitive* (Genis 2018: 27 and 40) requires a different kind of analytical lens for interpretation of what farmers say about wages and their workers. One Limpopo citrus farmer said: "[We] employ fewer people to do the same amount of work. *Government is forcing us* to improve productivity" and another Limpopo farmer: "You ask what the *impact of government policy* will be on farming? We will definitely consider going to 4,75 hectare per worker. In some parts of our enterprise we are working on 6 hectares per worker. When I began to farm we had one hectare per worker. We employ fewer workers to do more" (Genis 2018: 40 – emphasis added). The farmers she interviewed in Limpopo represented "large-scale farms" (Genis 2018: 27), and their reliance on cheap labour to produce profits is undeniable: "When the farmers were interviewed in Limpopo in November 2015, there was much talk about automatic machines that can 'pack, stack, strap and load' boxes, but those interviewed [in 2017] *all agreed that labour was still cheap enough in South Africa to avoid the enormous capital layout on such machines*" (Genis 2018: 45 – emphasis added).

Asking the question, "Can citrus producers afford to pay a higher wage without reducing the numbers of workers?", Genis goes on to say that 'the numbers' "paint a picture of a prosperous industry and seem to suggest they can" (Genis 2018: 57). What prevents them from doing so? Genis maintains it is the relentless 'accumulation' strategies of commercial agriculturalists such as Limpopo's citrus farmers "as if on a treadmill driven by competition" (Ibid), which means that even the most successful producers are focused on 'enhancing the productivity of workers', that is, working them harder and harder to 'justify' the *minimum* wage they must pay. Thus, on a citrus farm in Limpopo, "Malamula's owner explained…: 'You need to make sure that workers remain competitive compared to the machine. Otherwise you replace them with machines. There are people without jobs so the workers need to be competitive with mechanisation'"; for their part, workers on that farm remarked on the hard work, exclaiming, 'Here we work like donkeys' and 'On this farm we are working like machines' (Wisborg *et al* 2013: 75-76). Despite low-skilled labour representing massive cost-savings for commercial citrus producers and exporters, farmworkers' value has been diminished by commercial farmers. The minimum wage, as Wisborg *et al* note, has become a 'maximum wage' (Wisborg *et al* 2013: 75), and for farmers, 'government' has 'forced' them to improve productivity, requiring them in turn to ensure that farmworkers labour 'like machines'.

The data on which this chapter is based was produced through an ethnographic study spanning two weeks of a combination of participant observation and in-depth interviews on the export-oriented, citrus-producing farm,

Malapeng, in the Modimolle-Mookgophong municipal region in Limpopo.[2] "Since the early 1990s there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of farming units in Limpopo, largely due to multiple farms being bought up and consolidated", while at the same time, "gross income from farming [had] nearly doubled between 1993 and 2007" (Wisborg *et al* 2013: 28; Bolt 2015's study of farming along the Limpopo border confirms this as well). Many farmers, previously engaged in maize production, moved to citrus as it became increasingly profitable to do so. At present, Limpopo is South Africa's biggest citrus-producing region – accounting for almost 60% of total citrus production (CGA 2022a: 12) – and thus the driver behind the success of the country as *the second largest exporter of citrus in the world* (after Spain, and despite being only the 12th largest producer of citrus in the world) (CGA 2022b: 39). While farmers, particularly those engaged in the citrus-producing export sector, have prospered, Limpopo is also the province where "people spend the highest proportion (22%) of their income on food, a feature correlated with poverty (Aliber 2009: 12)" (Wisborg *et al* 2013: 29). Additionally, in their study on human rights violations of farmworkers in different provinces in 2003, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) found that "Racism, violence and other rights violations were reported to be particularly severe" in Limpopo and, the poor health conditions of workers was , "affected by the remoteness of farms and by abuse and lack of physical security (SAHRC 2003: 108–112)" (Wisborg *et al* 2013: 14 and 15).

Two periods of participant observation were undertaken by the researcher (Vermeulen) between February and March 2021, and six in-depth interviews were conducted with various social actors including the farm owner, white and black farm managers and supervisors with varying degrees and spheres of authority, and farmworkers.[3] The interviews were transcribed and critically analysed and interpreted within the broader sociohistorical, socioeconomic and psychosocial context through which we understand the development of South Africa's agricultural industry. We relied on critical discursive analysis (CDA) as our approach to interpreting the articulations (primarily) of the farmer. We therefore paid close attention to the use of words and phrases, the crucial ways in which these served to place the social actor/speaker in relation to other social actors within the field, and the particular *work* that words and narratives *perform* in the production of the farm's social order.[4]

The conflict between John and Dineo was present before the issue of the farm bank payments arose. It is a conflict that mirrors the conflict between 'Michael' and 'Marula' in Maxim Bolt's (2015) study on 'Grootplaas', a citrus-producing farm in the north of Limpopo.

[2] This is not the actual farm name. All names have been changed.

[3] For more information, see the original study, Vermeulen 2022.

[4] We use Mullet's (2018) definition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as "a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting, and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities. CDA rests on the notion that the way we use language is purposeful, regardless of whether discursive choices are conscious or unconscious" (Mullet 2018: 116). CDA is usually used in studies that seek to "examine interrelationships between power, ideology, and discourse", and CDA is characterized (amongst other things) by interpretative analyses that produce meaning, "the view that power relations are discursive to some extent", that "discourses are situated in time and place", that "expressions of language are never neutral" (Mullet 2018: 118). Discourses are "ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them", and discourse is to be understood as "*constitutive*" in the sense that discourses "sustain and reproduce the status quo"; that is, they are part of the "produc[tion] and [maintenance of] unequal power relations between groups of people" (Mullet 2018: 119).

