Chapter 4

Capital and Paternalism in Agriculture: The Case of Malapeng Citrus Farm

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Introduction

Despite labour legislation and the institution of a minimum wage in the agricultural sector, farmworkers in South Africa are some of the most vulnerable, underpaid workers in the economy. This chapter is based on an exploration of farmworkers' lives on a citrus farm in Limpopo Province, South Africa, called Malapeng, and how the workers' lives are impacted by the integration of the citrus sector into the global agricultural economy. This chapter aims to understand permanent farmworkers' lives in relation to various other actors in the field of Malapeng. These factors include farm management, the farm owner and other farmworkers, such as seasonal/casual labourers with whom they compete for jobs and whose lives and livelihoods are arguably even more precarious. A Bourdieusian framework is applied to contextualise and understand the neo-liberal and managerialist position the farm owner takes towards the labourers employed. Furthermore, this chapter looks to the study of *Grootplaas* (large farm) by Bolt (2015), to establish whether the findings hold true on Malapeng.

Although agriculture makes a significant contribution to the South African economy, farm workers are some of the least protected labourers in the country. Until March 2021, farm workers had an industry specific minimum wage that was lower than the national minimum wage (NMW). Farm workers earned a minimum of (South African Rand) R18.68 per hour, whereas the NMW was set at R20.76 per hour (Government of South Africa 2020). Since April 2021, farm workers have been paid the NMW, which is R27.58 per hour as of March 2024. The equalisation of the agricultural minimum wage has been met with severe opposition from farmers and farmer organisations, with magazines such as *Farmer's Weekly* encouraging farmers to apply for minimum wage exemptions (Phillips 2021). The agricultural sector is considered a special case when it comes to minimum wage discussions, as the sector is export oriented and subject to trade agreements and international

competition. Therefore, it was widely feared that fixing a minimum wage in this sector that is too high could lead to considerable retrenchment. Four years after the wage was equalised with the NMW, that fear appears to have been unfounded.

Claasen and Lemke (2019) illustrate that farmworker households are some of the most marginalised population groups in the country and that farmworkers (and their families) face many socio-economic challenges, such as poverty, food insecurity, little to no education, and limited access to government services. Farm workers are in fact, the most likely group in South Africa to experience food insecurity (Devereux, Hall and Solomon 2019). This is despite a range of policies instituted by the democratic government post 1994 that encourage fair labour practices and security of tenure. Claasen and Lemke (2019) suggest that the implementation and enforcement of these laws have mostly failed, and farm workers are reliant on informal networks and the farmer that they work for to survive. A key insight that the authors offer is that farm workers should not be treated as impassive or weak actors, since they are asserting their agency through their social networks to cope with the various insecurities they face (Claasen and Lemke 2019).

According to Anseeuw, Liebenberg and Kirsten (2015), the transformation of the South African agrarian sector post-1994 is minimal. The authors discuss the three most important features of the South African agricultural sector. These features are the deregulation of the economy (and by extension, the agricultural sector) since the late 1980s, the efforts to deracialise the agricultural sector and South Africa's spatial configuration since the end of apartheid and the persistent dualistic structure of the agricultural sector, which is divided into white commercial farms and black subsistence sectors (Anseeuw et al. 2015). The chapter in this source finds that the reforms that have been pursued by the South African government have not significantly contributed to transformation (social/racial, economic and spatial) (Anseeuw et al. 2015). As Bernstein (1998: 25) noted:

> In South Africa after apartheid, the land question retains a powerful symbolic and material charge, generated by the long history of dispossession and continuing widespread rural poverty and insecurity. There is also a widespread politics of land, and by extension, of fanning and livelihoods. At the same time, land and agrarian reform is politically marginal to the concerns of the ANC and the government.

It is important to note that black workers' access to national and global agricultural and agrofood

markets are mediated through white-owned farms which are operating in an agricultural sector that has been designed to exclude black Africans. Cousins and Scoones (2010) concur on the creation of a dualistic and racially divided agricultural sector in South Africa, which they suggest persists with a white-owned capitalist farming sector that monopolises national and global markets on the one hand, and a black peasant sector on the other.

Devereux (2020) discusses the violations of labour rights of farm workers in post-apartheid South Africa. His specific research focusses on female workers in the Cape provinces. However, Devereux's findings are consistent with other studies conducted across South Africa and are therefore useful to contextualise and understand the conditions of farm workers in post-apartheid South Africa. Devereux (2020) finds that although there is sufficient legislation meant to protect farm workers, there is a systematic failure by various actors in the agricultural field to comply and enforce the requirements. The author specifically mentions farmers (many of whom do not comply with basic requirements, such as providing contracts to workers and paying at least minimum wage), the government (who fail to enforce the relevant legislation) and trade unions (to hold other actors accountable for the good of the workers).

