

Farm Workers and Farm Dwellers in Limpopo Province, South Africa

RUTH HALL, POUL WISBORG, SHIRHAMI SHIRINDA AND
PHILLAN ZAMCHIYA

One of the less studied legacies of settler colonialism and agrarian dualism in South Africa is the substantial population of people living and working on (still mostly) white-owned commercial farms – a feature distinct from most other countries in Southern Africa. Many farm workers and farm dwellers in South Africa experience precarious tenure, and poor housing and labour conditions. This paper explores what is happening to farm labour and to agricultural capital in Limpopo province. Findings from field research on four horticultural and livestock/game farms illustrate how economic pressures, combined with land restitution and labour migration, have produced new and contested trajectories of agrarian change – largely cementing a historical shift from independent land tenure to wage labour but also prompting diversification of livelihoods. We explore the ways in which actors on farms – workers, dwellers, owners and managers – have responded with regard to three spheres of contestation: ownership, production and employment; tenure and livelihoods; and family, gender and children. We argue that, contrary to official visions of reform, long-term processes of agrarian change predating political transition – proletarianization, casualization and the externalization of farm labour – are being accelerated. These processes, and the ways in which they are producing new contours of social differentiation, are illustrated at farm level.

Keywords: farm workers, agricultural labour, land reform, rural livelihoods, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

‘Social classes do not simply end and die; they live and are transformed through social struggles’
(Araghi 2009, 138)

Worldwide, agricultural labour is predominantly supplied by poor and marginalized groups, including migrants who lack full protection of the law. In South Africa, insecurity – of employment, tenure and livelihoods – among workers on commercial farms has been shaped by

Ruth Hall, Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape, Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, South Africa. E-mail: rhall@uwc.ac.za. Poul Wisborg, Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Noragric, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, P.O. Box 5003, NO-1432 Aas, Norway. E-mail: poul.wisborg@umb.no. Shirhami Shirinda, P.O. Box 844, Elim Hospital, 0960, South Africa. E-mail: shirhami@yahoo.com. Phillan Zamchiya, Oxford International Development Centre, Queen Elizabeth House, 3 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK. E-mail: phillan.zamchiya@sant.ox.ac.uk

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historical processes that are unique yet resonate in certain ways across the region. Here, large-scale capitalist agriculture was developed during the course of the twentieth century through systematic coercion to induce the black African majority to enter into low-paid wage labour (Lacey 1981). Post-apartheid South Africa inherited a deeply divided countryside, characterized not only by the well-recognized dualism between commercial farming areas of the former 'RSA' (Republic of South Africa) and the former communal areas of the Bantustans – but also divisions and stark contrasts *within* commercial farms themselves, which exemplify the twin processes of accumulation and underdevelopment, featuring extreme poverty (among farm workers and dwellers) in the midst of substantial agrarian wealth in large-scale capitalist agriculture (Marcus 1989).

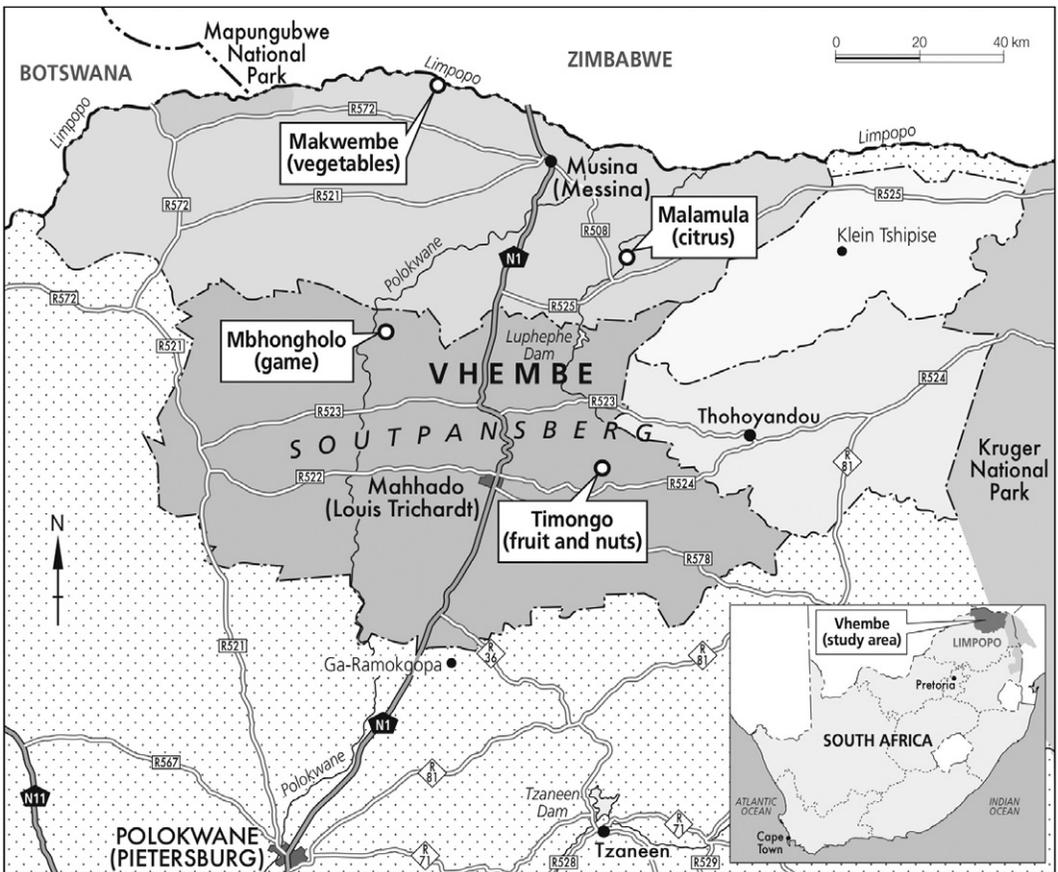
During the period of political transition to democracy in the 1990s, these conditions spawned a lively debate among activists, academics and policy-makers (CLC 1994; Marcus et al. 1996; DLA 1997). Would farm workers become the prime beneficiaries of post-apartheid land and agrarian reform, obtaining land of their own? Or would they remain on farms, benefitting from new laws protecting their labour and tenure rights? With growing mechanization and demand for higher-skilled labour, would they dwindle in number and be absorbed into other sectors of the economy? Or, superfluous to the formal economy, would they swell the ranks of the 'surplus people' without land or jobs in the overcrowded ex-Bantustans, and on the peripheries of towns and cities?

In many respects, these debates are still unresolved, as land reform has suffered several false starts, delivering little land and largely bypassing farm workers (Hall 2003; CDE 2005; Atkinson 2007). Meanwhile, the effects of policy reforms in various spheres – agricultural deregulation, trade liberalization, labour regulation, tenure reforms and price controls on key farming inputs – have compounded pre-existing trends towards agricultural labour-shedding (van Schalkwyk et al. 2003; Aliber et al. 2009) and evictions from farms (Wegerif et al. 2005). An extensive literature on conditions of farm workers and farm dwellers documents these trends and their outcomes, but little of it is published or attempts to engage with theory – with some exceptions (du Toit 1993; Atkinson 2007; Rutherford and Addison 2007). The evident failure of tenure and labour legislation ushered in under the new constitutional dispensation to bring about substantive change in the conditions and livelihoods of people on farms has in turn prompted some scepticism about the potential of a legislative 'rights-based' approach to development (Atkinson 2007). It is further claimed that the emphasis on state-guaranteed legal rights, combined with state failure in enforcement, has weakened trust between owners and workers and eroded paternalist practices that previously provided a degree of social protection to farm dwellers even while exploiting them (du Toit and Ally 2003).