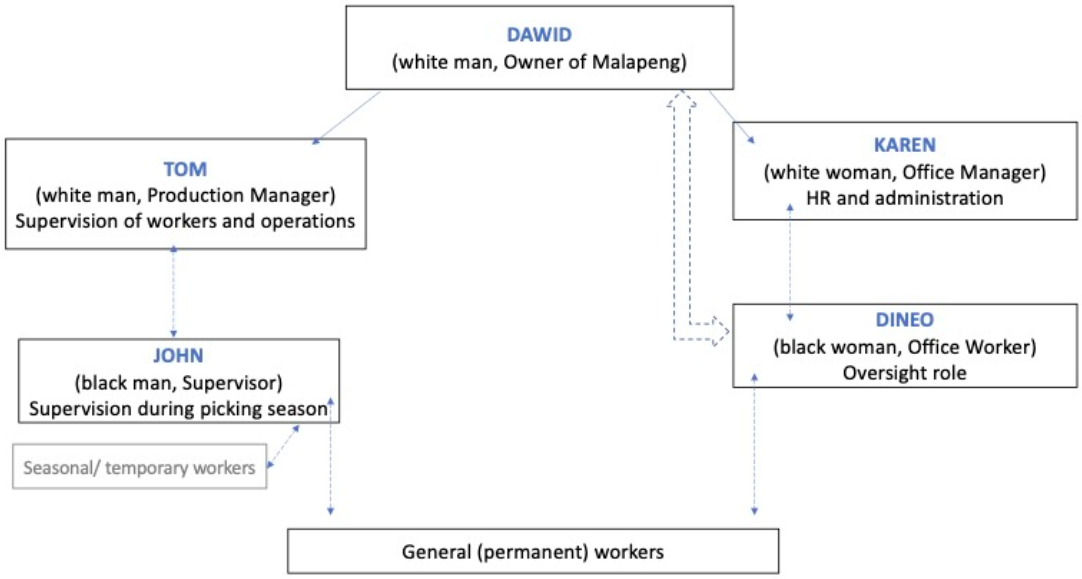

Figure 1: A depiction of the hierarchy of authority in the 'micro field' of Malapeng[5]

Dineo and John take actions in ways that suggest they do in fact have elevated positions of authority on the farm. The authority they are able to wield over the permanent and casual workforces is useful to Dawid, enabling the reproduction of social order on the farm. The fact that each draws on a range of social practices to gain Dawid's recognition, suggests that these are obviously effective; they do indeed produce that recognition and significance. Yet, in a revealing account of the labour hierarchy at Malapeng, Dawid demonstrates the inherent instability of their positions above 'general farmworkers', an instability that he actively produces through a kind of 'keeping them in their place':

> *We have a very flat structure at the moment, so it's me and [Tom] who assists me as* ***production manager****, and then [Karen] who assists* ***me in the office****. And then under that you've got ... my permanent employees and* ***they all slot in in different ways****. And that's the one thing which we've done; is that certain individuals will almost exclusively report to one person, but in general I'd say* ***it is more of a team structure than a hierarchical structure*** *at the moment****. We're one big team*** *and you and your skills are, if they [are] needed here then you work there. […] And then obviously within that employee group, we've got people which, say in the packing season we've got [Worker] in the Packhouse and John on the picking side* ***who perform more supervisory roles over the teams that are underneath them, of casual workers that come in****.* ***But to call them supervisors, I don't like doing that*** *because they might…* ***out of that season, if they are not in that role, they might just be in a role where a fellow worker is the same as them****. So, the label is something* ***dangerous*** *because* ***we're a team and you've got to be able to multitask****. So, today you might have a reasonably skilled [role? *inaudible*], tomorrow, maybe the work needs to be done, you need to dig a hole, and we need to accept that, that is your role, that's what we do.*

From Dawid's perspective, then, there is a clear distinction between management and labour, and neither John nor Dineo are in any kind of managerial position. They may perform supervisory *roles* at particular times, but would at other times be the same as any of the other permanent workers. It is interesting that he considers it *dangerous* for a permanent employee to think of him or herself *as more than a general farmworker*. Who is this danger posed to and what constitutes the danger here? 'Tomorrow' the worker who has been in a supervisory role may 'need to dig a hole', a *menial* task, one implying *manual labour*, distinct from *people management*, and 'we' 'need to accept that'; 'that is your role'. The flexibility required of them, reproduces the fundamental *instability* of the recognition that Dineo and John hold; their authority must continually be re-established and secured in the course of discursive skirmishes. Yet ultimately, these conflicts reproduce the key distinction between management and labour in ways that place them firmly among the workers. This confirms Bolt's analysis, mentioned above, of white/management and black/labour

[5] Vermeulen and Goga 2021.

as the constitutive distinction of the white commercial farming enterprise. It would be dangerous for either John or Dineo to acquire any *stable* recognition, any real possibility of upsetting the fundamental racial order of the farm, which may be more accurately captured in the re-arranged depiction of the 'micro field' below:[6]

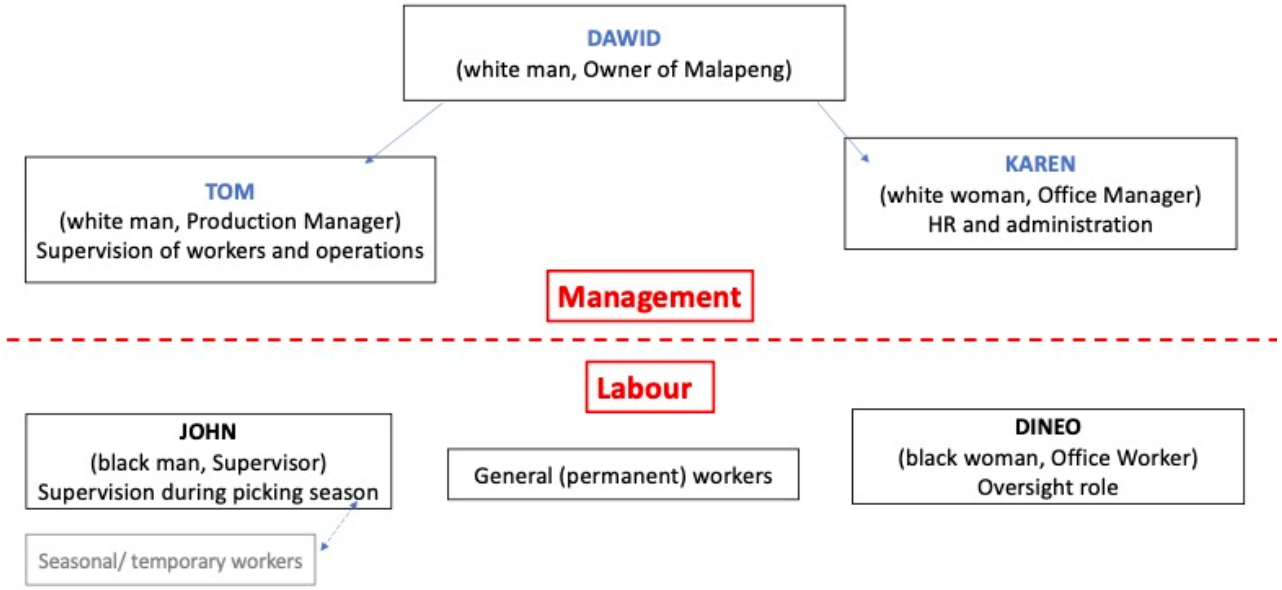

Figure 2: An alternate depiction of the hierarchy of authority in the 'micro field' of Malapeng

