Carleton University

Frontier Farm Labour:
A Study of Neoliberal Restructuring and Zimbabwean Migrant Farm
Workers in Limpopo Province, South Africa

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Institute of Political Economy

By

Lincoln Addison, B.A. (Hons.)

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Abstract

Over the course of the past decade, commercial farms in Limpopo Province have exploited increasing flows of Zimbabwean labour in an attempt to increase profitability and adapt to the more competitive environment ushered in by sectoral restructuring. Simultaneously, economic collapse within Zimbabwe and ongoing political repression have created unprecedented migratory pressures. While this thesis explores the role of neoliberal restructuring and the Zimbabwean crisis as driving the adverse incorporation of Zimbabwean migrants on commercial farms in Limpopo's far north, it also considers the localized engagements of Zimbabwean farm workers with dominant paternalistic and class relations on particular commercial farms. Case-studies suggest, in particular, the importance of "regimes of payment" as central elements within hegemonic formations on commercial farms. Taken together, these considerations reveal some of the important intersections between the micropractices of Zimbabwean migrants and macroprocesses that surround them.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Program
ESTA	Extension of Security of Tenure Act
FAWU	Food and Agricultural Workers Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GMB	Grain Marketing Board
IOM	International Organization of Migration
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LPM	Landless Peoples Movement
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
NCA	National Constituent Assembly
NP	National Party
PLAAS	Program for Land and Agrarian Studies
SACP	South African Communist Party
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions

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Figure One: The Structure of South African Agriculture, p. 41.

Introduction: South Africa in an “Age of hope”?

Twelve years on from the collapse of racial apartheid, South Africa still appears as a deeply divided society and ranks amongst the most unequal societies in the world. While the economy has begun to experience moderate growth rates and low inflation, high and unchanging poverty rates and chronic unemployment call into question what President Thabo Mbeki of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) recently termed South Africa’s “Age of Hope” (Mbeki, 2006; Nattrass and Seekings, 2005: 301). Indeed, two particularly counter-posed narratives emanate from South Africa and present very different pictures. The first is that portrayed by Mbeki and official state discourses consisting of South Africa as a prosperous economy and attractive haven for foreign investment, gradually undoing the injustices of apartheid through black economic empowerment (BEE) and market-based land reform (Mbeki, 2006; South African Yearbook, 2006). A recent address by Governor of the Reserve Bank, Tito Mboweni (2006), typifies this narrative:

The South African economy has been in an upswing since September 1999, making the current business cycle expansion phase the longest on record. The upswing continues apace, with strong growth in the South African economy during the first quarter of 2006 as global growth provided a solid tailwind, inflation pressures were relatively calm and interest rates were steady. Business confidence levels generally remain upbeat and private-sector investment sentiment remains strong.

However, a world away from the images of prosperity is a less promoted narrative that emphasizes the harsh realities that confront those living in the squatter camps, shanty towns and informal settlements outlying the urban areas or conditions for those inhabiting the deep rural areas in the former “homelands” or on privately-owned commercial farms. Just a little less than half the population, these people bear the brunt

of unemployment, tend to be on the periphery of social service delivery and generally lack secure access to land (Desai, 2003; Greenberg, 2004; Bond, 2004a; Eveleth and Mngxitama, 2003). Those who call attention to these marginalized groups, namely social movements and progressive non-governmental organizations (NGOs), articulate a second narrative that claims the transition to post-apartheid has meant manifestly little for these people in terms of material improvement. In fact, they have seen their marginality reproduced in the course of what Patrick Bond (2004a: 2) calls the transition from “race to class apartheid”.

This thesis broadly aligns itself with arguments of those who promote the second narrative, but it does so by drawing upon a part of the South African political economy mosaic that is often overlooked or misunderstood: the continued and growing role of migrant labour in the South African agricultural economy, specifically Zimbabwean migrant farm workers who work on citrus farms in the far north of Limpopo province. The “far north” of Limpopo is an intensive commercial agriculture zone located in the Limpopo River Valley between the Soutpansberg Mountains and Limpopo River. Commercial farms in this area produce a significant proportion of South Africa’s citrus exports and have increasingly incorporated Zimbabwean migrant farm workers into their accumulation strategies over the past decade (Lincoln and Maririke, 2000: 42; Mather, 2002: 6). At the same time, the Zimbabwean crisis has fuelled the growing migratory practices of Zimbabweans, many of whom elect to work on farms near the border despite the generally exploitative conditions. Following the thrust of Tessa Marcus’ (1989: 5) seminal work on farm workers, the intention of this thesis is not merely to “expose and shock” by discussing the scandalous conditions surrounding

Zimbabwean migrants on farms, but rather to contribute to an understanding of the forces which produce them.

The Argument of this Thesis

This thesis makes two interrelated arguments: the first establishes a “pull and push” framework that identifies two principal structural causes behind the migration: the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture in South Africa and the Zimbabwean crisis. The objective is not only to demonstrate how these factors have caused the migration, but also to argue that each cause carries with it specific implications for how the migration should be understood.