South Africa's Constitution (RSA 1996) provides that '[a] person or community whose tenure of land is legally insecure as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices is entitled, to the extent provided by an Act of Parliament, either to tenure which is legally secure or to comparable redress' (Section 25.6) and that 'no one may be evicted from their home, or have their home demolished, without an order of court' (Section 26). The Extension of Security of Tenure Act (ESTA), 62 of 1997, aimed 'to accommodate the mutual interests of both occupiers and landowners', prohibiting the eviction of any farm occupier unless in terms of a court order and also providing for occupiers to secure long-term tenure by purchasing land with state support (RSA 1997). These tenure rights and regulations on when and how people can be evicted from farms have been poorly enforced and appear disconnected from any developmental vision; the state appears ambivalent about its existing legislation and there is a policy vacuum regarding the future of farm dwellers (Hall 2003). The only national survey to thoroughly document the scale and impact of 'evictions' and 'displacements' from farms in the

post-apartheid era (Wegerif et al. 2005) found that about 3.7 million individuals were displaced from farms over a 20-year period from 1984 to 2003, of whom about 1.7 million were forcibly evicted. The rate of eviction increased in the first decade of democracy, compared with the prior 10 years; evictees were poorly educated, three-quarters of the adults having only primary schooling; and only 1 per cent of evictions involved the prescribed court process and supporting legislation, the vast majority being illegal (Wegerif et al. 2005). Yet, as this paper shows, multiple transformations (of capital and labour) draw into question the legal meaning of eviction, in a context in which global market forces and the national land-reform agenda are changing ownership structures, and migration (local and regional) is changing patterns of residence and household formation.

Figure 1 A map of Limpopo province, showing the farms studied in this paper



This paper focuses on how these trends have played out on several commercial farms in Limpopo (see Figure 1) and analyses some of the changes in the ways in which people on farms now secure their livelihoods and reproduce themselves. This is South Africa's poorest and most rural province and therefore, one might expect, a part of the country where agrarian labour on commercial farms might have stronger links, both current and historical, to land. Here, an

estimated 70 per cent of the province is under land restitution claims, rising to as much as 90 per cent in some districts (PGDS 2004, 31). Our study area was located in Limpopo province's Vhembe district which, bordering Zimbabwe, Botswana and Mozambique, is at the periphery of South Africa, geographically and economically. Historically the last frontier of colonial conquest in what became South Africa, in 1994 it inherited three 'Bantustans' or former reserves – Gazankulu, Lebowa and Venda – characterized by poverty, economic marginality, poor infrastructure and fragmented institutions. While home to significant pockets of wealth, 60 per cent of Limpopo's population live in poverty. By 2002, farm employment stood at about 101,000 (Stats SA 2005), while an estimated 24,000 households, or some 150,000 individuals, were forcibly evicted from farms in Limpopo province alone in the first decade of democracy (Wegerif et al. 2005, 59). Vhembe (formerly Zoutpansberg) district is a hub of commercial farming, mining, forestry and tourism, and spans two distinct agro-ecosystems: north of the Soutpansberg mountain range, one finds a semi-arid area that is primarily used for livestock or game ranching and, where irrigation is possible, horticultural production; south of the Soutpansberg are subtropical and higher-rainfall areas with fertile valleys and hillsides, where farming involves mixed cultivation, plantation forestry and fruit and nut cultivation. Our study farms are located in two of Vhembe's four local municipalities, Makhado in the south-west and Musina in the north-west, three of the farms being north of the Soutpansberg and one south of it, in Levubu.

Our study set out to understand the interaction of external pressures (economic and policy context) and micro-politics at farm level, impacts on tenure and livelihoods, and the implications for alternative tenure and livelihood systems and therefore for policy and law reform. The objectives of the study were fourfold: first, to analyse links and conflicts between the economic context of farming, agricultural policies, the economy of specific farms and tenure security and livelihoods for workers and dwellers there; second, to understand policies and legislation, including on land reform, that affect farm tenure and livelihoods; third, to understand actors' discourses and responses to the policies, including the impacts of land reform on farm workers and farm dwellers; and fourth, to explore the scenarios that actors on farms expect, the strategies they advocate, and to suggest how actors may strengthen tenure security, livelihoods and social justice on farms.

The study required a combination of contextual analysis and empirical study at farm level. The aim was to study an illustrative, rather than representative, range of concrete conditions. The major information sources and research methods were: (1) a review of literature, policy documents and secondary data; (2) interviews with resource persons in government and civil society at provincial and district level; (3) detailed empirical case studies of four farms in Vhembe district; and (4) interviews with selected displaced households, also in Vhembe. We employed an iterative process of returning to farms on repeat visits between May 2007 and March 2009. We purposively sampled farms that occupy different agro-ecological situations and reflect different positions within the restructuring of production systems (Table 1). The names of the farms (and respondents) have been changed for purposes of anonymity. This research makes a contribution to the study of the diversity of farm labour and tenure issues in South Africa but, given its geographical focus and small number of farm cases, is obviously not representative of the country as a whole. In addressing recent processes of agrarian change in commercial farming, we draw attention to consequences for the tenure and livelihoods of people living and/or working on commercial farms, including the limited role of land reform in addressing the poverty and inequality that they experience, and the continued significance for some of land access and also other diverse livelihood opportunities on farms where they are or were employed.

Table 1. The case study farms

<i>Farm</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Main production</i>
Makwembe	Musina, Limpopo River	Vegetables
Malamula	Tshipise	Citrus
Timongo	Levubu Valley	Fruit and nuts
Mbhongholo	Waterpoort	Game

LAND AND AGRICULTURAL LABOUR IN SOUTH AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Historical Trajectories of Proletarianization and Pauperization

South Africa’s history of capitalist development in agriculture saw a long trajectory of proletarianization – from independent petty commodity producers, to sharecroppers, to labour tenants, to wage workers (Keegan 1986; Bundy 1988). In the early twentieth century, successful black tenant farmers and sharecroppers were able to negotiate terms of tenancy on South Africa’s white-owned farms that enabled profitable farming (Trapido 1986). Alongside restrictions on black ownership of land, an array of laws was soon introduced to restrict and regulate rent, share and labour tenancy by blacks on white-owned farms. Through the decades following its prohibition in the Black (Natives) Land Act No. 27 of 1913, sharecropping was transformed and overtaken by other contractual forms, although, as Trapido (1986) showed, its transformation was through the force of capitalism – the growing economic resources and power of landowners – rather than through legislation. Yet sharecroppers retained substantial leverage in this period, as famously observed by Kas Maine, the sharecropper whose remarkable life spanned almost the entire twentieth century: ‘The seed is mine. The ploughshares are mine. The span of oxen is mine. Everything is mine. Only the land is theirs’ (Van Onselen 1996, preliminary page, no page number). After the prohibition of sharecropping by the 1913 Land Act, labour tenancy emerged as the dominant form of labour mobilization and control on white-owned farms (Jeeves and Crush 1997). Heightened demand for labour contributed to white opposition to independent production by African tenants and ‘squatters’ and led to the introduction, but weak enforcement, of new mechanisms to coerce Africans into wage labour. Continued tenancy and sharecropping now constituted a ‘working compromise’ between land-poor black farmers and capital-poor white landowners (Keegan 1985).

The character and pace of these transformations took different forms around the country, in response to local histories of conquest and resistance, diverse agro-ecologies, and the varied labour demands of specific crops, among other factors (Morris 1976; Williams 1996). Frequent labour shortages in the three main sectors of the economy – on the mines, in the factories and on the farms – shaped national policies and politics, and informed not only the Bantustan or homeland policy of ‘grand apartheid’ but also a system of labour recruitment extending beyond South Africa’s borders. Regional labour migration has long been central to rural livelihoods strategies in Southern Africa, and the successful emergence of capitalist agriculture and mining sectors was in large measure due to South Africa’s position as a destination for such labour (First 1981; Murray 1981). As a regional centre of accumulation, South Africa depended through much of the twentieth century on labour reserves both within and outside its own borders, both of which were controlled to manage the supply of labour. While migrant labour was

predominantly male – and reliant on women’s contributions to social reproduction at home (Wolpe 1972) – over time, women have made up a growing proportion of internal and cross-country migrants (Peberdy 2008).