Farm bank: talk about debt, wages and conflict

The struggle over monies accumulated in farm bank takes on a particular significance when we consider the farm owner's discursive articulations around *wages*, *debt* and *conflict* at Malapeng, in particular *how he ties these concepts together*. When asked directly about the conflict that had arisen around farm bank's monies, the farmer was dismissive, saying he did not want to discuss anything around it. At a different point in the conversation, when asked about his general ban on workers selling goods on the compound, the farmer stated in managerial terms that "*It relates to conflicts in the workplace".* He went on to elaborate that perhaps one worker might start a shop, "*but invariably [selling] would be on credit. And then the end of the month would come and one of the employees couldn't … fully pay the money and then there's conflict at work, because* ***now there's unhappiness between two employees, for a matter which is totally unrelated to their work, since it's a private matter*** *[…] So, people selling invariably;* ***selling equals debt, debt equals conflict****. That's just the way it is... So that's why we don't allow them to sell…"* (Personal Interview, Mookgophong: 25 February 2021).

Unable to keep livestock either, according to Malapeng's rules, workers were in a position of having alternative livelihood strategies seriously curtailed, controlled and circumscribed.[7] Additionally, wages, the most crucial of all sources of income for farmworkers in Limpopo (Wisborg *et al* 2013: 20, 91–92), are low at Malapeng. The owner seems to be aware of the fact that his wages are often less than is required for farmworkers to meet basic needs, as he inadvertently reveals in the statement, "I don't know how, you know, some of the staff survive on the salaries that they earn" (Personal Interview, Mookgophong: 25 February 2021). He goes on however to justify the wages he pays: *I think in terms of the industry, we are paying a fair wage. What is a fair wage? Answer that question. What is a living wage? Is this, what is your expectations? So, I mean, if I could pay* ***my people*** *more in terms of the business, could afford to pay more, I think I would, but that's a double-edged sword as well. If I pay people more, then they have to give me that value as well…But in terms of the area, we [are] pretty much above average in terms of what the area pays, but I think we would like to…but then the same stage, I am also running a business****.* ***And I can't afford to pay***

[6] According to the Census of Commercial Agriculture, out of a total of almost 43 000 farm operators and managers in South Africa, 86% are white (CoCA 2017: 32).

[7] Tom, who lives on the farm property, owns several sheep that he keeps in a pen next to his house. He is responsible for his sheep, which often roam freely on the property. In justifying not allowing farmworkers to keep livestock of their own, the farmer insisted that conflicts would arise over who would take responsibility for sick animals and other potential issues.

people more than the value they give me (Personal Interview, Mookgophong: 25 February 2021). Dawid's responses around paying his workers a 'fair wage' are fairly defensive: he wants to pay higher wages, but cannot afford to; he thinks he would pay higher wages if he could afford it, but then his workers would have to give him 'that value as well'. He comes close to saying again that he 'would like to pay more' but quickly insists he is 'also running a business' and once again, that he cannot afford to pay 'more than the value they give me'. Affordability here is tied to the 'value' of the worker/. While initially referring to the workers as 'my people', he quickly shifts to speaking about the value they bring or are capable of adding to the business *as units of unskilled labour*. Significantly, the value they add is not in relation to any measure of actual labour productivity, nor is the value of the workers calculated in relation to the cost of the machinery that would be required were they to be replaced through mechanization. Rather, workers are simply constructed as *lacking* value based on their ostensible lack of skills; based that is on the ostensibly unskilled, value-adding work *required* of them.

In speaking about the problems faced by his workers, the owner both distances himself from their 'personal' lives, while seeking to demonstrate his knowledge *about them* and his paternalistic understanding of what lies at the root cause of their problems, and by extension of who they are:

> *I think it's my biggest concern about our workers and, you know, we see it, we see it. We aren't privy to their personal situations and things like that, but, you know, things happen. You know that a lot of our employees have got themselves caught in a debt trap. And generally, with, you know… you're talking about loan sharks... And they find it very, very difficult to get themselves out of that trap. Not just because it's a trap and then it's expensive to pay off**,** but also because,* ***this society is…*** *but I don't think that it's unique to my workers, I think it's society's problem,* ***that you desire, you want, it's easy to borrow money and you want the new shirt or a new pair of pants****. 'Oh no, don't worry, we'll lend you the money', and then they borrow the money and they [have to] pay it off. So, it's always been a concern for us that, that obviously debt gets expensive****, it takes a huge amount of their salaries****. One of the reasons we don't give,* ***we don't give loans as the business*** *is that what happens at the end of the month is obviously, they will say, OK, you want to borrow so much money, alright, so you're going to pay so much per month and 300% hunky dory. And the end of the month, you know, the bottom line is that you get, for argument's sake, five thousand or two thousand, three thousand rand [as your salary]. And then they look at that and* ***they say, but I'm not being paid a fair wage for what I get done****.* ***But that's not their wage, their wage might be, two or three thousand more than that, but because they're paying off debts****. So, it demotivates your staff terribly, because* ***they don't think you're paying fairly for something because [of] debt****.*

The owner links debt traps, which he also says often leads to drinking and a general 'downward spiral', to a lack of money management on the part of some workers; responsible workers on the other hand, are those who are able to save and invest their money towards self-advancement: *It's a percentage of your staff and* ***''d like to think the majority manage their money very well, and they've been saving and they're building houses and things like that. Unfortunately, there's a percentage that don't*** (Personal Interview, Mookgophong: 25 February 2021)

Here, we may begin to discern the discursive relationship that the owner wishes to establish between conflict, debt and wages. Dawid does not lend money to workers at Malapeng directly "as a business". Instead, he has set up farm bank as a credit facility which is ostensibly under the complete control of the workers. *"It was a place that they could go and lend money from. And then they would charge interest rates on that, and they decided how much, where and what, how. It was all their decision. We administer for them, but it's not, nothing to do with us"* (Personal Interview, Mookgophong: 25 February 2021). Karen explains farm bank as "*an account that we started for them"* and is also careful to distance herself from the decision-making around the granting of loans: "*They've [the permanent workers] got all the decisions and who gets how much and when and how it is allowed*" (Personal Interview, Mookgophong: 18 March 2021).