The first cause or what is termed a “pull factor” is the South African restructuring of agriculture under the auspices of the broader neoliberal growth path, a path initiated by the late-apartheid state and deepened in the post-apartheid context. As Stephen Greenberg (2004) and others argue, this neoliberal growth path has reproduced the exclusion and marginalization of the poorest in South Africa, particularly the unemployed, rural women, farm dwellers and undocumented migrants from Zimbabwe and elsewhere. In agriculture, neoliberal restructuring has increased the dominance of agribusiness and large-scale farms within the sector, while reducing overall farm employment and increasing the proportion of casual or seasonal workers. Commercial citrus farms in Limpopo that straddle major migratory routes used by Zimbabweans have turned to the employment of Zimbabweans as part of an attempt to respond, mediate and adapt to the more competitive environment brought on by restructuring and

liberalization. The intensified exploitation of Zimbabwean migrants in the “far north” of Limpopo can thus largely be viewed as produced by this process of restructuring.

Paradoxically, however, the same neoliberal process that reproduces the marginality of millions of South Africans presents an “opportunity” for Zimbabwean migrants. But this “opportunity” is to work in the lowest paid sector in the country where laws are routinely ignored or broken and to remain vulnerable to the various threats and abuses that face mostly undocumented or “illegal” migrants. Under such conditions, it is clear that most migrants would prefer to stay in Zimbabwe if it were possible to make a living there. Thus, even while Zimbabweans gain employment on farms in Limpopo, the conditions of their employment demonstrate the very tendency of neoliberalism to resolve the limits to accumulation by intensifying the exploitation of labour. In revealing these tendencies, the thesis calls into question the “trickle down” assumptions underlying neoliberal logic, while also asserting the fundamental commonality between exploited Zimbabwean migrant farm workers and other social groups marginalized by the neoliberal growth path.

Secondly, the crucial “push factor” is the Zimbabwean crisis that has forced at least two million Zimbabweans (out of a population of twelve or so million) to migrate to South Africa, thousands of whom have elected to work on farms near the border (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2004: 8).¹ Although the South African government views most Zimbabwean migrants as strictly “economic migrants”, there is a profound political

¹ In the last decade as many as three or four million have left Zimbabwe in total (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2004). However, the question of how many Zimbabweans are in South Africa is debated. For example, Loren Landau (2005) argues that the figure of two million is too high and that the inflated figure reflects South African xenophobia. This debate will not be taken up here, except to say that one should not underestimate the impact of the Zimbabwean crisis in forcing people to migrate. Indeed, it could be that the figure of two million is a conservative estimate.

dimension associated with the crisis that this category obfuscates. Undoubtedly, economic concerns are central to the motivations of Zimbabwean migrants.

Zimbabwe's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has shrunk by more than 40 percent since 1999 and Zimbabwe has the highest unemployment rate in the world (*Business Day*, 2006, 3/5). But the causes of this economic collapse are located most directly in the efforts of President Mugabe and sections of the political and military elite to stay in power at any cost. When the economic collapse is understood as arising from the political crisis facing the regime, it becomes difficult to place Zimbabwean migrants in the depoliticized category of "economic migrants".

The second argument begins with the premise that explaining Zimbabwean migrant farm workers solely through reference to a "pull and push" schema says little about how power is constituted in the localized context of commercial farms. There is a danger that in placing migrants within a rigidly constructed "pull and push" framework, one can overlook the fact that these are real people with hopes, fears and desires like anyone else, potentially leading to arguments that have little resemblance to what actually motivates people. The challenge then is to supplement the structural causes of the migration with perspectives of migrant farm workers themselves and detailed analyses of social relations on farms. In so doing, one can understand more about how migrants engage with exploitative practices on farms that are situated and driven by neoliberal restructuring and how these engagements can be potentially supported.

Occasionally, migrants collectively challenge exploitative practices, even by going on strike, but more often than not they accommodate power relations between them and the employer. A central task of this study is to shed more light on what leads migrants

to move from accommodation to forms of “collective action” that directly challenge to power relations. By doing so, this study will contribute to discussions on the prospects for transformation both locally on Limpopo farms and beyond. At one level, the analysis of migrant’s livelihood struggles may inform the strategies of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions and other stakeholders that work with migrant farm workers, or alternatively, may inform farm owners who seek to create more stable labour relations.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis employs an integrative theoretical framework with two components. The first and most foundational component is a non-deterministic historical materialism and a non-reductionist understanding of class (O’Meara, 1996; Hart, 2002). The two basic premises of historical materialism are not departed from: firstly, that before human beings practice politics, war, art, ideology or religion, they first satisfy their historically defined material needs. Flowing from this is the second premise of materialist analysis: that the various forms of social organization arising from the process of human beings ensuring the production and reproduction of their material needs in turn shapes the conditions under which humans live their lives and practice politics (O’Meara, 1996: 466). Interpreted non-deterministically, this second premise “says nothing about what forms such organization takes or its specific impact on social life” (O’Meara, 1996: 466). It suggests that any notion of causality must attend to the various and changing class, racial, cultural and gender² based forms of organization that structure social life.

² These are obviously not the only forms of organization and distinction, for example religion and language are only two others that could be added.