South Africa shared with its ‘settler colonial’ neighbours not only connections established through labour migration but also state strategies during the colonial and immediate post-colonial eras (Alexander 2006). These produced structural similarities across countries in the region, with similar conditions on white-owned farms persisting in the independence eras in Zimbabwe (Moyo et al. 2000) and Namibia (Werner et al. 2001). Farm workers and dwellers were marginal in both countries’ land-reform programmes (Moyo et al. 2000; Rutherford 2001; FCTZ 2002; GAPWUZ undated [2008]), which excluded the possibility that they might have a prior claim to land being redistributed, on the basis of their existing residence and use of it (Moyo et al. 2000). South Africa alone, though, instituted specific tenure laws protecting farm workers and dwellers as part of its land-reform initiatives but – as this paper shows – these were contradicted and undermined in practice by a range of state policies that prompted agricultural restructuring.

As Bernstein (1996) observed, South Africa’s agrarian question is extreme in the Southern African context and also exceptional in some respects. South Africa shares with several of its neighbours histories of settler colonialism and large-scale white-owned farms (specifically Zimbabwe and Namibia), but differs more markedly from other countries in the region (such as Mozambique, Botswana, Malawi and Zambia). These differences include the significant proportion of the rural poor who engage in wage labour on large-scale commercial farms; the even larger numbers of households in densely settled areas under ‘customary’ forms of land holding and who lack access to arable land, do not own livestock and do not engage in farming at any scale; and the predominance of non-agricultural sources of income for rural households. In South Africa alone, though, one sees the increasing importance of cash transfers from the state as key sources of livelihood (du Toit and Neves 2009). More generally, the regional differences are rooted in the historical span of South African colonization, the scale of its transition to capitalist agriculture and industry, the extent of African dispossession and the extreme racialization of its colonial (and postcolonial) political order. The question of land reform in contemporary South Africa is thus posed in a context that differs from both that of the classic agrarian question and that in surrounding countries of the region. Yet the recent trend towards large-scale land acquisitions in several countries in the region – for plantation agriculture, forestry, biofuels production, tourism and other purposes – has had the effect of concentrating control over both land and labour, and may yet in time contribute towards blurring the distinction between those countries with a history of settler colonialism (and large-scale white commercial farming) and those without (Hall 2011).

Farm Workers in South Africa

The experiences of farm workers and dwellers are shaped by structural inequalities that are common across a South African countryside that was moulded through conquest and dispossession, and remains divided between the communal rural areas once set aside for the black majority and the private farmland owned mostly by white South Africans descended from European settlers. The literature on farm labour in South Africa has been largely concerned with the nature of the country’s agrarian transition and the establishment of capitalist agriculture (Keegan 1985; Trapido 1986). More recent studies have been policy-oriented and concerned with documenting and understanding the reasons for evictions (Wegerif et al. 2005) and for continued poor living and working conditions on farms (du Toit and Ally 2003; SAHRC

2003; Atkinson 2007). Our contribution to this literature is to show the multiple overlapping trajectories of change under way and the new dynamics that they are spurring on.

Of the total land area of South Africa (about 1,223,000 km²), former homelands and other communal areas cover some 170,000 km², or just below 14 per cent, while about 40,000 private farms cover 860,000 km², or 70 per cent of the total area (DAFF 2009). Post-apartheid agricultural policies, reinforcing the deregulation thrust of the 1980s, produced dramatic restructuring: the number of commercial farms declined by a third from about 60,000 in 1996 to just under 40,000 by 2007, as they were consolidated into larger units (DAFF 2009). By 2005, the agricultural workforce was estimated at about 628,000, down nearly a third from 921,000 in 1994 (NDA 2008).

Widely recognized as one of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups of South Africans, about 1 million farm workers and an estimated total of 3 million people were living on farms in 2002 (Stats SA 2005). The 1990s saw the dramatic casualization of farm labour, with formerly 'atypical' forms of employment – temporary, casual and seasonal labour – becoming increasingly dominant. By 2002, there were about 480,000 regular and 460,000 casual employees in primary agriculture. They constituted the poorest category of employees, the 'working poor', but jobs in farming still provided 11 per cent of formal employment nationally and, more significantly, 39 per cent of rural incomes (RSA 2001). At precisely the time when new labour rights were introduced, growing unemployment and casualization of labour have narrowed the range of labour-based entitlements, disrupting long-established migration patterns and the flow of remittances (from urban to rural areas and from farms to communal areas). Cheap labour, a central concern of past state policies, is no longer scarce. Casualization in the labour market has been prompted not only by the raft of labour laws introduced since the 1990s (prior to which farm workers had no labour rights at all), but also, in agriculture as in other sectors of the economy, is connected to transnational trends, following South Africa's economic liberalization and trade deregulation. Outsourcing, labour brokering and other forms of employment are on the rise, with severe implications for livelihoods among workers across the board, and particularly for farm workers whose employment is so closely intertwined with their ties to their place of residence, and to entitlements to goods and services that form part of established terms of employment.

As observed by Friedmann and McMichael (1989), following structural shifts in the world economy from the 1970s, a new international food regime may be taking shape, concentrating 'corporate control both upstream and downstream of farming' (Bernstein 2010, 82), with consequences not only for farmers large and small, but also classes of labour engaged in struggles in the 'micro-politics' (du Toit 1993) of specific farms. In the context in which households are extended across multiple rural spaces, it is striking that the policy discussions on farm workers have treated them exclusively as 'labour' and failed to draw connections or propose remedial measures that would address the position that some (though by no means all) occupy, through extended household networks of petty commodity producers, as 'capital' in underdeveloped communal areas. Nor have policies addressed the diverse livelihood strategies pursued on and off farm, outside of waged work. As Bernstein observes, this 'fragmentation of classes of labour' is the flipside of globalization, in which 'the growing global masses of labour pursue their reproduction in conditions of increasingly scarce, insecure and oppressive wage employment combined with a range of likewise insecure "informal sector" ("survival") activity' (Bernstein 2006, 13). More broadly, the state response to the failure of the new constitutional order to bring about substantial improvements (and evidence instead of growing informality) has focused on white farm owners as impeding the realization of rights, missing the systemic factors structuring the behaviour of both 'capital' and 'labour' in the commercial farm context.

The distinct categories, ‘farm workers’ and ‘farm dwellers’, reflect that, historically, many black people who lived on white-owned farms were not employed there and that, with evictions and casualization, an increasing proportion of farm workers live off-farm and commute there seasonally or even daily from nearby (often informal) settlements. While the categories of farm dweller and farm worker overlap – there are those who live *and* work on farms – the people living on farms, including those who are not in employment, continue to be relatively invisible, their experiences unreported in official statistics, and their needs obscured in policies that focus on labour conditions on commercial farms and on ‘rural development’ in communal areas. The term ‘farm dweller’ also suggests an alternative to the presumption of labour-dependence and the view of proletarianization as an inexorable trajectory of change. It both recognizes the fragmentation of labour under way, and suggests the desire by farm dwellers themselves for an identity and opportunities beyond farm labour. Our research shows how, in our study area, farm owners, workers and dwellers have different and often contradictory visions for the future of production regimes, farm labour and settlement patterns, and have few opportunities to engage with each other or with state institutions on the character of land or agrarian reform they seek.