Dawid's claim that the farm bank has "nothing" to do with 'us' constructs it as outside the formal, managerial structures of the farm. Farm bank is relegated to the realm of the informal, thereby obscuring the ways in which it interacts with the official structures of power on Malapeng; how the formal structure of the farm both necessitates (through the curtailment of other livelihood strategies) and administers it. Karen, who administers salaries, is also in charge of administering payments from and repayments into 'farm bank'. If a loan is approved for a worker, it is paid into their account and the *repayment is subtracted in instalments from the worker's monthly salary* and paid into the farm bank account. Most significantly, the repayments are expressed as a *deduction on the farmworker's monthly payslip*.

It is this *reflection on the payslip as a deduction from salaries* that reveals precisely how farm bank and the debt it produces, are tied to wages. Debt, as Dawid says, "takes a huge amount of their salaries". As such, when the farmworker *perceives* his wages to be low or *unfair*, this is a misconception on his part because the low amount reflected on his payslip is in fact a result of the worker's indebtedness. His indebtedness is in turn connected to his impulsiveness and lack of self-control as well as his proclivity for impulsive, irrational choices: "*you desire, you want, it's easy to borrow money and you want the new shirt or a new pair of pants"*.

The value of farm bank lies ultimately in how it enables the farmer to speak back to the claims about low or unfair wages as reflected on the wage payslip. The farmer's authoritative power lies in no small measure in his *knowledge* of his farmworkers. What is it that produces *debt as a problem*? The farm owner produces the debt problem as one of individual but also *social (group) character*; an inability to practice self-restraint, an inability or irrationality in managing 'their' money, 'wanting things they cannot afford', and a lack of sober habits on the part of farmworkers. He understands them (particularly their weaknesses and excesses and *natural* proclivities) and is able to authoritatively assess the kinds of limitations of access to be set. Implicit here is the fact that this is a generationally acquired knowledge of/about the Other, a knowledge passed from farmer to son, and a deeply racialized *knowing* about the very *nature* of the black farmworker.

The conflict between farmworkers at Malapeng over access to and control over the single legitimated source of credit and alternative economic capital, the farm bank, performs its own crucial discursive function; it stands as an illustrative example, as *evidence*, for the need to control access to 'privileges' as they 'inevitably' result in conflict. The conflict proves what the farmer already *knows*, and thus *speaks for* him. It reinforces the natural order of things, including the rightful place of authoritative and decision-making power.

Re-placing the 'pater' and racialised resentment?: the farm as a psycho-social space

Dawid's claims – including the notable *disconnect* between the assertion that the wages are fair, and the fact that he is not sure how some of his staff survive on the wages they earn – must be considered within the larger historical context of the South African agricultural industry and field. The 'rules' by which the field was constituted and by which it continues to function to produce understandings of what a fair wage is in relation to the extremely low wages, extensive exploitation, and illegal wage practices that have historically characterized the national agricultural economy. To make sense of the relations between farmworkers and farm owners on the post-apartheid farm requires understanding what fundamentally shapes their interactions within the broader discursive field. In this section, we discuss the shift in farmer relations with the state (since 1994) and how this produces particular relations in the micro field of the individual farm. When Dawid spoke about the shift in relations with/to farmworkers, he referred to the way things were 'before' and how they are now. In doing so, he provides a picture of the paternalistic system that was practiced, which marks the farm owner as 'giver':

> *We, in the 80s when my dad [was in charge], we moved from* ***a very paternal system to more of an employee-employer relationship****. The paternal system, which was the* ***traditional system*** *of agriculture was basically you* ***fed*** *all your workers, you would* ***give****, they would literally* ***give*** *mielie meal, they were* ***given*** *protein source of some sort, and they would [be]* ***give[n]*** *tobacco. And then at the end of the month would be* ***given*** *a small amount of money. But they were* ***accommodated****, when the child was sick or the employee was sick, they were* ***driven*** *to the hospitals, to a doctor, you know. They were* ***fed*** *twice a day at work,* ***so food was made at work in the cafeteria, it was taken to them****, they were* ***fed****. As the employees were moving off the farm and had homes, obviously that little bit of money that they were getting wasn't enough to keep the house going. So, we changed totally into a corp- normal, normal employee relationship.* ***They would get given a salary and then it was their choice****. So, they would get paid, and they were given money, but they had to bring their own food to work, they, if they if they wanted to go and buy food for home, then they'd go buy food for home* (Personal Interview, Mookgophong: 25 February 2021).

Dawid idealises the 'traditional system of agriculture' that his father practiced until the 1980s. This was a time when workers were beneficiaries of a range of benefits (which he details quite carefully to make the extent of 'care' apparent) bestowed by the benevolent farm owner. The idea that 'food was made at work in the cafeteria, it was taken to them' – suggests that workers were almost those being *served*. Farmworkers were 'accommodated', 'driven', 'fed', 'given'. In Dawid's narrative, there is a definite break in this relationality, though he does not name the break, stating simply that 'employees were moving off the farms and had homes', a process of farm evictions that was highly politicised and did not involve the level of agency on the part of farm dwellers and farmworkers that he wants to suggest (Wegerif, Russell and Grundling 2015). Dawid states simply that the change was 'total' and the old system gave way to one

where a 'normal' employer-employee relationship took root. Under the new normal workers were given just one thing – a salary – and it was now their *choice* what to do with it. They had, in other words, been made independent actors.