A class-based historical approach lies at the core of this thesis, especially in the approach to agricultural restructuring in South Africa and to the Zimbabwe crisis. Given the centrality of class, this thesis draws upon much of the neomarxist writing on Southern Africa, especially Tessa Marcus' work on farm workers, Stephen Greenberg on restructuring, Hein Marais on transition dynamics and Brian Raftopoulos on Zimbabwe. But the conception of class that underlies this thesis is a non-reductionist one that accommodates explanations from other reference points. The arguments of this thesis should therefore be taken as provisional and are more of an initial foray and charting of the complexities surrounding Zimbabwean migrant farm workers than a definitive statement about their condition.

The class-based analysis employed here takes shape by application of the Gramscian conception of hegemony. Hegemony explains how domination of one social group is exercised over others through dominant discourses and the establishment of social consent. Underlying this approach is a conception of the state which encompasses "political society" and "civil society". Dominance cannot be maintained through coercion alone – the stability of the prevailing social order requires a general legitimation of the dominant group through the establishment of hegemony in civil society (Hart, 2002: 27). While "political society" is the realm of coercion upon which the dominant group ultimately relies, civil society is the realm of hegemony and discursive legitimation. Hegemony entails a fusion of antagonistic ideologies and conceptions of the world, "bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages... and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a

series of subordinate groups” (Gramsci, 1971: 161). When the ideological and moral legitimacy of the dominant group is established in combination with control over the material basis of production, then an historic bloc can be said to have been constructed (Taylor, 2001: 12).

A historic or hegemonic bloc represents the elite-pacting and network of alliances fostered by the dominant group upon which consent is derived. As Taylor notes, “By constructing what is essentially a superficial coalition via a mixture of coercion and consent, the hegemonic class produces (temporary) stability and diverts the subordinated elements within society from realizing their own real needs or interests, thus serving to defend the ascendant position of the dominant class elite” (Taylor, 2001: 13). As is testified by the plethora of Gramscian-inspired literature on South Africa,³ the ability of Gramscian analysis to identify moments of crisis make it a useful framework for interpreting the onset of neoliberalism and the restructuring of agriculture in South Africa (Hart, 2002: 26-27).

In South Africa one can trace the origins of the neoliberal growth path to the “organic crisis” endured by the apartheid state from the late 1970s. This organic crisis – indicative of a simultaneous crises in capital accumulation as well as political legitimacy – framed the transition to liberal democracy and eventually necessitated broader shifts in the hegemonic bloc that incorporated sections of the black elite. In the post-apartheid dispensation, the ruling ANC has presided over the deepening of the neoliberal growth path and restructuring of agriculture that partly accounts for the employment of Zimbabweans on Limpopo’s commercial farms.

³ To name just a few, Gillian Hart (2002), Ian Taylor (2001), Stephen Greenberg (2004) and the pioneering work of John Saul and Stephen Gelb (1981) are among the most notable.

While the hegemonic bloc in South Africa may be relatively stable for the time being, in Zimbabwe the Mugabe regime holds onto power primarily by force or a decidedly “non-hegemonic form of domination” (Saul and Saunders, 2005: 139). A Gramscian analysis can trace the unravelling of social consent in Zimbabwe and thereby shows how the political crisis facing the Mugabe regime caused economic collapse in the late 1990s and 2000s. The Gramscian framework is thus used to advance the first argument of this thesis, specifically, that the migration is produced by the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture and Zimbabwean crisis.

But even with the critical insight offered by a Gramscian perspective, the schematic of pull and push factors offers little towards an understanding of how migrants engage with trans-local processes. As the critical migration theorist Sandro Mezzadra (2004: 269) has put it:

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

In another sense, Donald Moore (1998: 350) points out how complex matrices of power that enmesh subalterns are often ignored or overdetermined by a singular focus on class.

To move beyond mechanical “pull and push” factors and monolithic class constructs, the challenge is to connect with migrants as “historical agents” through fine-grained analyses of cultural politics and situated practices (Moore, 2000: 656). For the study of Zimbabwean migrant farm workers, this challenge entails focusing on commercial farms as the key localized sites of contestation and accommodation.

To facilitate the investigation of contestation and accommodation on commercial farms, the second theoretical component combines Gramscian hegemony with post-colonial literature on farm workers (Rutherford, 2001; du Toit, 1993). In particular, du Toit's (1993: 320) identification of racial paternalism as the dominant discourse on commercial farms helps define the content of hegemonic formations on farms in the far north of Limpopo. But as du Toit (327-330) recognizes, even as paternalism remains a salient general feature, hegemonic formations differ from farm to farm and each contains its own particularities. Furthermore, paternalism itself has been transformed and rearticulated as it has been reformed and challenged from various corners. To attend to all these discursive particularities – and thereby understand more precisely how contestation and accommodation by farm workers takes place – one must examine the micropolitics of individual commercial farms and avoid sweeping generalizations.

However, this emphasis on localized discourses and micropolitics raises two potential problems. First, for all the effort to avoid class reductionism, granting strict primacy to discursive dimensions of power can merely replace class determinism with a more base discursive determinism (Moore, 2000: 658). Second, the emphasis on forms of contestation at the level of micropolitics can lead to “fetishizing resistance”, where any cultural or livelihood practice comes to be interpreted as resistance or “weapons of the weak” (Moore, 1998: 350).