CHANGING CONTEXTS AND TRAJECTORIES

Farm worker and farm dweller issues have been understood within the context of colonial dispossession, apartheid monopoly on land ownership and associated political and economic marginalization, factors that remain central to understanding the situations that we observed in Limpopo. New factors, though, are changing conditions, behaviour and decision-making on farms. Three major drivers of change in commercial agriculture are shaping the lives of workers and dwellers on the Limpopo study farms: (1) *economic restructuring* through rising exports, mechanization and shifts to less labour-intensive production; (2) *land restitution* to specific claimants with historical ties to the land; and (3) *migration*, which combines old patterns of labour migration and new patterns of displacement that bring migrants and refugees to Limpopo’s commercial farms.

Economic Restructuring

Market-led economic restructuring has shaped the ways in which owners and agri-businesses are responding to opportunities and constraints in a liberalized economy where, after the withdrawal of subsidies and state controls through the 1980s and into the 1990s, markets are major determinants of investor and owner behaviour (van Schalkwyk et al. 2003). Since the early 1990s, the number of farming units in Limpopo has been dramatically reduced, largely due to multiple farms being bought up and consolidated into a single operation, a trend associated with the conversion of livestock and mixed farms to game farms. At the same time, gross income from farming nearly doubled in real terms between 1993 and 2007, with all three major farming sectors – horticulture, field crops and livestock – registering significant growth (Table 2). In response both to seasonal variation and long-term exposure to global markets, investors and landowners have been replacing labour with technology and casualizing employment. Minimum wage regulations have raised wage levels, but also spurred reorganization and technology change to minimize the use of labour.

Land Restitution

The Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994 provides for people dispossessed of land due to racial discrimination after 1913 to claim that property back or to get other compensation. In

Table 2. Commercial farming in Limpopo 1993, 2002 and 2007

<i>Item</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2007</i>
Farming units	Number	5,053	2,915	2,934
Employment				
Owners and unpaid family members		5,776	3,827	–
Paid employees (total)		93,116	101,249	74,216
Regular employees		62,720	62,635	44,037
Casual and seasonal employees		30,396	38,614	30,179
Employees' remuneration	R1,000	446,774	632,613	685,389
Gross farming income	R1,000	2,541,779	4,247,863	4,638,558
Field crops		338,339	785,982	435,145
Horticultural products		1,137,892	2,319,058	2,443,697
Animals and animal products		888,972	1,038,642	1,737,424
Other products		176,576	104,181	22,292
Expenditure	R1,000	2,271,547	4,118,081	3,461,084
Current expenditure		1,931,864	3,791,963	3,272,735
Capital expenditure		339,683	326,118	188,349
Farming debt	R1,000	2,100,458	2,734,233	2,542,742

Source: Stats SA (2005, 2010).

Note: Rand amounts for 1993 and 2007 are adjusted to 2002 prices.

Limpopo, most of the commercial farmland is subject to land claims (PGDS 2004, 31). By March 2011, a total of 3,326 claims had been settled in Limpopo, involving 548,044 hectares being restored to 43,667 households at a cost of R2.8 billion (CRLR 2011). In view of the scale of land claimed, the process of restitution is clearly still in its early stages, and is likely to remain a central and determining feature for the future of the province and its people (Ramutsindela 2007). Some claims include farm dwellers and workers, but they have been widely ignored as a distinct interest group in settled claims, and therefore, as we show below, are vulnerable to job loss and displacement due to the changes in land use, management and employment brought about by restitution. All the study farms were under restitution claims at different stages: from rumours, to gazetted claims, to negotiations, to transferred ownership. The land restitution programme was putting significant pressure on landowners to sell up and leave or to enter new alliances; three-way 'strategic partnerships' with the state (as funder), claimant communities (as landowners) and commercial investors (including former white farm owners, as partners in management) have become a dominant model for settling claims while ensuring continuity in production (Derman et al. 2010). While some farm owners have responded to moments of uncertainty in the claims process by halting investment, we found that others are investing further and expanding production and employment, in the belief that this will strengthen their leverage in negotiations with government and with claimants to sell their farms and enter into such partnerships. Restitution is one mechanism through which concentration of agricultural capital is being reversed, and access to land expanded, yet by definition many long-term farm dwellers – having averted prior eviction during apartheid-era forced removals – are excluded from these claims.

Regional Migration

There exist well-established historical patterns of migration into and through Limpopo – from Zimbabwe in the north, Botswana to the west and Mozambique to the east. Recent dynamics

have altered the socio-economic realities of Limpopo as a destination and as a place of transit. While, historically, the Soutpansberg district of Limpopo was 'exceptional' and officially exempted from labour migration requirements applied elsewhere, this exceptionalism has persisted unofficially, as immigration authorities have facilitated 'corporate permits' to allow commercial farmers in the border zone to recruit undocumented migrants (Derman and Kaarhus forthcoming). In these respects, the region has witnessed the continuation of established migration patterns. Yet both the scale and character of migration changed dramatically following political crisis in Zimbabwe from the early 2000s and its economic collapse from the mid-2000s, precipitating a wave of economic and political migrants, and altering trends in labour migration. While estimates vary, a United Nations report estimated that between 1.5 and 3 million Zimbabweans now live in South Africa, many having crossed the border illegally (Chaykowski 2011). Labour migration provides commercial farming with enormous benefits, as a commercial farmer reflected: 'the Limpopo [river] provides us with water and Zimbabwe provides us with labour' (Skjæraasen 2008, 16). The influx of migrants also appears to exacerbate market pressures towards flexible and insecure labour arrangements, while farmers emphasize problems of crime and insecurity associated with the high number of people moving through the farm areas. From 2009, South Africa granted temporary residence permits, in recognition of the plight of migrants, but also sought to maintain a scenario of normality and treated Zimbabwean migration as 'economic' rather than 'political', deporting large numbers of unsuccessful asylum-seekers (FMSP and MLAO 2007; Derman and Kaarhus, forthcoming). In this context, farms provided temporary livelihoods and refuge for some displaced Zimbabweans, as well as a locus for longer-term migrants.

STUDY FARMS AS SITES OF ACCUMULATION AND INSECURITY

Ownership, Production and Employment

While the study farms differed from one another in significant ways, they were all in a state of flux, adapting to a changing and volatile environment. In recent years, all of the farms had expanded, consolidating additional land or portions of farms into larger units – as a result either of private purchase, leasing of land or restitution. This trend is at odds with the original official vision for land reform, namely the subdivision of commercial farms into a variety of smaller units, to make possible a more mixed farming sector, offering wider opportunities for entry for small producers (DLA 1997). Another commonality is the pervasive contestation over ownership in the form of restitution claims, which is shaping production and employment decisions and social relations on farms.

Makwembe is a horticultural farm on the Limpopo River, with diverse and technically complex vegetable production. It has a large workforce and high number of seasonal workers, and has over time sourced much of its labour from the Zimbabwean side of the Limpopo River (the owner said memorably that 'in Africa a river cannot be a border'), but it mainly recruits Zimbabwean workers with work permits. Makwembe was in the process of substantial expansion into new lines of high-value vegetables for domestic and European markets, and extension into off-farm processing and packaging enterprises, on the presumption that a pending restitution claim on it would not proceed.

Malamula is a large family-owned citrus farm, which relies heavily on Zimbabwean labour (an estimated 80%). Its owner was in the early stages of negotiating a strategic partnership with claimants, and diversifying at the same time into game. Malamula bought up the neighbouring farm of 500 hectares about 10 years ago, acquiring additional land on which to expand citrus

production; similarly, Makwembe's owner had leased in two neighbouring farms – an adjacent property owned by a parastatal, and a non-contiguous portion of a relative's farm not far away.