Yet, who is Dawid *really* addressing in these claims about the benevolence of paternalism and the subsequent distance produced by corporate-like managerialism? What is the ideological work being accomplished through these claims? This becomes clearer when we consider the extract above in relation to another extract, where Dawid demonstrates that the independence of workers (from farm owners) has increased worker dependence on the state; and the state in turn has hopelessly failed the farmworkers:

> *You asked me, do we provide private health care? No. You find that you are assuming roles which is not your responsibility, and it's a slippery slope when you go down it…there is always going to be an exception here and there…But ultimately,* ***you're dealing with human beings, you're dealing with adults here, you are dealing with people that make their own decisions and you're not dealing with children****. So, I can't make a decision for you[…] You know, the government that's voted in is the government that the majority of people want in power…So, ultimately it is not my role. I'm an employer, I must keep my employees safe, I must keep them motivated and I must keep my business running, so that I can pay their salaries. And that's my responsibility as an employer. It's not my responsibility to provide health care, it's not my responsibility for education. That is a government's responsibility****.*** *But* ***my employees have the power, even though they are a small group of people, but they have the power to make changes to their own personal situation. And that is ultimately their decision. You want to help them, but change your own destiny, you know? By helping them, you basically just make it easier for them to change their own destiny****. If the government is not working, maybe it's just my opinion that the government is not working. Maybe it is working, then it's fine. And maybe the healthcare is good enough, maybe their education is good enough. Just from my point of view it's not, but that doesn't mean it's the truth. That's just my opinion, understand? Don't take my opinion and force it on my employees.* ***It's up to them and they make their decisions****, and* ***they are human beings and adults, they're not kids. I'm not going to treat them like kids*** (Personal Interview, Mookgophong: 25 February 2021).

While the role of the post-apartheid state in the commercial agricultural sector has been written about extensively in terms of policy and legislation, including around labour, an insignificant amount of attention has been paid to the *meanings of the post-apartheid state's metaphorical entry onto white commercial farms and the implications of this entry for the discursively articulated and produced relationship between the white commercial farmer and his white management and the black and Coloured workers who labour on these farms.*

It is widely acknowledged in the literature that the interventions of the post-apartheid state in 'labour relations' on the white commercial farm – whether through minimum wage legislation, prevention of evictions of farmworkers and farm dwellers (Wegerif, Russell and Grundling 2005), inspections of working conditions by the Department of Labour (Visser and Ferrer 2015) or land reform and redistribution projects and programmes (Lahiff *et al* 2012) – has had the unintended consequence of *worsening* the plight of farmworkers. Following an extensive explication of poor working conditions, through his own study as well as those of others across provinces, Devereaux concludes with a 'general' finding:

> "the replacement of 'racialised paternalism' on farms with legislated labour rights has had the unintended consequence of removing non-wage benefits that farmers used to provide informally which have not been replaced, as farmers engage strategies to evade legislation and deliver as little as possible to their workers. What used to be accepted as the responsibility of farmers is now seen as the responsibility of the ANC government" (Devereaux 2020: 401).

We see in the Dawid's discourse above, the repeated statement that workers are 'not kids', 'you're not dealing with children', 'I'm not going to treat them like kids'. Yet the tone of the entire narrative is paternalistic, schooling the workers on how to improve their lives and mildly chastising them for not taking responsibility for changing their own destinies but relying on others to do this for them.

The idea that he is respecting the autonomy and agency of his workers and that decision making is in the hands of workers, that they in fact have 'the power' to form their own opinions, to act collectively for their own good, and to change their own destinies, we argue, forms a part of the larger discursive construction and discursive practices through which farm owners *speak back to the state*. Having fused the 'favours' of racialised paternalism with legal obligations and worker rights under the law, farmers have refused to provide either, making use of provisions in the legislation to accelerate farmworker evictions, seeking exemptions from minimum wage obligations, and transforming

state policies on land reform and private-public agrarian partnerships into forms of subsidies for themselves (Devereaux 2020, Cochet, Anseeuw and Freguin-Gresh 2015). They have overall insisted that it is the state's responsibility to 'provide' for workers, whatever these provisions might be.

The economistic explanations and analyses can only take us so far in making sense of the positionality of white commercial farmers in South Africa, in particular their relationship to farmworkers, and to the post-apartheid state. It may be useful to step somewhat outside this framework of analysis, to critically analyse white commercial farmers' discursive articulations and their ways of *speaking back* to a legislating *black state* as key to re-establishing and re-producing racial order on the farm; the black state having intervened and inserted itself into the sociospatial order of the farm, has been emphatically made aware of its *inability* to act on behalf of black (and Coloured) farmworkers. In doing so, the white commercial farmer/father re-establishes himself as ultimately being in a position to *disburse* or *withhold* favours and well-being to or from farmworkers.

Analyses that suggest that forms of state intervention have resulted in the loss of "the benefits of 'racialised paternalism'" and have thus "*weakened* the relationship between farmers and farm workers" appear to accept the basis on which such relationships found their 'strength' (Devereaux 2020: 384 – emphasis added). The *strength* of the relationship between farmers and farmworkers in a paternalistic system was the concept of "*mekaar verstaan*" (Du Toit 1993), where accepting the white 'father'/farmer's authority over his Coloured/ black 'children' was key to maintaining the stability of deeply racialised hierarchies on the farm (Van Onselen 1991). The white father-farmer is accepted as the one who "[takes] responsibility" for his black/coloured worker-children (Du Toit 1993: 320). To be black or Coloured "in terms of paternalist discourse, is to be child-like, unable to take responsibility for yourself, dependent on white masters for protection" (Du Toit 1993: 322). In Dawid's insistence that his workers are *not* 'kids', appears to lie a desire to render them *precisely* as such. Like 'kids', they make irrational decisions that go against their own interests, in who they choose to govern them, and thus in *not* choosing to change their destinies, and *not* choosing to live better lives. Recall Dawid's statements about farmworkers' poor money management, propensity to fall prey to alcohol and debt traps, and their in-fighting (squabbling?) over farm bank monies, which all stand as evidence for the white farmer-father that these are in fact 'kids' whose position on the farm, as well as in life/ society in general, is a result of their inherent irresponsibility. In Dawid's narrative around 'government's responsibility', above, he appears to seek to underscore the fact that the black post-apartheid father-state appears helpless to change the 'destinies' of its black and Coloured worker-children. His repeated statements that 'these are *not* kids' in fact seek to emphasize that they are dependent and child-like and while rebuking them for behaving *like kids* (irresponsibly) Dawid is also impressing the fact that they have been failed by the one that stepped into the role of the father, the state.

Writing in the early 1990s, Van Onselen (1991) states that for much of the country's history, "the vast majority of black and white South Africans lived on the land in a largely agrarian society", where the "…struggle to keep the racial order intact had to be contested…[on] extensive farmlands set aside for the exclusive ownership of a white minority that was overwhelmingly Afrikaner in origin" (Van Onselen 1991: 2). In the 1920s and 1930s, this racial order was produced principally through paternalism, which Van Onselen describes as:

> "A set of social practices predicated on quasi-kinship relationships that are powerfully informed by notions of patriarchy… In the politically, physically and psychologically enscribed [sic] domain of the colonial estate, farm or plantation, white patriarchs tend to…inculcate and reinforce notions of obedience, deference and subservience amongst black dependents" (Van Onselen 1991: 38-39).