These problems can be offset, however, by returning to Gramsci's conception of hegemony. In his formulation, discourses are constantly reworked and re-articulated in response to various pressures and sources of contestation (Hart, 2002: 27). This observation means that dominant discourses are not frozen ideological constructs that

simply determine social activity. Rather, the methodological focus is to investigate how discursive formations are themselves contested and rearticulated, to understand how, as Moore puts it (1998: 351), “performances do not unfold in a pre-given discursive field, but rather shape the very texture and contours of that terrain”. For Gramsci, one major source of contestation is between classes, that is, between a dominant group that exercises control over the “decisive nucleus of economic activity” and other groups made subordinate because of this control (Taylor, 2001: 12).

Applied to commercial farms, this insight has two implications. First dominant paternalist discourses are enmeshed with class relations between farm workers and their employer. Second, contestation on farms will be more apparent where these discursive and class dimensions of power intersect most sharply. In this thesis’ detailed study of two commercial farms, this intersection is exhibited within the farm’s “regimes of payment” for fruit pickers. Regimes of payment are crucial because they simultaneously influence the social reproduction of the farm worker and also act as a site upon which farm worker “claims” are made over the farm’s production processes. These “claims” are, furthermore, often made in terms of a farm’s paternalist discourse. By discussing how these claims or entitlements draw upon farm discourses and often formed the basis for contestation, hegemonic formations on commercial farms are shown to be both simultaneously “controlling” (in service of the employer or dominant social group) and also a source of entitlement for farm workers (encouraging contestation “from below”) (Moore, 2000: 673). Seen in this light, resistance by farm workers does not emerge from some essentialized space “outside” of power, but by drawing upon entitlements within hegemonic discourses or “multiple fields of power”

(Moore, 1998: 352). Lastly, this drawing out of class relations and their envelopment with farm discourses potentially reveals more general dynamics characterizing social relations of farms.

Methodology

This thesis is based on three months of fieldwork conducted in South Africa and Zimbabwe from June to August, 2005. The first month of field work was spent in Johannesburg and Cape Town, where I met with and interviewed other researchers, land and farm dweller activists and other representatives of “organized” civil society. During this time I also attended three meetings or workshops, including a planning meeting for the “Land Summit” organized by the South African Communist Party (SACP), as well as a consultative workshop between researchers at the Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) and land activists, and finally a workshop on farm dweller evictions organized by Nkuzi Development Association, a land rights and farm dweller support organization active in Limpopo province. This first month of interacting with activists, researchers and other political groups exposed me to the constellation of forces that is challenging neoliberalism in the land sector and advocating farm dweller’s rights. However, very few of the organized civil society groups had any engagement or campaigns relating to Zimbabwean migrant farm workers. This perceived disengagement of South African civil society from the plight of Zimbabwean migrant farm workers was confirmed for me in August when I attended a four-day Land Summit in Johannesburg, organized by the Department of Land Affairs and Department of Agriculture. At the Land Summit, farm worker issues featured

prominently, but problems regarding migrant farm workers were only raised once by way of an intervention by myself.

The bulk of the field work – the remaining two months – were spent in Limpopo province and focused on going out to commercial farms and interviewing and talking with farm workers, especially Zimbabwean migrants. In addition to conducting over forty structured and semi-structured interviews with Zimbabwean farm workers, I also interviewed several foreman (both Zimbabwean and South African) and about ten white farmers or farm managers. These interviews were supplemented with informal discussions with the informants as well as participant observation when I was on farms. In all, I visited fifteen commercial farms in the far north of Limpopo, although the time spent and depth of my engagement at each farm varied considerably. I also spent roughly two weeks in Zimbabwe, mostly in Beitbridge near the border with South Africa. In Beitbridge I interviewed three chiShona speaking border smugglers and learned some of the various routes used by migrants to enter South Africa illicitly.

I encountered several problems and constraints while conducting field work in Limpopo. The first was my own lack of a car, which made going out to commercial farms very difficult; renting a car was unfeasible due to resource constraints. However, I was fortunate enough to be affiliated with Nkuzi Development Association while I was in Limpopo and worked very closely with Shirhami Shirinda, a program officer with Nkuzi based in Elim. As Elim borders the commercial farming areas of the far north in Limpopo, fieldworkers at the Elim office have the most involvement with Zimbabwean farm workers, as compared to the other three Nkuzi offices in Limpopo.

I was able to go to farms with Shirinda when he responded to calls and problems at farms. One example was a ten-day strike by Zimbabwean migrant farm workers in the far north of Limpopo. In this instance, Shirinda and I traveled to the strike in the far north each day from Elim. This provided an excellent opportunity because as Shirinda assisted the striking workers I was able to conduct several detailed interviews with many of them. Nevertheless, relying on Shirinda and Nkuzi for going to farms meant that my access to farms was intermittent and dependent on Shirinda's schedule. I managed to address this problem partially by hiring a private taxi on one occasion (although at great expense) and by visiting farms for a few days with my research supervisor Blair Rutherford who had rented a car. Finally, I managed at one commercial farm to be granted permission to stay for five days in a lodge the farmer kept for hunters on the farm property, enabling me to observe the daily activities at the farm and to walk to the compound where Zimbabwe migrants stayed.