Both Makwembe and Malamula farms were bought in the 1980s by white South Africans and remain 'family-owned' by a few relatives through a company or a trust, although in practice the man in charge (husband, father or older brother to other family members), considered to be the 'main owner', is most closely involved in managing production, employment and human relations. This structure of ownership was typical of white-owned commercial farms, but has been on the decline since the deregulation of agriculture from the 1980s onwards, and increasingly overtaken by corporate forms of ownership.

Timongo, in the Levubu Valley, is also a horticultural farm with a large permanent and seasonal labour force, but it differs from the previous two cases in that it is deep into a process of land restitution: twenty-six formerly white-owned farms had been granted to two neighbouring communities and were being managed by these communities with a 'strategic partner' (SP), a large agro-business company. Timongo was an early example of the strategic partner model now being prioritized in the settlement of restitution claims on high-value land (Derman et al. 2010). Its geography, labour relations and commercial practices are therefore more complex. Timongo is one case where, rather than family-based ownership, the farm is under corporate management and community ownership, as the land was transferred to two communal property associations (CPAs) representing claimant communities. As institutions envisaged as broad-based, democratic landholding entities, yet expected to develop 'commercially viable' plans for the use of their newly regained land, the CPAs formed joint management companies with two successive (but unsuccessful) 'strategic partners', agro-business companies working under contract with government. Mavu was the first SP, prior to its withdrawal and replacement by Umlimi in 2008, which in turn withdrew in late 2009, in response both to slow disbursement of state subsidies and conflicts with the CPAs over decision-making. Core to this were decisions regarding payouts to members versus reinvestment in the enterprise – an inevitable tension where poor people engage in commercial production and are expected to behave as capitalists, yet prioritize social reproduction. While ownership of the land by a historically displaced community sets it apart from the norm, in other respects Timongo's ownership structure reflects dominant trends of the deregulation era: farm consolidation, corporate management and vertical integration. The strategic partnership model is now promoted as the dominant means of ensuring continuity in production in the restitution context, curtailing possibilities for significant changes in production systems or labour regimes. By design, this strategic partnership emulates a model that is on the ascendancy in commercial farming, as long-term economic trends and increased exposure to volatile commodity markets have squeezed out smaller operators and prompted consolidation of farming units into larger enterprises.

Mbhongholo is a game farm in the Waterpoort area, created from six former livestock farms that were bought and then consolidated into one operational unit by a European investor in 2003. Planned new infrastructure for a commercial safari venture had been halted pending clarity on a restitution claim, and it has been mainly used by the owner, his family and business partners, rather than commercial clients. A population of eight farm dweller families, most of them relatives, remain after many more families were displaced from the constituent farms over time. The hired manager's primary tasks are to manage the people who live there and the smaller number who are formally employed; to ensure the maintenance of infrastructure such as fencing and monitoring of the wild game that has been introduced; and to prepare accommodation and catering for the owner and his guests when they come to visit.

Responding to this changed and changing context, the study farms opted for certain strategies and trajectories of adaptation: (i) horticultural intensification, (ii) conversion to game farming and (iii) vertical integration into value chains.

Horticultural intensification, seen at Makwembe and Malamula, involved expansion in cultivation and irrigation to capitalize on growing domestic and international markets for high-value crops.

Conversion to game farming responded to investor and tourist interest and involved major farm mergers. While it often reduces the need for employment and changes the type of staff needed (Carruthers 2008), experience from the Eastern Cape shows a mixed impact on workers, with some workers finding the labour lighter and more rewarding while others lose employment and access to land, as the presence of wild animals prompts greater restrictions over independent land use by farm dwellers and banning of workers living outside of compounds (Brandt and Mkhize 2009). At Mbhongo, the merger in 2003 caused significant movement of workers off the farms and only one family had (partially) secured its tenure to a distinct piece of land. The contestation over access to land was ongoing, and dwellers' independent farming almost extinguished.

Vertical integration in up- and downstream enterprises was important at all study sites: game farms sought to expand into tourism, hospitality and trophy hunting, while fruit and vegetable processing was a diversification strategy on the horticultural farms. Competition over lucrative input supply and processing opportunities shaped outcomes in restitution claims, as former farm owners at Timongo tried to protect their juice and packaging businesses, and the state and the new landowning communities tried to expand into similar agro-businesses.

Each of the farms was in some way affected by the land restitution process in the province. In the case of Makwembe (vegetables on the Limpopo), despite a pending claim, neither workers nor owners expected imminent change. At Mbhongo (game farm) and other contiguous farms, where a claim was pending, some farm dwellers were involved as claimants, and hoped to become the new owners, while others who were not claimants were threatened by the uncertainty brought by the claim. At Malamula (citrus farm), the setting up of joint venture companies was in process, as the owner prepared to propose a strategic partnership with the claimant community. At Timongo (subtropical fruit and nuts), land had been restored to two communities that initiated co-operation with a strategic partner. The restitution process, with its extended period of uncertainty and manoeuvring, caused an estimated 40 per cent decline in employment of the existing workforce, in part to make way for jobs for members of claimant communities. The few dwellers with multigenerational links to the land now had to negotiate their presence with landowning communities. Existing workers and dwellers were generally ignored as a distinct interest group in this restitution process at Timongo.

The farms demonstrated quite divergent employment patterns (Table 3 provides figures for the 2008/09 season). The three labour-intensive horticulture farms employed a large number of

Table 3. Employment at four study sites

Farm	Total ^a	Women	Men	Seasonal (as part of total)
Malamula	800	400	400	550 (69%)
Makwembe	450	340	110	330 (73%)
Timongo	420	295	125	120 (29%)
Mbhongo	10	4	6	0 (0%)

^a Rounded to the nearest five except for Mbhongo.

workers, most of whom lived on-farm in compounds or villages for at least a portion of the year. In contrast, the Mbhongo game farm had a small population of workers engaged primarily in maintenance, pending full operations of a safari venture.

The proportion of the workforce employed on a seasonal basis varies significantly, but had grown rapidly at all the large horticultural farms in the past 5–10 years, which both workers and employers explained as a response to the introduction of the minimum wage and related labour and land-reform fears. Reasons for these changes to employment practices extend far beyond the cost of labour itself, to input costs and perceived risk associated with land claims. At Malamula and Timongo, this had occurred alongside a decline in the total number of workers. ‘Seasonalization’ appeared to have been not merely a function of production requirements, but also a response by farmers to the policy and economic context. The term ‘seasonal’, though, obscures the degree to which employment is regular and long-term: although about half the workers at Makwembe were considered seasonal, ‘the season’ extended from March to November – a full 9 months of the year. The designation as seasonal workers appears *not* to be a strategy by the owner to discriminate in wage terms, since seasonal workers were paid the same as others but, rather, aimed to dissuade the substantial number of ‘seasonal workers’ from considering the farm to be their primary home, mitigating future claims to employment and avoiding retrenchment costs. It is a strategy to maintain ‘labour flexibility’ and control over settlement, while securing a skilled and reliable workforce.

At all the farms, the introduction of the minimum wage in 2003 was reported by both workers and owners/managers to have led to substantial increases in wages. During the time of fieldwork in 2008, the government-gazetted minimum monthly wage¹ was R1,090, or an hourly rate of R5.59, for those working fewer than 45 hours a week (RSA 2006, 2–3), rising to R1,232 per month, or an hourly rate of R6.31, from March 2009 (RSA 2009, 4). As some commentators had warned before its introduction, the ‘minimum wage’ had become a ‘maximum wage’, at least for workers considered to be unskilled. In view of the rising costs of living, particularly food prices, many workers reported that it was difficult for them to support their families on the wages. Single mothers who sent a large share of their income to relatives for taking care of their children in towns or villages at considerable distance told us both that they compromised on their own diets and cut the number of home visits to once a month to make ends meet (Women workers, Timongo). Malamula’s owner conceded that a basic salary could not support a ‘decent’ standard of living; all the other farm owners and managers agreed that it would be difficult to pay ‘decent’ wages due to economic pressures. At Malamula, a piece-rate system led to considerable wage differentials and payment below the minimum wage in some cases. The owner defended this as a way to reward productive workers and preserve jobs: ‘You need to make sure that workers remain competitive compared to the machine. Otherwise you replace them with machines’ (Malamula owner, 2008). Workers on the farm found it hard to meet production targets and confirmed that ‘here we work like donkeys’ and ‘on this farm we are working like machines’ (workers, 2007, 2008). Some, including illegal Zimbabwean migrants, chose to leave in search of better conditions, contributing to high labour turnover at this farm.