Devereux (2020) argues that the progressive legislation created by the ANC government has not been adequately implemented due to the neoliberal logic that the ANC champions. At the core of this is the idea that the government interfering and regulating the relationship between employers and employees is contrary to the core belief of allowing market forces to run their course. It is evident that the ANC is struggling to balance its revolutionary roots and its newer capitalist loyalties. Devereux (2020) goes further and argues that recent policies have served the interests of commercial farmers and not farm workers, and gives the example of farmers being able to apply for exemption from paying minimum wages. This once again illustrates that farm workers are not adequately protected by the state, and in some cases, the state goes as far as to explicitly place the interests of capital above that of the workers. Devereux (2020: 385) reaches the conclusion that 'farm workers have arguably been left more vulnerable than before'. This is due to a combination of two main factors. First, the lack of state enforcement of legislation and policies meant to protect farm workers, and second, the restructuring of the agricultural sector and in some ways, the weakened relationship between workers and farmers through the decline of the historical paternalistic relationship between farm owners and farm labourers. The paternalistic system that used to be prevalent on farms provided many workers with permanent accommodation and employment

and other informal benefits, such as the provision of meals and transport when needed. Although farmers no longer have total control over the lives of farm workers, the workers no longer have access to the benefits of "racialised paternalism".

It can thus be concluded, that literature shows a deeply unequal agricultural sector in South Africa, with farm labourers facing precarious conditions and poverty.

Data collection and analytical framework

This chapter will use political ethnography as its methodological framework. According to Halfpenny (1984: 8, as cited in Harrison and Callan 2013: 54),

> [e]thnomethodology is founded on the view that every occurrence within the social world is unique or indexical: that is, every event depends for its sense on the context within which it occurs, where the context is made up of the time, the place and the people involved.

This means that ethnomethodology can give insights as to how various actors make sense of the structures around them. This methodology therefore creates an opportunity to study how actors respond and relate to a system that is shaping their lives.

Two methods that fall under the umbrella of ethnographic methodology were employed for this study. First, observation was used to map the social interactions at the farm Malapeng. The research was conducted by participating in day-to-day activities with the farm labourers and engaging in formal and informal discussions regarding their lives at Malapeng. The second ethnographic method used was semi-structured interviews. Six interviews were conducted, each lasting an average of 40 minutes. The interview questions revolved around the relationships between the individuals on the farm, the management structures, and specific events that could help understand the dynamics of Malapeng. The interviewees consisted of the farm owner, a member of management, and four workers who are employed on a permanent basis.

Bourdieu's work, specifically the collection *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991b), helped the analysis of data collected. The crux of this work is that linguistic interactions express and recreate

the social order in which they happen, no matter how unimportant or personal the interaction may seem. Throughout the collection Bourdieu moves away from traditional linguistic analysis in multiple ways and argues that linguistic analysis cannot be effectively carried out by only looking at the grammar and form of language. Language and linguistic utterances cannot be understood without understanding the context—the field—that they are situated in. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 142) explicitly argues that 'linguistic relations are always relations of symbolic power'. As such, understanding the linguistic market at Malapeng allows one to understand how symbolic power is exercised and distributed. Bourdieu's shift towards understanding symbolic power as a function of discourse aided this study in carrying out an analysis about legitimate and illegitimate discourses at Malapeng and how they reflect power hierarchies.

The main languages spoken by the workers were English, Afrikaans and Sepedi. To accommodate for this, the interviews were conducted in the language that the participant was most comfortable with. All interviewees chose to conduct their interviews in English. Some sections of interviews were answered in Afrikaans, as certain participants struggled with English and defaulted to their home language. These sections were translated into English for the purposes of analysis. Participants actively choosing a language that they are not completely comfortable with is analytically significant and will be addressed in the discussion section of this chapter, since there is a rich social history related to speaking these colonial and apartheid languages in South Africa, especially by black labourers.