For the most part, paternalism appeared to 'work' because of a degree of dependence that white farmers had on their African 'tenants' and sharecroppers who were sometimes more economically successful than the former (with their main handicap being that they had been stripped of their rights to own land by successive land acts since 1913). The 'agricultural revolution' brought about by the second world war ushered in a decade – 1939-1949 – during which Afrikaner farmers "put on financial muscle at an unprecedented rate", a transformation that produced in them "an increasingly aggressive political stance" (Van Onselen 1991: 34). As Van Onselen states it:

> "Poorly-educated farmers who for most of their working lives had been dependent on, or subservient to the whims of distant mining companies, slick property speculators, 'foreign' grain traders, 'English' banks or the credit supplied by local Asian and Jewish storekeepers, suddenly found themselves … in a position to embrace a new and far more ambitious vision of Afrikaner nationalism" (Ibid).

It was in no small measure through the support of "considerable numbers of Afrikaner farmers" that the National Party won the election of 1948 "with the help of its socially elevating slogan; '*Die kaffer op sy plek*…'" (Van Onselen 1991: 35). After the war, Afrikaner farmers would experience "mounting commercial success and growing political self-

confidence" while simultaneously stripping African 'tenants' and sharecroppers of the last vestiges of their independence (forced to sell their cattle and no longer allowed to farm-on-the-halves), and eventually pushing them into wage labour for farmers (Van Onselen 1991: 37-38). Thus, from 1949 African people who chose to remain on white farms (rather than go off to live in the 'native reserves'), were kept ever-more-securely 'in their place' on these farms.

The former tenants and sharecroppers were not the only (or even primary) source of labour for the farms however. From at least the 1930s, and accelerating in the decades that followed, a steady stream of black people were coerced into farm labour, particularly through their expulsion from the urban areas as offenders of the notorious pass laws (the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 marking the beginning of concerted efforts to rid the cities of their African populations). Coercive farm labour schemes trapped thousands of African men on white farms under often brutal and inhumane conditions, which have resulted in comparisons being drawn with slavery (Evans 1997, Cook 1982, Benson 1960, Wilson 1971).[8] The racial order of the farm then was produced not just through (ostensibly non-violent) paternalistic practices, but through more direct, physical violence.

What was the effect then of a radical shift in the national political order in 1994? The post-apartheid state with its slew of policies, legislative acts and discursive acts in support of farmworkers threatened the racial order of the farm.[9] If "Paternalism conceives the farm as a crucially threatened community" (Du Toit 1993: 322), the entry of the black father-state into 'labour relations' on the farm would have been experienced as a significant threat. As Du Toit states, paternalism is reliant on the "[denial of] systematic antagonism *within* the farm", but sees that which inserts itself from the 'outside' into the farm space (particularly between the farmer and farmworkers) as a threat to the "harmonious" farm community (Du Toit 1993: 322; see Van Onselen 1991 for a discussion of the short-lived threat posed by the ICU to the racial order of the farm in the 1920s). The example of trade unions is instructive. Trade unions are largely absent on white commercial farms in Limpopo (Wisborg *et al* 2013; Genis 2018). In their study on a citrus farm in Limpopo, Wisborg *et al* (2013: 45) assert that "the owner largely saw unions as a threat to the social relations between himself and workers", and to the harmonious farm environment, stating: "'The trade unions will only destabilise the environment and make life difficult for all of us, we live in a peaceful environment, and everything is by *consensus*'" (Wisborg *et al* 2013: 45 – emphasis addded). Significantly, workers on this farm were aware of where authoritative power genuinely lies: "'The farm owner will have the final say in any dispute, not the trade union. They have no power over him, not even the police [do]" (Ibid).

The black state-father's attempts to gain physical access to white commercial farms via Department of Labour inspectors has been stillborn and ineffectual (Visser and Ferrer 2015, Heinemann 2017, PMG 2000). Farmers have instead introduced their own mechanisms for worker organisation: Workers' Committees and Employment Equity Committees. As one citrus farmer states, the workers' committee on his farm meets monthly to discuss workers' concerns: "'*We work with them*, and in doing so, *keep the unions out*. They never have big demands, rather small

[8] The long-established practice "of making convict labour available to white farmers" was given a particular boost in 1934 due to an "administrative arrangement" forged between the Department of Prisons and agricultural unions, with payment for this work going to the Department of Prisons (Evans 1997: 131). These schemes to deliver black prison labour – mainly urban *pass law offenders* – to white farms were highly successful, with numbers increasing from 40,500 in 1952 to 200,000 in 1957-58, prompting calls for white farmers to establish Farmers' Prison Co-operative Societies in order to "pool contributions to construct private jails on white farms" (Evans 1997: 132). The supportive role of the white state towards white commercial farmers in the stabilizing of coercive labour was reinforced after 1948. When 'liberal activists' sought to extract 'pass offenders' "from the grip of the various [coercive] farm labour schemes in the late 1950s" through legal actions, "[Minister of Justice, C.R.] Swart committed the state to defend and pay the legal costs of indicted farmers", as well as "expressly [authorizing]" the extension of corporal punishment to farm jails (Evans 1997: 136). In 1959, Victor Verster, the Director of Prisons boasted: "the Department of Prisons has become the focal point for the farmer, from the Limpopo to the Cape. They all want labour from us, but we cannot supply it, but we are doing everything in our power to meet the emergency" (Evans 1997: 132). Tellingly, South Africa's low wage trajectory in agriculture has been compared by some to "the south of the United Stated of America where the availability of slaves resulted in… partial mechanisation and the maintenance of a relatively high number of manual tasks, made possible by cheap labour" (Cochet 2015: 265). As such, the authors maintain, "South Africa did go the same path, somewhat later and not as rapidly" (Ibid).

[9] See Visser and Ferrer (2015: 39-40) for a summary of government policies and legislation in support of farmworkers since 1994. See also relevant sections in South African Government (2017).

things that need attention. We do not have strikes'" (Genis 2018: 38 – emphasis added). According to Genis, these committees appear to "serve to keep workers contented" (Ibid).