Beyond simply obtaining transport to the farms, another problem I faced was gaining the consent of the farmer to talk with the workers. Yet this problem was less difficult than I first expected; the fact that I was a white person from Canada often immediately established the trust of South African farmers. But on occasions where I visited farms with Shirinda, I was often perceived as an Nkuzi affiliate and was thus regarded with hostility by some farmers. This was especially the case if Shirinda was responding to a particularly contentious problem, such as a farm worker being evicted or if he was assisting workers on strike. In other cases the farmer granted me permission to speak with the workers, but then supervised the interview as if to monitor what was told to

me. In this situation little could be done except to avoid raising questions that would compromise the security of the worker being interviewed.

Another problem that arose was establishing the trust and communicating with the farm workers themselves. Given the hostility associated with politics in Zimbabwe and their own vulnerability as mostly “undocumented” farm workers in the far north of Limpopo, I found most farm workers to be suspicious and guarded when I approached them. However, I also found that this suspicion could be partially mitigated when I emphasized upon first meeting a Zimbabwean farm worker that I was an independent researcher, not linked to the farmer, trade union or NGO interests. Of course if I was with Shirinda at the farm, I would already be identified as having links with Nkuzi. But for farm workers, this identification seemed to be more of a help than a hindrance. Many of the Zimbabwean farm workers I met trusted Shirinda and viewed Nkuzi as one of the few supportive institutions available to them. So workers sometimes did not hesitate to reveal to me serious problems on the farm, perhaps believing that I would help resolve the problems through Nkuzi (despite the fact that I would emphasize I was only a researcher, not a Nkuzi worker).

Nevertheless, many farm workers were suspicious of my research and avoided me, reflecting the contentious politics surrounding Zimbabweans. As one farm worker (interviewed in August, 2005) with whom I developed a close relationship revealed to me, “Some of the people do not trust you. Some think you are with the MDC (Movement for Democratic Change) and will use the information you collect here to help overthrow Mugabe. They think you are like the white missionaries of the past, who came with notebooks and asked many questions, and that these missionaries were

soon followed by soldiers.” He further elaborated that those farm workers who distrusted me were people whose families and communities were resettled on recently seized white-owned land, and he described them as supporters of Mugabe’s Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). Despite being resettled on new land, these people migrated to the farms in Limpopo because they needed money to buy seeds for planting and other commodities. Thus, despite my efforts to emphasize my independence and university affiliation, the politics of the Zimbabwean crisis interfered with my ability to establish the trust of some Zimbabwean farm workers.

Communication with the farm workers was difficult when they did not understand English, which, among Zimbabwean migrants, was about 50 percent of the time. While Shirinda would sometimes informally translate if he was available, I did not have an official translator and so was forced to seek out those who understood English. This had implications for the kind of people available to me for interviewing: most were young males who had some degree of formal education. Moreover, men were generally more willing to be interviewed than women. When I did interview women, they were often more guarded than men and often gave short, one-word responses to the questions I asked. The result of this is that my field work disproportionately reflects the experiences of men.

The questions that I asked during interviews with farm workers explored two areas: the first was gaining an understanding of different migrants’ particular livelihood strategies. I would thus typically start by asking general information, such as where the individual originated from, what their job was in Zimbabwe, why they came to South Africa, and how (if) they supported dependents back in Zimbabwe. The second theme

was based on understanding relations between Zimbabwean farm workers and the farm owner or management. In this regard, I would ask how they perceived the farmer and conditions on the farm, and how they potentially challenged or accommodated the conditions. Beyond developing these two themes, I tried to let the farm worker shape the interview and talk about what they considered important; I found the more the farm worker shaped the interview the more genuine and profound was their response.

Apart from participant observation and conducting interviews with farm workers and other key informants, this thesis is based on a thorough reading of secondary sources and policy documents. In South Africa, I was able to get access to government policy documents, NGO and trade union reports and books from the PLAAS library at the University of Western Cape that were related to farm workers and unavailable in Canada.

Layout of the Thesis

Chapter One develops agricultural restructuring as a “pull factor” for Zimbabwean migrant farm workers and puts forward the basic argument that their super-exploitation is partly produced by the neoliberal growth path in South Africa. It does this by first tracing an earlier phase of restructuring in South African agriculture to locate the roots of labour casualization. In so doing, restructuring processes are shown to exhibit a general tendency to intensify the exploitation of labour. By discussing the shift towards labour casualization during the apartheid era, the employment of Zimbabwe migrants in the far north can be shown to be part of a similar process of casualization.

The chapter then examines apartheid's "organic crisis" and the impact of the crisis in agriculture, demonstrating that the neoliberal phase of restructuring arose out of the crisis. Discussion of the terms of the 1994 transition illustrate how a reconfiguration of the hegemonic bloc made it possible for neoliberal restructuring to be deepened and continued in the post-apartheid context. The uneven trends associated with agricultural restructuring are then traced throughout the post-apartheid period and situated in Limpopo province. Analysis of the competitive pressures unleashed by sectoral deregulation demonstrates that commercial farmers in Limpopo have adapted to the post-apartheid environment by employing low-waged Zimbabwean labour. These trends of restructuring are then supplemented with surveys and other research to establish a general picture of how Zimbabwean farm workers are exploited throughout the far north.