Findings and discussion

Linguistic hierarchies

The overwhelming presence of English and Afrikaans (a colonial language and the official language of apartheid, respectively) is an indicator of what is linguistically considered valuable at Malapeng, which is referred to as 'linguistic capital' (Thompson 1991: 18). Thompson explains that:

> The more linguistic capital that speakers possess, the more they are able to exploit the system of differences to their advantage and thereby secure a profit of distinction. For the forms of expression which receive the greatest value and secure the greatest profit are those which are most unequally distributed, both in the sense that the conditions

> for the acquisition of the capacity to produce them are restricted and in the sense that the expressions themselves are relatively rare on the markets where they appear. (1991: 18)

It is essential to note the implicit hierarchy of language that is being articulated by the actions of these specific actors. One can reasonably assume that knowledge of English or Afrikaans is likely to be seen as more valuable and prestigious than any other South African language, which Bourdieu (1991b) would refer to as the 'legitimate language'. Additionally, participants who were Afrikaans felt comfortable defaulting to their home language, while those whose home language was Sepedi, did not feel that this would be an appropriate action for them based on the historical devaluation of indigenous languages through the explicit valuation of Afrikaans and English. This can be attributed to both the larger composition of the citrus field and the archetypical Afrikaans farmer, as well as the use of English by the owner and those in the main office. At various points of the fieldwork, different participants were vocal about their ability to read and write in English and/or Afrikaans, and how this separated them from other workers. A similar situation is described by Bourdieu (1991c) when discussing fieldwork that the author had participated in. Bourdieu (1991c: 78) states:

> It is clear that the interviewer, as an 'educated' city-dweller, will only encounter strongly corrected French or silence; and if he uses Béarnais himself, this may well ease the tension of the exchange, but, whatever his intentions, it cannot fail to function as a strategy of condescension likely to create a situation no less artificial than the initial relationship.

> The above author discusses the self-censorship employed by individuals with less symbolic and linguistic capital. This occurs when an individual engages with someone possessing linguistic competence closest to the recognised legitimate language of the field. Bourdieu reflexively includes the interviewer or researcher in his analysis of when different forms of French were used in that specific setting. Two key insights from this passage assists this chapter in understanding the significance of all the interviews being conducted in colonial languages.

First is the idea of "self-censorship". According to Bourdieu (1991c: 66), all linguistic exchanges are more than just communication, they are also 'an economic exchange which is established

between a producer, endowed with a certain linguistic capital, and a consumer (or a market), and which is capable of procuring a certain material or symbolic profit'. As such, all linguistic exchanges (including, if not especially, between the researcher and the research participants) can generate profit (such as the prestige of their proximity to the researcher, an actor with more symbolic capital than the labourers). Bourdieu (1991c) posits that the linguistic relation of power is not only dependent on the linguistic forces at play, rather, the whole structure of power is also present in each interaction. In other words, the distribution of linguistic capital is related to the distribution of other forms of capital. In this context, individuals assess the linguistic market they are acting in and modify (or self-censor) their speech (what is said and how it is said) based on how it would be received. Success would mean profits, such as prestige, whereas failure would lead to sanctions, such as a negative impact on their reputation (Thompson 1991).

One must note the role of anticipation in this process. The individual makes an implicit assumption of the structure of the market and pre-emptively modifies their discourse accordingly. As such, this is self-censorship based on anticipated sanctions or rewards (Thompson 1991: 20). In Bourdieu's (1991c: 77) own words, he describes self-censorship as:

> In the case of symbolic production, the constraint exercised by the market via the anticipation of possible profit naturally takes the form of an anticipated censorship, of a self- censorship which determines not only the manner of saying, that is, the choice of language- 'code switching' in situations of bilingualism - or the 'level' of language, but also what it will be possible or not possible to say.

If Bourdieu's (1991c) argument that linguistic capital is linked to and reflects other forms of capital is accepted, then it must be recognised that the farm labourers chose to have their interviews conducted in English as a form of self-censorship that recognised and reinforced the existing capital distributions at Malapeng, specifically related to race and language.

Limiting livelihood strategies

The lives of the permanent workers at Malapeng encapsulate the precariousness that is well-known in the South African agricultural sector. Almost all the workers interviewed agreed that they are either not earning a fair wage, or not earning enough to support their families. There is a consensus

that the wage is not enough.