Employment remains highly gendered on the study farms. On the fruit and vegetable farms, women make up a large portion of the workforce, picking vegetables and sorting and packing them in pack-sheds – considered to be more delicate work given the potential for damage – while men do the tough physical work of picking citrus. A preference for male supervisors, team leaders and managers excluded women from more rewarding positions, except at

¹ Sectoral Determination 13, regulations in terms of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act.

Makwembe, where four out of seven supervisors were women; here, women also predominated among temporary and seasonal staff, leaving them with less job security, inferior rights to leave and pensions, and lower salaries than men. Women who were employed independently as seasonal workers, and those not in a relationship with an employed man, often found it hard to secure a permanent life on the farms, due to discriminatory regulation of accommodation. In these ways, as the commercial farms provide jobs, they also reproduce gendered patterns of poverty and deprivation, primarily among households headed by single women and dependants without employment.

Change on the farms was constrained by the limited capacity for collective action among workers. In general, workers were aware of labour rights – such as the minimum wage, overtime pay and paid leave – but not of the details of these rights, such as working hours, sick leave, holiday and absence entitlement, and compensation following injury. Workers are in general unorganized or poorly organized, and no unions were active at the farms we studied; some workers had had negative experiences with unions that did not follow up after recruiting and receiving membership subscriptions from farm workers.

Tenure and Livelihoods

Our findings confirm that the long historical process of limiting the scale and type of land use by farm dwellers is by no means over, despite recent tenure laws. Land access remains a means of control, and a site of struggle on farms, but restrictions imposed by owners on the terms of tenure have also emerged as a means of *de facto* (or ‘constructive’) eviction, forcing farm dwellers to leave in search of alternative land. Contrary to the depiction of farm dwellers as ‘displaced proletarians’ with no connection to the land outside of waged employment (Hendricks 1990), independent access to land for farm dwellers remained contested in all our study sites, particularly with respect to access to land for grazing livestock, keeping poultry and growing vegetables.

Across our varied study sites, household cultivation in gardens or small fields was evident as an important supplementary livelihood source. Many farm workers and dwellers relied at least in modest ways – and despite constraints imposed by owners – on using land to offset some of the costs of feeding themselves and their families: ‘We do not have land to cultivate for our own use, as you see some of us only plant vegetables in small gardens in front of our houses and [this] is not even enough to feed the occupants of the house’ (Farm worker, Malamula, 2009). Evictees, too, had diversified their livelihoods and faced competition for and sometimes exclusion from land access in communal areas. Some, though, were able to establish homesteads and some modest production of their own there, while leaving some family members to continue with wage employment on farms. Table 4 gives an overview of the diversity of tenure conditions on the farms, showing that tenure is not only about agrarian livelihoods: where people live, and on what terms, determines the services they can access, from running water and sanitation, to electricity and child care.

While we found evidence of recent evictions at *every* study site, no legal processes had been followed in any of them. Forced movement had been ‘normalized’; none of our informants used the word ‘eviction’. In contrast to the single legal definition, the evictions we learnt about through interviews with evictees in the study area took a variety of forms, expressing in specific stories the imprint of wider processes of change in the national and global economy. First, there were wholesale evictions of entire families and the destruction of their dwellings, often extending to homesteads built over several generations. For instance, Sarah (then 55) was evicted in 2003 with her elderly husband after 35 years on a farm when it was bought by a

Table 4. Tenure and livelihoods trends on study farms

	Makwembe	Malamula	Timongo	Mbhongtolo
Who may be on the farm	Workers and approved dependants	Workers and approved dependants	Workers and approved dependants, and a few land tenants	Workers and approved dependants, and a few land tenants
Access to housing	Rented – dependent on employment or close family relationship Some free and some on payment basis	Rented – dependent on employment or close family relationship On payment basis	Rented – dependent on employment or close family relationship Mainly on payment basis	No cost – dependent on history of land and social relations Generally free
Access to land	No independent access, temporary occupation in compound	No independent access, temporary occupation in compound	Limited independent access, cases of long-term occupation	Limited independent access, cases of long-term occupation
Livelihoods	Food gardens, spaza shops, poultry, services, crafts	Food gardens, spaza shops, poultry, services	Food gardens, spaza shops, poultry	Food gardens, minor livestock
Main trend	Towards wage labour only (almost completed)	Towards wage labour only (almost completed)	Towards wage labour and corporate control, but incomplete	Curtailling independent land uses (livestock and cultivation)
Exceptions	None observed	None observed	A few old dwellers with homesteads; also illicit garden plots	One family with own homestead and plot of land
Contestation	Access by visitors, game poaching	Access by visitors, keeping livestock	Access to land for workers, dwellers and claimants (new owners)	Keeping livestock; access routes on and off the farm

foreign investor and converted into a larger game farm. With the intervention of an NGO and information about their rights under ESTA, they obtained R20,000 compensation, which paid for some of the materials needed to build a home for themselves on a small stand allocated by a local chief in the already overcrowded communal area of Venda, but had found life there difficult for several reasons:

Here we are like goats in a kraal. We [want to] just run down the road, back to the farm. . . . We were staying very nice on the farms. We got firewood, milk for free, meat, and could shoot wild animals. We want to go back, even if there is not a white on the farm. Our graves are there. There we can stay on our own. We can live on his pension. We are not used to the [village] environment. People fight, here are robbers, we have no fields . . . Now, the whites are saying there are too many [people] on the farms. Our problem is, we were not born in villages. We were on the farms. We were evicted by the Spanish [farm owner]. They said, 'Get Out!' We have never lived in a *lokasie* [location] before. (Sarah, evictee, 59, 2008)

Second, there were evictions of individual household members rather than whole families. This was most marked as a method by owners and managers of dealing with the children of workers – teenagers and young adults who were not employed – but also applied to spouses and the elderly, including parents of employees. At Timongo in particular, substantial numbers of children and teenagers had been evicted and sent to stay in the ex-Bantustans with relatives or friends, while parents and smaller children remained – a process overseen by the black security manager who was also part of the claimant community:

As a security [manager] I try to look to those hostels, to find if there are some intruders, those who are not working on the farm, coming only to stay there . . . Even today I instructed my people to go around to the hostels, to find out if there are little children, those who are above six years and up, so that they report them to me. So that I can talk to their parents, so that they must take them to school. They must not keep them here on the farm, because I don't see them having a good future. (Security manager, Timongo, 2008)

Third, some farm dwellers had managed to secure their tenure on farms, but without the means with which to secure a livelihood. This problem, which we characterize as 'tenure without livelihood', emerged most starkly in the case of an extended household at Mbhongholo that had defended its tenure against threatened eviction; no one from the household was employed, and their use of land to grow crops and graze cattle had been terminated with the transition to game farming. They subsisted on one disability grant and very limited gardening around the homestead. A source of tension was the manager's suspicion that they engaged in poaching.