Chapter Two focuses on the Zimbabwean crisis as a push factor and argues that the crisis imparts a political dimension to the migration it has stemmed. This argument runs counter to the view of the South African government which views Zimbabwean migrants as primarily "economic migrants", a view that is shown to be premised on a misreading of the crisis. Underlying the "economic migrant" designation is a purely economistic interpretation of the Zimbabwe crisis articulated by South African President Thabo Mbeki (Mbeki, 2003). According to this view, the economic crisis that afflicted Zimbabwe in the late 1990s and 2000s stemmed from imprudent state spending, especially during the 1980s when social spending was relatively high. The first section of this chapter dismantles this key assumption by analyzing the Zimbabwean growth path during the 1980s and demonstrating that while the growth

path certainly had limitations, it was not the sole reason for economic crisis.

Furthermore, the departure from this growth path was bound up with shifting political forces that are also scrutinized.

Contrary to the economistic reading of Mbeki, a more direct cause of the economic crisis was the political fallout that resulted from Zimbabwe's adoption of an Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) in 1990. The negative economic impact of ESAP led to mounting popular opposition against ZANU-PF, making the Mugabe regime rely more openly upon coercion. To stave off the popular challenge, the Mugabe regime attempted to restructure its base of power, as was evident in the costly incorporation of war veterans (although this incorporation was also in response to demands and threats from war veterans). In tandem with the expensive military intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), these (ultimately failed) efforts by the Mugabe regime to restructure its base of power are shown to be immediate causes of the economic crisis in the 1990s.

However, the real watershed moment of the Zimbabwean crisis came after the regime's loss in the 2000 constitutional referendum. This loss intensified the political crisis facing the regime as it made concrete the prospect of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) coming to power in the subsequent parliamentary and Presidential elections. It was in this context of a looming electoral defeat that ZANU-PF initiated the land invasions and embarked on a far-reaching militarization of the state. These efforts, as well as later instances of state endorsed violence such as "Operation Murambatsvina" (or operation "clean up trash"), represent attempts by the regime to suppress opposition forces and navigate the crisis. While the Mugabe regime

has been able to hang on to power, reference to the ongoing economic meltdown shows that government efforts have only intensified the crisis, creating more migratory pressures. As these worsening economic conditions are largely a product of the regime's relentless efforts to stay in power, the nominally "economic" migratory pressures are shown to have deep-seeded political connotations.

Through reference to two case studies, Chapter Three explores how Zimbabwean migrants engage with power relations⁴ and considers how these engagements can be supported. While power relations on commercial farms are shaped by and take place in the context of neoliberal restructuring, a study of how they are constituted, contested and accommodated must be conducted at a localized scale. With reference to different aspects of micropolitics observed during fieldwork, the chapter analyses and compares dominant discourses on the two farms, demonstrating how one farm represented a stable hegemonic formation and the other a very tenuous one. Specifically, the analysis of micropolitics focuses in both cases upon "regimes of payment" for fruit pickers – the different ways piece-work payment methods for fruit pickers were governed. While this aspect of the farm might seem relatively insignificant, one of the cases demonstrated that the stakes involved over this aspect of the regime were important enough to hundreds of Zimbabwean pickers that they staged a wild-cat strike. Conversely, in the other very different case, the control the pickers were able to exercise over how the bags were counted contributed to a much more stable hegemonic formation. The case studies thus reveal some of the key localized dynamics that shape the engagements of farm workers with power relations on commercial farms in the far north of Limpopo.

⁴ When I speak of "power relations" in the context of commercial farms, I mean the specific relations between farm workers and their employer. Power relations also take place between farm workers (with gender relations being perhaps the most obvious example), but these are not examined in this thesis.

However, it is insufficient to discuss these “localized dynamics” in a detached manner, without reference to how the engagements of migrants can be supported. In this regard, the case-study involving the farm strike provides a useful example of how an NGO, the Nkuzi Development Association, can make productive interventions and assist Zimbabwean migrants. Nkuzi’s interventions are, however, complicated by the “ambivalent” position it holds towards Zimbabwean migrants in the far north.

Although Nkuzi advocates that unemployed South Africans in the far north should have first access to jobs on farms of the far north (the cause of its “ambivalence”), its assistance during the fruit picker strike demonstrates how Nkuzi can manage this ambiguity and support the struggles of Zimbabwean migrant farm workers (*African Eye News*, 2003, 13/1).

While this thesis focuses on Zimbabwean migrant farm workers, its arguments coalesce broadly as a critique of neoliberalism in South Africa. Whether discussing the restructuring of agriculture, the ubiquitous application of the term “economic migrant” to Zimbabwean farm workers in Limpopo, or the specific constraints and opportunities facing Zimbabwean migrants within hegemonic formations on commercial farms, each of these is to some degree informed by the underlying neoliberal growth path followed by the post-apartheid state. It makes sense therefore to begin with South Africa and chart the emergence of neoliberalism and its application in the agricultural sector.

Chapter 1: The “Pull Factor”: Neoliberal Restructuring of Agriculture

“We Prefer to Be Called Investors”

Sitting across from me in a plush leather chair, the white farm owner maintains a grim demeanour as I explain my research proposal and request to speak with his farm workers. Conscious of the wariness farm owners are reputed to hold towards unknown outsiders, as well as the relatively politicized environment surrounding farm labour in South Africa, I try to describe my research in as neutral and non-political terms as possible. However, I am interrupted when a Zimbabwean domestic worker enters the office to serve tea, creating a transitional moment for the farm owner to intervene and make his first remarks. I have not finished discussing my research, but it seems the farm owner has heard enough. Given his stern disposition, I anticipate a rejection of my proposal.