The farmer seems to know that his wages are often less than is required for farmworkers to "survive", as he inadvertently reveals in the following quote:

> *'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 ...* ***I don't know how, you know, some of the staff survive on the salaries that they earn****. 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 people more than the value they give me****.'* (Personal Interview, Mookgopong: 25 February 2021)

The farm owner is quick to justify the wages paid based on a differentiation between "living" and "fair" wages. According to the farmer, the wages being paid are fair, "in the context of the industry". This speaks to the worker who agrees that their wages are fair compared to surrounding farms. There is a notable disconnect between the assertion that the wages are fair, and the fact that the farmer is not sure how some of the staff survive on the wages they earn. This point must be considered within the context of the South African agricultural field. The "rules" by which the field was constituted and by which it continues to function, produce the understanding of what a fair wage is due to the historically low wages, extensive exploitation, and illegal wage practices that have characterised the national agricultural economy.

The farm owner has banned the buying and selling of all goods if not done through an officially sanctioned farm shop, thereby restricting the livelihood strategies of the labourers working on Malapeng. The farm shop is "rented" to one of the labourers who has an exclusive mandate to sell necessary items on the property of Malapeng. The labourer does provide some credit for those purchasing from the store, however, several participants confided that they only bought from the shop in cases of emergency, since the goods being sold are overpriced.

Workers are also not allowed to trade amongst themselves to earn extra income. However, it is

unclear how successfully this rule is enforced. During fieldwork at Malapeng, some participants alluded that informal shops are set up during the picking season, whereas others denied the existence of any such shops. One can attribute this "inconsistency" to the process of self-censorship Bourdieu (1991c) discusses, implying that the information was withheld from the researcher by some participants because they were either unsure how the information would be received or that they did not trust the researcher enough to not report the existence of any shops not sanctioned by the farm owner.

The discussion around ad hoc buying and selling was the only time a labourer explicitly mentioned race in an interview: *'If we do that, 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, Mookgopong: 24 February 2021). The labourers are aware of the racialised nature of the hierarchy at Malapeng, even if they very seldomly verbalise it. There is a distinction being made between "us" versus "them", the nature of which is left vague and undefined for the majority of the time. However, in this instance, the difference between the labourers and the management is articulated explicitly as one of race. The conspicuous absence of race from the conversation in a very racialised context can be understood as a form of protecting workers through euphemising and self-censorship.

One participant sold airtime and single cigarettes and provided small loans to those who needed it. The participant makes it clear that if caught selling anything, he would be fired. When asked how he is supplementing his wages, the participant stated that he is just saving as much as he can. The topic of workers selling goods among themselves came up in the interview with the farm owner as well; when asked about the ban on trading among farmworkers, the farmer explains:

> *'It relates to conflicts in the workplace. Because what was happening was, every farm would have one or two little spaza shops. And then one worker would start a shop and maybe a bit more entrepreneurial and they would sell stuff, but invariably it would be on credit. And then the end of the month would come and one of the employees couldn't pay the money to 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*** *and we got to an extreme where we had one employee who was in a supervisory role and despite a direct order the person made a decision which was not based on what was best in the company's interest, or indeed the employee's interests; but ultimately her interests.*

> *Because she was the spaza shop [owner] and it would have involved that the employees—it was casual workers—that would lose hours that weren't going to work certain hours. And she was fearful that by doing that, they wouldn't be able to pay her debt back. So, she made a decision which ultimately cost the business a lot of money. And so, you know, I think that was that was sort of the conflict and everything and that that was just the last straw. So, people selling invariably;* ***selling equals debt, debt equals conflict****. That's just the way it is. That's what it always... So that's why we don't allow them to sell anything other than obviously [the worker] who specifically has got the shop. I mean, that's the function, she used to work for us. She's taken over the shop, that's her function, that's her job. Well not her job, her, it's her business.'* (Personal Interview, Mookgopong: 25 February 2021)

When a senior manager was asked about the ban on selling goods amongst workers, they also mention the senior worker that the farm owner brought up. However, the senior manager gave a different account: the real issue, according to the manager, is that the worker had been selling alcohol and wanted to keep selling after her dismissal. The language and sentiments that are evident in his answer speaks again to his managerial mindset; decisions must align with what is best for the business. No mention is made of the fact that workers are far away from the closest stores or the fact that their wages are, by his own admission, not living wages. Furthermore, the assertion that selling amongst themselves equals debt is re-contextualised when one remembers that there are those who avoid buying from the farm shop unless they need to buy on credit, hence, create debt.