Aside from the black father-state being physically shut out of the farm, the post-apartheid state's illegitimacy on and *outsiderness* to the macro field of the national agricultural economy is also produced through discursive claims about it being ineffectual, incompetent and lacking capability. White commercial farmers in the citrus sector made statements such as "our government is simply hopeless" and "we need a government with competent officials" (Genis 2018: 47). These statements were made in relation to the tremendous growth of the sector in the global agricultural economy, which the state finds difficult to 'cope with'. The fact that "DAFF finds it difficult to cope with the growth and demands of international trade" places the black state-father as a kind of junior partner of white commercial farmers, with the state relying on the white agricultural sector's guidance, organisation, collective bodies, and expertise and knowledge to navigate the complex space of the global agricultural economy (Genis 2018: 55).

The relationality between the black state-father and white commercial agriculture, particularly the ability of the latter to authoritatively speak back to the state, *would not be possible* without the commercial success of the sector, in particular that of the citrus subsector. White commercial agriculture has been on a trajectory of increasing concentration since the 1950s, a trend that accelerated in the immediate post-apartheid years, with a significant drop in the number of white commercial farmers (from 60 000 in 1994, to around 40 000 in more recent years) (CoCA 2017; Anseeuw, Liebenberg, and Kirsten 2015: 46; Bernstein 2012). This drop in farmer numbers has been simultaneous with *significant increases in the size of individual farms* (while the overall land area owned by white commercial farmers has remained more or less constant). This consolidation and concentration of white commercial agriculture (which is set to continue, Bernstein 2012: 26), has emboldened the sector in speaking back to the black father-state, its policies, legislation and regulations.

We must read statements within farmer discourses about farmworkers within this context; as statements fundamentally about 'who is in charge' within the 'macro field' of the national agricultural economy and on the 'micro fields' of individual farms. The black father-state whose interventions into the closed world of the farm, and insertion of himself *between* the farmer and the farmworker has threatened to upset the social/racial order of the farm; the state is boldly being 'put in its place' through discursive articulations about 'the government's responsibility' and *its* dismal failure to protect farmworkers. Dawid is determined to direct the onlookers' gaze towards the black father-state and *its* failures towards farmworkers; yet this failure is not of course the failure to enforce adherence to labour legislation by white commercial farmers, but failure of the black state-father's *duty of care* towards its black and Coloured labourer-children. Compared to the paternalistic white farmer-father of the past, the black state-father has done *even less* to improve the lives of farmworkers.[10]

The post-apartheid maintenance of the racial order of the farm relies firmly too on the overall failure to produce anything resembling a successful black commercial agricultural sector; the place of the black and Coloured farmworker on the white commercial farm – as labourer, as unskilled, as aspiring to, and suited for, *low level* management positions at the most – is reproduced through racialised understandings of who *should and can* farm, who has the necessary vision, skill, abilities, values and foresight to do so, and *who does not*.

Economistic and policy-orientated analyses have approached the question of the relationship between farmers and farmworkers on commercial farms in South Africa, without a consideration of the ways in which farming enterprises have also been about the production of *Afrikaner indigeneity to the land*. The farm represents more than *just* a commercial enterprise or space of ostensibly de-racialised 'labour relations', and the farmer or farm owner more than just a profit-oriented, 'economically rational' businessman. Instead, farms and farmers are intricately woven into so-

[10] A recent high-level government report meant to consider the effectiveness of legislation and policy to protect the rights of farm workers, farm dwellers and labour tenants concluded that there has in fact been a 'total system failure', with few if any of the protections envisaged actually serving their purpose (South African Government 2017: 289). "The legislative and policy framework has become increasingly confusing and contradictory, without clear focus", and in the case of one Draft Policy entitled 'Strengthening the Relative Rights of People Working the Land' (better known as the 50/50 policy), it has been described as "an incoherent and dangerous policy" with "grave consequences" for those who are meant to be protected and "represents a step backwards from the promise of tenure security" (South African Government 2017: 291). A farmworker from Mpumalanga speaking at the public hearings for this report stated: "We leave our homes at 03h00 to go to work. We also work on Saturdays. I would like to know why we are not paid for working on Saturdays…We are slaves in the farms but the ANC is celebrating freedom when we are not enjoying freedom" (South African Government 2017: 287).

called 'pioneer stories' (Bolt 2015); narratives by (mainly Afrikaner) farmers which discursively shape how they think about their relationships with the land *and its black population*.

The immense success of white commercial farmers across the country, but particularly in the export-oriented citrus subsector, reinforces the idea of the white farmers as "men of vision" (Bolt 2015: 45), of "white, male farmers as the protagonists in rural development and progress", and "white settlers as frontiersmen of civilization, rationalising an environment through their vision" (Bolt 2015: 47). *Their* labour and *their* efforts in 'clearing the bush', "'…was not merely labour. It was an engagement with the natural world in which cultivators put an end to 'the primitive state of nature'" (Ibid). Their commercial success in the international agricultural economy and their continuing growth feed the narratives of the pioneering white farmer-settler, a relationship with the land that also naturalised a particular relationality with black labourers; "…it is they, not black workers, who have the necessary vision to farm" (Bolt 2015: 50). The failure of the black father-state's agricultural and land reform programmes to produce significant and notable commercial successes of black farmers, confirm who *can* and indeed who *should* farm.

Delmont demonstrates how Maggie Laubser's painting and artwork in the 1920s and 1930s were central to the early image-making of Afrikaner nationalism; Laubser's "representations of idyllic farmyard scenes and *a settled rural work force*" (Delmont 2001: 10-11 – emphasized), dehistoricized the social order as "unchanging and natural" (Delmont 2001: 13), thereby "[emptying the artworks] of their ideological content" (Ibid). Afrikaners "derive their historical being and identity from this relationship: they are products of the land *natuurmense* (people of nature) or at the very least, *plaasmense* (farm people)" (Delmont 2001: 14).[11] In J.M. Coetzee's critique of white writing in first half of the twentieth century, he demonstrates "how the identity of the Afrikaner settler is constructed as being inextricably linked with the issue of land, an issue which is embodied in the pastoral image of the farm" (Delmont 2001: 14-15). Laubser's work "[encoded] a vision of a content and enthusiastic rural labour force" (Delmont 2001: 20). In her artwork, "The image of the coloureds as a homogenised group of manual labourers is therefore presented as natural and inevitable, 'a prescriptive image of them as they should be, working'" (Delmont 2001: 22).