His first words are barely audible, spoken soft and slow: “On this farm we have achieved a balance, here there is an equilibrium. When people come from outside there is a danger that the balance will be disrupted.” Without saying it explicitly, it is clear that he is referring to labour relations on the farm. I do my best to reassure him that my research will not interfere with work on the farm, and he subtly nods in approval. He states that he has no problem with me interviewing his workers, on condition that my research causes no disruptions on the farm.

He then speaks uninterrupted for close to an hour, elaborating on his notion of “balance” and in particular deriding the government for its “interference” on farms. But I soon learn that this farm owner is less critical of the government than other white

farmers I've encountered in Limpopo province. This becomes clear when I ask his opinion about the government's land reform program. Instead of condemning the land restitution claim on his farm and the recent provisions regarding tenure security for farm workers, as is the norm for most white farmers I met, he actually perceives the land reform program as providing opportunities for the South African agricultural sector. Specifically, he notes how land reform can contribute to "consolidation" of the sector; the phasing out of uncompetitive or small family farms and the creation of more competitive corporate structures in South African agriculture.

As an owner of a capital intensive, high exporting citrus farm with more than 1,200 employees (the majority of whom are Zimbabwean migrants), including a new state of the art packing facility that processes much of the fruit from neighbouring farms, this farm and its owner are not threatened by the process of consolidation. Considering the farm is one of the largest and most productive in the northern parts of Limpopo, its prospects for dominating the restructured agricultural sector in the region seem good. I appreciate the full meaning of one of the farm owner's final comments: "It is now out of date and inaccurate to call us 'farmers.' We prefer to be called investors."

Over the last ten or fifteen years in the far north of Limpopo province a vast transformation has taken place on commercial farms. This transformation is however not of the progressive "social transformation" variety that one might have hoped for during the struggle against apartheid. Rather, the hallmark of this transformation is the very antithesis of those now seemingly antiquated aspirations, for it has meant the

retrenchment of thousands of South African farm workers and the exploitation of Zimbabwean migrants as replacements. This transformation in the far north stands as a particularly grievous example of what John Saul (2001: 1) has termed the “tragedy of the post-apartheid denouement”, whereby Zimbabwean migrant farm workers have become part of the “very large percentage of the population that are being sacrificed on the altar of the neo-liberal logic of global capitalism.”

Nevertheless, Zimbabwean migrants themselves come to work on the farms from even more desperate circumstances in their home country of Zimbabwe. As such, the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture in South Africa can be posed as a “pull factor” that at once creates employment for Zimbabweans but does so on condition of them being super-exploited.⁵ While the mainly white-owned commercial farms in the far north that employ Zimbabweans are in the immediate sense responsible for this super-exploitation, their accumulation strategies also represent efforts to remain profitable in a deregulated environment brought on by agricultural restructuring under neoliberal terms.

This reliance by commercial farmers on exploited Zimbabwean labour seems to go against the ANC-led government’s stated objective to provide employment for South Africans and policies that seek to improve conditions for farm workers. Indeed, white commercial farmers who employ Zimbabweans are often made scapegoats by the government for unemployment in Limpopo province (*Sunday Times*, 2001, 14/11; SABC, 2006). But what is masked over by such scapegoating is the role of the government in deepening the neoliberal growth path that has in turn created a conducive

⁵ The term “super-exploitation” is used here in a descriptive sense as opposed to an analytical one. It is meant to convey the generally low wages (below minimum wage), hazardous working conditions and poor accommodation that typify the commercial farms of the far north.

environment for the adverse incorporation of Zimbabweans to occur. The nominal “intentions” of the government have thus been superseded by the logic and imperatives of the neoliberal growth path – the intensification of capitalist relations in the countryside alongside a limited process of deracialization, and a renewing of profitability through export-led development (Greenberg, 2003a, 2004). The result of these neoliberal imperatives is that, notwithstanding the rhetoric from both sides, the apparent antagonism between (especially highly capitalized, exporting) commercial farmers and government is in practice largely one of accommodation.

In fact, farmers have turned to the expanded employment of Zimbabweans as a “defensive response” to neoliberal restructuring – employing low-waged labour in order to remain profitable in more competitive conditions (Frantz and Shabangu, 2000). This “defensive response” stands in contrast to earlier phases of restructuring in South Africa under apartheid, when the state formed an open alliance with white farmers and directly supported rearrangements in their labour forces.⁶ However, the outcome of neoliberal and apartheid-era restructuring remains essentially the same. Both resulted in the intensified exploitation of labour, albeit in different ways and with an emphasis on different labour forms. At one level the similar outcomes are unsurprising, as the neoliberal phase was initiated under the apartheid regime and the phase basically extended trends that were already in place. But the continuity runs deeper, for it speaks to the inherent class project associated with restructuring (under capitalist terms): the attempt by dominant classes to reorganize or adjust (as opposed to transform) social

⁶ As one example of the state “directly” supporting shifts within white farmers’ labour regimes, note that the apartheid state provided “prison labour” at increasing rates from the 1940s and up to the 1970s and early 1980s (see Marcus, 1989). The differences between early apartheid era restructuring and the later neoliberal phase of restructuring are discussed in the next section.

relations of production and distribution to shore up profitability within an existing social system (Marcus, 1989: 1).