In the past, dwellers and workers enjoyed greater access to land on Limpopo farms than at present – whether this was land that they owned and used before white occupation or land they secured through arrangements with private owners. Our farm cases and evictees' stories suggest that dwellers' access to land for livestock or crop production has been eroded over time, often culminating in evictions. Dwellers at Mbhongholo recalled: 'We used to plough; my father had lots of cattle, goats, and sheep. We were ploughing *kaffirkorn* – *makaha* [sorghum] – and watermelon' (Farm dweller, 2008). Elderly workers said they had valued this opportunity to cultivate and keep livestock, and would still prefer this system; a few hoped that it could be restored through land restitution claims. At Malamula, some dwellers had previously engaged in their own agricultural production: 'We used to have big fields where we planted sorghum; the

fields . . . were put under citrus production by [the owner] a few years after he bought the farm in the 1980s' (Farm worker, 2008). Another recalled how livestock production by workers came to an end at Malamula:

In the early 1990s the farm owner told me to remove my goats from the farm. [He] said that my goats would contaminate his goats through cross breeding. He said that he wanted to establish a business environment and that I should understand that I was a worker. (Farm worker, Malamula, 2008)

Following the reduction in access to land at Malamula, some dwellers accepted the weaker and narrower employment-based tenure. Others found life difficult without their livestock and left the farm; the deprivation of independent access to land resulted in constructive evictions (Zamchiya 2008). Some dwellers saw their loss of land as being caused by the expansion and intensification of farming by landowners: 'The farm system made us to stop ploughing' (Farm dweller, 2008). As elsewhere in the country, though somewhat later than in other regions, the expansion of capitalist farming caused the gradual demise of independent land tenure and tenant production. At Mbhongholo game farm, since the merger in 2003, workers increasingly saw it as necessary to own a house outside the farm to have a place to live in retirement and to pass on to children – a trend also reported in the Eastern Cape (Brandt and Mkhize 2009). Their long-established tenure on the farm had been replaced with a tenuous, negotiable access that depended on the owner's or manager's approval, which in turn required availability for employment and compliance with rules relating to land use, livestock and other issues.

Contestations over land continue, reflecting the competing interests of dwellers and owners. Whether the farm is owned by individuals (Makwembe, Malamula and Mbhongholo) or restored to communities through restitution (Timongo), owners and managers generally see dweller cultivation and livestock production as conflicting with commercial production. A manager at the Timongo restitution farms said that ' . . . we cannot open the farm for cultivation for each and everyone, it would be chaos'. The owner of Malamula told us that 'They [farm workers] have no right to have animals or to start their own farming. No mine worker can mine gold for an hour for his own pocket. He gets paid a salary. This is not a social welfare environment, this is a business' (Owner, Malamula, 2008). Similarly, following years of conflict between the farm dwellers – reliant on donkey carts as their main means of transport – and the new Spanish owner, the infuriated South African farm manager exclaimed: 'This is not a bloody donkey farm!' (Manager, Mbhongholo, 2008). Yet, because the planned safari operations had not materialized, and no commercial operations were under way, to a significant extent Mbhongholo *was* a donkey farm. What was common was the emphasis on the farm as a business, determining the status of dwellers as workers and a logic of land use as owner-defined, marketable production – seeking to complete the shift from land tenure to wage labour (Gibbon and Neocosmos 1985).

Family Life, Gender and Children

Our research suggests that a pattern of 'split families' – as evident under the apartheid-era system of influx control – is not merely an old-established pattern, but is being created (and reproduced) in new ways on commercial farms, whereby parents and very young children live on-farm, while older children, siblings, spouses and grandparents stay in towns or villages elsewhere. Such changes in family settlement patterns may compromise the rights and social needs of individuals, particularly if labour migration is combined with restricted freedom of movement. As Desmond Tutu has observed, in apartheid South Africa, 'black family life was

systematically undermined by the migratory labour system' (Tutu 2000). One effect of farm evictions, especially those where some family members were evicted while others retain some form of employment on farms, is that extended households transcend distinct rural spaces. While not by any means in the majority, at all farms we interviewed workers who lived on farms but also held land in communal areas, usually worked at a modest scale by family members. These social ties between people living on commercial farms and family members elsewhere enable mobility, but also continuity of kinship and place. The practices observed suggest the reproduction and modification of old migrant labour, settlement and family patterns, all of which affect production, security, sexuality and education.

The 'split family' arises from three factors. First, owners and managers have concerns about sexuality and security. We found numerous disputes over who has a right to be on-farm, and over the distinctions between 'family', 'visitors' and 'squatters'. Some rules structured gender relations and created gender inequalities: a widespread practice is that women workers may have (small) children stay with them on-farm, but not husbands or boyfriends; in contrast, male workers may have a wife or girlfriend, and children, stay with them. A woman farm worker at Timongo said: 'Only married people are allowed to stay together. A man's wife who is not working can stay with him, but a woman cannot keep a man [who is not working].'

Second, there are concerns about education, aggravated by the widespread closure of farm schools by the Department of Education (Human Rights Watch 2004: see also Graaff et al. 1990; Nasson 1998). The absence of secondary schools, transport or affordable boarding facilities means that teenage (and even younger) children must be sent away to relatives or friends, as the Timongo security manager (see above) insisted. At Mbhongo, too, the distance to school meant some children living far from the main gate of the game farm were prevented from getting to school – it was just too far:

The police came here to take up the children with some papers; they told us the papers were from Pretoria. They told us the government was saying it is not wanting children on the farms who are not going to school, so they were going to all the farms to collect them. (Male farm dweller, Mbhongo game farm)

Third, there are concerns about the 'bad influence' of teenagers and adults who are not tied to employment relationships; this has led to the eviction of teenage children and young adults, derided as thieves and sexually promiscuous. This concern of owners and managers was shared by many of the workers we interviewed, some endorsing the practice of evicting young people who are seen as outside of the control of either farm management or their parents. A woman worker at Timongo said: 'Yesterday, security [guards] were going around telling us they don't want children here – not like mine, but the teenagers. Some have babies. Some don't have parents here, but come here for men; as girlfriends, they are not allowed to stay.' Children, including older children and young adults, who are often unwanted by farm owners, face very problematic conditions of housing, health and education, issues that deserve deeper attention in research, policy and public support.

The ironic outcome of these factors shaping family life is that, in the context of attempts to overcome agrarian dualism through redistributive land reform (including through historical restitution claims), new corporate systems of management, and 'securitization', are reinforcing patterns of oscillating migration and a remittance economy in the communal areas (and Zimbabwe), which continue to serve as labour reserves where social reproduction also depends on the labour of older children and (older) women.

All these issues point to the contentious question of the future not only of production but of settlement – whether this should be on farms, in communal areas, in towns or new

'agrivillages' being mooted in government policy (RSA 2010). Our respondents – farm owners and managers, and farm dwellers and workers – articulated competing views of land use and production, and divergent visions for the future. Owners and managers on the three large horticultural farms envisaged creating settlements for social reproduction and greater stability of the workforce – a ready supply of labour. At Makwembe, for example, the on-farm compound was well established, concentrating settlement in one part of the farm only, where a childcare facility and a nearby school provided for permanent and long-term seasonal workers. At both Timongo and Malamula, managers expressed visions of corporate managerial control over settlement by creating farm villages on or near the farms:

The idea I have got on this farm is to create one or two villages and then break down all the other old compounds. Just to put proper sanitation, wash facilities, electricity, and to upgrade people's living standards, to have a crèche maybe, so that the father and the mother can go to the work without worrying about the child, because it is in the crèche and is looked after and is safe. So that is the future idea I have got in my head. (Manager, Timongo, 2008)

Land in itself is nothing. We have the ability to utilize the land and they [will] have the land. The ownership will change, but the need for competitiveness will not change . . . Some people want to return to the land of the ancestors, but providing services to scattered groups is a problem. So one must make small groups settle close to the hub of the wheel. (Farm owner, Malamula, 2008)