In addition to this, workers are not allowed to keep livestock. The reason provided by the farm owner is that the livestock would become his responsibility and he would rather avoid the potential conflicts this would create, since it is unclear to him who would inoculate, take care of, and medicate potentially ill animals. However, one of the senior (white) managers who lives on the property owns several sheep that he keeps in a pen next to his house. It was made clear to the researcher that the manager is solely responsible for his sheep. Often the sheep roamed freely around the farm. It is noted that it is not the presence of livestock that is inherently problematic to the farm owner; rather the farmer does not trust the *labourers* to take care of *their* livestock responsibly. It can be interpreted that this is another instance of the infantilisation of the labourers by the farm owner.

On two of the four farms there are small food gardens run by the workers. In each case, one person oversees the garden, however, it appears that everyone contributes by watering and adding seeds,

when possible. One of the gardeners mentioned that he does not sell any of the vegetables or other food that he grows. When people need food, they can simply help themselves to what is needed for their subsistence. These findings are in line with what Wisborg et al. (2013) reveal in their research about farm dwellers in Limpopo, that is, that sources of livelihood generally include wages and grants, practices such as a food garden and keeping livestock, and access to other natural resources. Significantly, they show that wages are the most important source of livelihood.

Employees as units of labour

When referring to the employees, the farm owner speaks in terms of value, affordability and business. It is noted that the workers are valuable to the farm owner by virtue of the value they add to the business *'as units of labour'*, which as unskilled labourers, significantly reduces their value in the estimation of the farmer. The farmer uses managerial language to define his relationality to his farmworkers, a language that legitimises the farmers attempts to distance himself from the plight of the farmworkers. Throughout the interview, the farm owner delimits his role within a managerial frame of reference, rather than a paternalistic one, to emphasise the fundamental change in the historical relationship between the owner and the workers.

> *'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 give 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, Mookgopong: 25 February 2021)

This is the kind of technocratic language through which the poor black persons are "responsibilised" and through which efforts to produce a "calculative rationality" for the poor are routinely and paternalistically expressed in post-apartheid South Africa (Von Schnitzler 2013). In other words, by making it about workers' "choices", the responsibility for their wellbeing is shifted entirely onto the workers, who (it is implied) *'are free'* to make either "good" or "bad" choices (they have agency). When prompted about this statement and the fact that the farm owner had previously mentioned that the state fails to govern people in isolated rural areas, the farm owner continued:

> *'So, I can't make a decision for you. OK, so the one greatest thing about this country is that it's still a democracy. I truly believe it's still a true democracy. You know, the government that's voted in is the government that the majority of people want in power. You know, there's not a whole bunch of fraud and things like that.* ***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 healthcare, 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, Mookgopong: 25 February 2021)

In this lengthy quote, the farm owner is framing himself as not wanting to "overstep". The primary actor whose role the farmer would not want to be caught encroaching on is the democratic government. Importantly, he draws a discursive link between the state and farmworkers: *'The government that's voted in is the government that the majority of people want in power'*, and *'... 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'*; together these statements are about saying that the

farmworkers need to look to the state for their needs beyond the very specific needs that the employer is required to provide. The fact that the farmworkers are a part of the "majority" who have voted the government into power: as part of who constitutes the "majority", they are the ones with the "real" power. Together with the fact that they are "adults and not children", this makes them "doubly" responsible for their situation.

The farm owner refers to the farmworkers as "human beings" twice in this quote, both times to insist that he *must* treat the workers as human beings. Here, one might be faulted for instantly reading this in terms of seeing the farm workers as more than just units of labour, but as people with the right to dignity and a living wage. The farm owner makes it clear that their "humanness" is connected primarily to their "agency", their "responsibility", and the need for them to "take control of their lives and their destinies". They "make their own decisions" and consequently must be held responsible for where those decisions take them, including the poverty they find themselves in.

The managerialist and technocratic discourse of value in the first quote merges seamlessly with the discourses of responsibility and agency in the second quote. Importantly, it should be noted that the two quotations speak to each other in terms of where the farm owner places himself (and all those like him) in the two quotes: in the first quote, farmers are placed front and centre through a discourse of "care" as actors who have willingly taken on responsibility for farmworkers health, nutrition and overall wellbeing. In the second quote, farmers are projected as helpless, as sidelined by the state which has assumed the primary role as caretaker of farmworkers. Where before, one was asked to think of farmworkers as being under the benevolence of the farm owner and their generosity, in the post-apartheid era the beleaguered, poverty-stricken farmworker has been rendered as such by a state that has failed them, however, they "irrationally" and stubbornly keep voting the party into power.