In the post-apartheid period of concentration and consolidation of white agriculture (and a failed land/agricultural reform and redistribution programme), the naturalised connection of the Afrikaner to the land appears to be more cemented than ever.[12] Just as Laubser's artwork and the *plaasroman* novel of the early twentieth century served to produce and reproduce the naturalising of Afrikaner belonging to the land, the post-apartheid 'Afrikaans culture industry', to use Adriaan Steyn's (2016) phrase, offers a range of television series through KykNET – *Megaboere*, '*n Boer Soek 'n Vrou*, *BoerBokke* and *Ons Boere, Ons Inspirasie*, to name a few – that appear to serve a similar purpose; the reproduction of Afrikaner belonging to the land, and the *naturalising* of this belonging.[13] This is accomplished in no small part by the idea of the *family farm*; the immense *value* that successive generations of the family have *added* to the farm, and the investment and commitment of the new, younger generation of (mainly) sons to continue to build on this generational investment. In this narrative, black and coloured workers are a *background* part of this family – *valued*, while not necessarily crucial to *adding value* – appearing contented and satisfied, their aims and objectives in tune with those of the farmer and his farming enterprise, *its success accepted as their success*. In naturalising the white commercial farmer's authority over his farming enterprises, his natural and necessary (and *benevolent*) authority over *his* farmworkers is also rendered natural; a seamless part of the ostensibly deracialized story of the post-apartheid

[11] In a chapter titled 'Cultivating Indigeneity' (in her book on *rooibos* farming in the Cape), Ives (2017: 30) states: "…white Afrikaans farmers often claimed a cultural and even biological connection to the ecosystem…[an attachment] so strong that they felt their blood was mingled with the soil… Afrikaners asserted that their cultural survival hinged upon a place-based identity". A white farmer in Bolt's study of Limpopo border citrus farms stated similarly about farming: "It's in our blood, it's in our skin" (2015: 50).

[12] For a full appreciation of the reasons behind these failures, see Anseeuw, Cochet and Freguin-Gresh (2015).

[13] Steyn states that "the Afrikaans television channel KykNET is [the most] watched channel on the entire bouquet of channels offered by the satellite television network, DStv" (Steyn 2016: 487). The rise of KykNET, Steyn argues, " illustrates the process through which the Afrikaans language has become uncoupled from the state and re-established itself in the marketplace" (Steyn 2016: 494). The six seasons of *Megaboere* and Season 1 of *Ons Boere, Ons Inspirasie*, can be found on the Naspers-owned Showmax.com, where *MegaBoere* is described as "an agribusiness program with a personal touch. In each of the episodes we meet one of the biggest farmers in the country and find out what makes them successful" (showmax.com). The first episode of *Ons Boere, Ons Insperasie*, is about the Cilliers family: "After five generations, Cilliers family farming is more prosperous than ever and it is thanks to the strong family ties that bind to each other for HF and his siblings" (showmax.com).

commercial agricultural industrial successes. As with Laubser's work, the cultural work of KykNET series such as *Megaboere* "effectively mask the issues of land ownership and the nature of labour" (Delmont 2001: 22).

The basis for Afrikaner entitlement to the land is precisely white commercial agriculture's investments in the *modernization* of farms and farming methods through technology, organisation and collectivity, and innovation. "As J.M. Coetzee describes it, to be a 'good steward (*vooruitboer*) is to make the earth bring forth manyfold and the flocks increase; it is to consolidate the substructure of the farm; it is to build upon the inheritance'" (Devarenne 2009: 632). Indeed, technological innovation, mechanisation and modernisation has reproduced and entrenched the 'right' of white commercial agriculture to the land;[14] the increase in the productivity of the land has been increased manifold by the forward-looking, risk-taking white pioneers of agriculture who 'cleared the bush' and brought civilisation to the land through ordering it and making it productive. The widespread failure of land and agricultural reform programmes to do the same has reinforced the 'naturalness' of *these* farmers' inheritance of the land, and thus the racial order on each individual white commercial farm regarding who owns/manages/makes decisions/holds authority and who engages in manual, unskilled labour (see Figure 3).

Chris Rossouw Snr., owner of Rossgro agricultural enterprises, when asked if an 'ordinary' person can simply enter the industry and become successful, states that they worked out the kind of capital outlay that an "outsider" would require and could not come up with an answer because the amount was "too vast, too big".[15] When asked what needs to be *preserved* in agriculture, Rossouw stated the following: "I think the concept of *family-owned farms should be nurtured*. I can't think of another way for someone to get involved in farming. One needs *quite extraordinary ability* to get involved in farming." When asked what he thought enabled his father to survive for fifty years "in a very tough industry?", Rossouw's son replied: "Grace, faith, steadfastness". The trajectory and development of the agricultural industry in South Africa, it may well be argued, enables the perpetuation of deeply racialised myth-making about land *and labour*, and the ownership of and authority *over both*. When asked what government should be doing "to ensure that justice is achieved for the agricultural sector", Rossouw Snr. stated: "If I was the government, I would make the farmer, regardless of what he farms, my best friend, and not my enemy. The farmer is not the enemy of the government". The state here is being invited, *coached* even, on the path to take, which, together with the general racial paternalism through which white farmers speak to and about the state suggests that white commercial agriculturalists have re-positioned themselves as *kindly but stern fathers over the state*.

[14] At public meetings held for the high-level government report on land rights, "a representative of organised agriculture argued for an economics-led approach to land access and redistribution for farmworkers… 'If we do not think in economic terms we are not going to alleviate poverty among these people…land does not alleviate the plight of the poor, but the *utilisation of land* through sustainable agricultural practices'" (South African Government 2017: 287 – emphasis added).

[15] *Megaboere*, season 3, episode 11 (showmax.com).

Figure 3 : A depiction of the 'macro field' of the national agricultural economy

Conclusion

The plight of farmworkers is indeed inextricably intertwined with that of the agricultural producers they labour for, yet not only in the way that economistic arguments suggest. The stability of the racial order of the farm has been secured through the commercial success (particularly of citrus) and increased concentration and consolidation of white agriculture. Having successfully shut the black state-father (and black trade unions) out of the gates of the farm, the order of the farm, the relations between the white farmer-father and his black worker-children are *harmonised* once more; everyone knows their place, there are no strikes. In their highly circumscribed world, we might read the Malapeng farmworkers' "[refusal] to be subordinated to a colonising white story" (Devarenne 2009: 640-641) in acts of resistance that take the form of silence: "*We just keep it secret because **we know that we are black**. We have to protect each other. So, we just keep quiet*" (Personal Interview, Mookgophong: 24 February 2021).

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