While many farm workers focused on improving labour conditions, some workers and dwellers also articulated a need for expanded settlement and more access to land for their own reproduction, alongside continued commercial land uses. Some hoped that the restitution process would see the end of commercial farming, to be replaced by more dispersed types of settlement under community ownership, enabling family-based production by farm dwellers themselves:

What I am expecting, and what I would like to see, is for the claim to be finalized and then the people come back here and then we stay [here together]. The people will choose where they want to stay . . . There will be no white manager; it will be the chief and his people. (Farm dweller, Mbhongholo, 2008)

We should be like others, so we are able to sell things. I want to see myself ploughing vegetables and spinach, and then put this in my donkey cart and go and sell it at the pension point in Mopane. Because now I don't even have a gate to get out. My donkeys can't get out of the farm. The gate has been closed. Yes, that's how I feel: we are in a kraal, we are fenced in. (Farm dweller, Mbhongholo, 2008)

All this suggests that the future of farm workers and dwellers is far from clear, to them or anyone else, and the absence of policy direction on land and agrarian reform more generally compounds this. Policy-makers and actors in the farming sector face major questions and policy choices, such as: whether their aim is, or should be, to provide homes, jobs and livelihoods for as many people as possible on farms or let the commercial farm population dwindle; whether to realize or abandon the constitutional rights to secure tenure for people living on land owned by others; whether or not public service provision is to encompass commercial farming areas; whether 'farm workers' and their families should rely on wage employment or diversify their livelihoods; whether and in what ways land reform should include or affect farm workers; and ultimately, whether or not policy and social change can safeguard the tenure, livelihoods and realization of social justice for people living on farms.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper depicts varied trajectories of change on farms, and in the lives of farm workers, and new forms of insecurity that emerge. One historical trajectory has been that of independent producers becoming dependent employees. This trajectory of proletarianization, widely predicted (Jeeves and Crush 1997), observed (Marcus 1989) and applauded (Atkinson 2007), clearly continues and gathers pace as farm dwellers' access to land is curtailed, 'unproductive' household members are evicted and dependence on cash wages underscored. The outcomes, though, are varied, with some employees reaping the benefits of increased skills and security as professionalized junior and middle management within corporate agriculture, others becoming more insecure as casual and seasonal workers, straddling different sources of livelihood on the farm itself, and elsewhere, while dependent non-employees may be evicted and either resort to modest production in communal areas or exit agriculture altogether. Caught between a heritage of colonial and apartheid-era paternalism (now eroded), and post-apartheid public regulation (which has patently failed), farm workers are employing many different strategies to survive and secure their own social reproduction. These strategies call into question the category 'farm worker', and include seasonal farm work, informal trading and informal work on farm compounds, small-scale cultivation on farms and elsewhere, keeping livestock, social grants, migration and remittances circulating among family members between farms, communal areas and urban centres. The outcomes for agrarian change are uncertain, and far more fractured than prior predictions of 'proletarianization' suggest.

Agriculture in commercial and communal areas in Limpopo remains important for the employment, production and food security of a significant proportion of the rural poor. However, farm workers and dwellers living on privately owned farmland often lack opportunities for independent use of land to support their precarious livelihoods. The contraction and casualization of farm employment has been caused by a range of factors, including economic policies of agricultural deregulation and trade liberalization, the effects of land restitution, and the conversion of livestock and mixed farms into game farms and tourism ventures. Far from being reversed, the historical trajectory of displacement of African farmers and tenants from white-owned land, their conversion into wage workers, and expulsion into rural reserves or towns and cities appears to have continued and accelerated in the democratic era, and the dualism of the commercial and communal areas remains intact.

In a context of deep rural poverty and rife unemployment, each of the farms provides job opportunities and (often precarious) livelihoods. At the same time, our farm case studies illustrate in different ways the largely completed historical process of evicting dwellers with claims to independent tenure and thereby a conversion to wage employment as the basis for continued residence and claiming entitlements on farms. Factors driving changes to the labour force and the high number of evictions include economic restructuring in response to the liberalized economy and minimal state support to realise the legal guarantees to dwellers and to enforce obligations placed on owners. For managers and owners, reduction in the number of dwellers and contraction or casualization of labour are responses both to government policies to strengthen labour-based entitlements (such as wages and housing), but also to an environment of increasing competition and uncertainty (Agri SA 2000; CDE 2005). Land restitution claims have added to uncertainty, particularly for former workers and dwellers; as observed in the Timongo case, the strategic partnership model failed to protect former dwellers and workers (as well as, apparently, to provide sustainable jobs and incomes to members of claimant communities). Increased migration, particularly from Zimbabwe, expanded the supply of desperate labour. While Zimbabwean workers have brought important skills that support the

market expansion of some farms, their presence is perceived by some as weakening workers' negotiating power (see also Theron and Bamu 2009).

We argue that a pattern of split families has been created by the economic restructuring and a reinforced and changing system of labour migration in the province and the region. It shapes family patterns, including some gender disparities: for example, that women employees are less able than men to bring partners on to farms. Having children on farms, particularly older children, is both contested and difficult, among other reasons because child care and schooling is absent or of poor standard. Split families and labour migration are the products of economic uncertainty, land restitution and Zimbabwe's instability. Managers expressed similar visions of creating farm villages on or near the farms (as they were being transformed by restitution); in this way, labour could be closer and more stable, while the costs of housing and services could be borne by municipalities or new landowning communities. While this may be self-interested, it rests on an insight that social reproduction remains deeply problematic in the divided landscape and requires new solutions. Among actors in this locality, and in national policy debate, there is disagreement about whether this should be in agri-villages under corporate or bureaucratic control, or in homes on land owned by communities or dwellers and workers. Women often bear the brunt of problematic dependence on men and landowners, and on the distance between workplace and home; attention to this is central to building new and more gender equitable patterns of settlement, work and social reproduction.

The unusual step taken in South Africa of regulating the tenure of dwellers and workers on commercial farms, in recognition of the problem of landlessness and the effects of evictions, has been shown wanting. In the absence of any measures to grant secure access to land, only specific categories of occupiers acquired special protection, and this was highly procedural and stopped short of guaranteeing access to land for livelihood purposes. Despite tenure legislation, farm dwellers' experiences of life and livelihoods on farm continued to be one of insecurity in the context of rapid change and impending restitution. Farm workers and dwellers were peripheral to the debate about land reform in the 1990s, and limited tenure reforms have failed to secure their occupation rights, access to land or livelihoods. In isolation, tenure reform, even if effectively enforced, cannot address the land, housing and livelihood crises experienced by large numbers of farm dwellers. To secure farm tenure, the narrow procedural approach adopted in legislation and policy to date needs to be expanded to include measures that address the range of social relations, economic conditions and political practices that shape tenure, and it must focus on land and homes both on and off farms. Independently owned land could help provide a way out of often repressive 'domestic governance' on farms (Rutherford 2001). Tenure security, in this perspective, is only effectively addressed if linked to livelihoods through employment, access to land or other economic opportunities. Beyond policy interventions, dwellers' and workers' agency and social and political mobilization – for example, through organizing in labour unions – is needed to change power relations with landowners, farmer organizations and the state.

In this context, an enduring question is how poor people in rural South Africa are reproducing themselves as capital and as labour, composing complex livelihood strategies, often straddling urban and rural bases, and even, as this study shows, moving household members between commercial farms and communal areas, and across national borders, in order to combine marginal production of their own (on the farm or in these other locales) with wage labour. These are the conditions of existence that Bernstein (2002) terms 'fragmented classes of labour'. Questions for further research include whether and how social and agrarian movements might emerge in response to the complex class positions and multiple sites of reproduction occupied by women and men who are living and/or working on farms.

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