The farmer, in essence, proclaims his "innocence", something that Bourdieu demonstrates is a discursive strategy aimed at presenting oneself as lacking power, and reinforcing the legitimacy of the status quo:

> Having an interest in leaving things as they are, they attempt to undermine politics in a depoliticized political discourse, produced through a process of neutralization or, even better, of negation, which seeks to restore the doxa to its original state of

> innocence and which, being oriented towards the naturalization of the social order, always borrows the language of nature... This politically unmarked political language is characterized by a rhetoric of impartiality, marked by the effects of symmetry, balance, the golden mean, and sustained by an ethos of propriety and decency, exemplified by the avoidance of the most violent polemical forms, by discretion, an avowed respect for adversaries, in short, everything which expresses the negation of political struggle as struggle. This strategy of (ethical) neutrality is naturally accomplished in the rhetoric of scientificity. (Bourdieu 1991a: 131–32)

The language of the farm owner, therefore, is an attempt to naturalise and obscure the political nature of the category "employer" and its political relationship to the category "employee", thereby establishing the vast gulf between himself and the labourers at Malapeng. Furthermore, by framing it as a product of economics and democracy—natural forces out of his control—the farmer further hides his own role (and the role of "farmers" as a class/ group) in creating and maintaining the hierarchies on Malapeng, including the category of farm labourers. Bourdieu (1991a) argues that the naming and description of this class category becomes a prediction of sorts, with the farmer symbolically designating what and how their employees should be—not as a political action, but as a natural way of being. This symbolic violence extended when the farmer discussed the lack of (legitimate) cultural capital that the labourers possess:

> *'The quality of education they [the government] provided the youth is not great, but youth are coming to you, educated but not really employable, because they're not educated and don't have computer skills, all these things. So that impacts* ***my ability to uplift people, because you've effectively got to retrain them from the beginning .... So, on all levels, the government's lack of capacity, impacts on us. And as a result, because it's more expensive, more difficult to do business, obviously you're less inclined to invest in the business****.'* (Personal Interview, Mookgopong: 25 February 2021)

This relates to the farmers previous quote wherein he stated that higher wages must be justified through workers adding higher value to the business. Most farm labourers are engaged in unskilled labour, therefore "computer skills" are not a requirement. Therefore, the only real loss of profits is symbolic in nature. The farm owner is essentially justifying the skewed distribution of power at Malapeng as something natural and self-evident due to a lack of "essential skills", without

acknowledging that it is an arbitrary requirement, not based on the actual needs of Malapeng. By following this logic, the farm owner further externalises responsibility for the working and living conditions of those employed on Malapeng. The farmer has created this arbitrary goal that he knows his employees do not have and will not need under his employment and declares them as "less valuable" for not meeting that goal. Through this, the distribution of capital (symbolic and otherwise) is not only reinforced, it is also legitimised and justified for all parties involved.

Conclusion

The exploitation and abuse of farmworkers in South Africa is a well-established fact in literature, which was only discussed briefly in this chapter. This chapter has explored a single case, the farm Malapeng, through ethnographic methods to further insights into the precarious livelihoods of the farm labourers. The chapter interrogated the discursive strategies of the farmer, consistent in some ways, and contradictory in others; the farmer's insistence on treating workers as "adults not children" and yet his continuous infantilisation of these workers in limiting their access to livelihood strategies. It is particularly through the farmer's discourse regarding conflict and conflict management that it can be seen how conflict discourses connect with a confident and deeply racialised knowledge of the farm workers. The farmer utilises discourses of paternalism and managerialism strategically to affect a distancing from the farmworkers and their socioeconomic situation (and the farmer's relationship to this through the wages paid), or to gain proximity to them to effect forms of "care" and control.

The findings of this chapter largely mirror Bolt's (2015) findings in the research on *Grootplaas*. Bolt dedicates a chapter to discussing the relationship between traditional paternalism and neo-liberalism in contemporary farms in Limpopo. The author argues that 'contrasting visions and interpretations of white agriculture are emphasised and de-emphasised strategically by certain farmers and employees' (Bolt 2015: 161). Like *Grootplaas*, the discursive practices at Malapeng are reflective of the strategic uses of discourses of managerialism and paternalism in the maintenance of labour hierarchies. This impacts how key agents in the field conceptualise and understand the field. At its core, this is about the production of, and control over discursive capital, and the ways in which access to economic capital shapes actors' control over, and access to forms of discursive capital. Furthermore, the findings of Devereux (2020) are also confirmed in terms of the material position that the workers find themselves in: they are facing new forms of vulnerability by virtue of the changing relationship between themselves and the farm owner.

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