It would be wrong therefore to view the masses of Zimbabwean labour in the far north as simply an “unintended consequence” of otherwise sound deregulation policies. For the ongoing presence of Zimbabwean migrants in the far north is bound up with a more fundamental and strategic class project associated with restructuring. Moreover, the extremely adverse incorporation that the neoliberal phase has meant for Zimbabwean migrants is only one example of a “deepening divide” and intensified exploitation for casual and seasonal workers across the agricultural sector (du Toit and Ewert, 2005). It is crucial therefore to connect the adverse incorporation of Zimbabweans with the wider political-economic processes that have produced the conditions of their employment.

To demonstrate that the appearance of Zimbabwean labour is inextricably linked to neoliberal restructuring, the first section of this chapter casts restructuring in an historical perspective. As indicated, the trends associated with the neoliberal phase – that is, casualization and differentiation of the agricultural work force – were in fact initiated during apartheid as part of a preceding phase of restructuring, termed the “postwar phase of restructuring” (dating from the 1945 to 1980). By locating how these trends originated in the post-war phase of restructuring, this historical approach will assert the fundamental continuity between phases of restructuring (manifested in different forms of intensified exploitation) and lay the basis for a subsequent discussion on how Zimbabwean labour emerged as part of neoliberal restructuring.

In addition, the shift in the agriculture sector towards neoliberal restructuring was related to the crisis of the apartheid state and, at a later stage, the shape of the democratic transition in 1994. Some discussion then is necessary on the politics of the transition and how the ANC-led government acquiesced to neoliberalism. The focus, to be sure, is upon the application of neoliberalism in agriculture, not the emergence of neoliberalism in general. But in the absence of a relevant political and historical context, the processes enveloping Zimbabwean migrants might appear incidental or unconnected to broader processes.

After establishing the relevant historical material, in the second section the impact of neoliberal agricultural restructuring is situated in Limpopo province and specifically the far north. The section will demonstrate that restructuring has forced an uneven process of consolidation and expansion of export production involving the increased use of Zimbabwean labour. Surveys and research conducted during fieldwork that attest to the wage levels and working conditions for Zimbabwean migrants are then employed to substantiate the general argument of intensified exploitation.

Restructuring in Historical Perspective

At the heart of agricultural restructuring are efforts to reorganize production relations on farms so that labour is made cheaper (Marcus, 1989:3). But while centred upon the renewing of profitability through the cheapening of labour, restructuring also reflects the political imperatives of the given balance of class forces within a social formation. For instance, during the earlier apartheid period, successive phases of restructuring shored up racial and class domination over the African population, whereas neoliberal

restructuring represents a more deracialized project of class domination. Thus, while there is a fundamental continuity between phases of agricultural restructuring in terms of intensified exploitation, the nominal political imperatives can alter substantially.

However, considered against the ideological and discursive claims that accompany the current political imperative of deracialization under the ANC, the ongoing presence of Zimbabwean migrant farm workers in the far north provides an example of the contradictions inherent in the restructuring process. Such discursive claims from the ANC range from professed social democratic or socialist values that seek to oppose the exploitation of farm workers (whatever their nationality), to a more parochial yet resonating claim that seeks to “put South Africans first” over “illegals” for employment opportunities.⁷ Yet, despite such claims from the government, there is a real hesitancy on the part of government to act against farmers in the far north on the matter of Zimbabwean labour.⁸ This hesitancy attests to the fact that the intensified exploitation of Zimbabweans – in contrast to the post-war restructuring period – takes place in a mode of restructuring that prioritizes South Africa’s neoliberal imperatives.

The tasks then of this section are twofold: the first is to explain how the roots of intensified exploitation of Zimbabweans were located in the post-war phase of restructuring (1945-1980).⁹ By explaining how restructuring efforts of the apartheid

⁷ See in this regard the contrasting claims between Thabo Mbeki’s “humane” comments made in 2001 when mass deportations were threatened against undocumented Zimbabwean migrant farm workers (“Illegal Zimbabwean Workers Must be Treated Humanely: says Mbeki”, SAPA, 13/11, 2001), and the remarks of Home Affairs Director-General Billy Masetla who called for mass deportations and claimed Zimbabweans were taking jobs from South Africans (“Government threatens farmers”, 2001).

⁸ “Acting” in this sense could mean enforcing labour regulations on the farms (such as minimum wages) or conversely, the forcible deportation of the thousands of “undocumented” Zimbabwean farm workers. Apart from the general imperatives of neoliberal restructuring, the more specific reasons for the hesitancy to act against farmers is taken up in the next section.

⁹ This periodization of phases of restructuring is borrowed from Vink and Kirsten (2000) who note three phases of restructuring: 1910-1945, 1945-1980, and 1980 to the present.

regime during the 1960s and 1970s phased out labour tenancy and led to increased reliance on migrant and prison labour, one can demonstrate the basic tendency of restructuring to cheapen labour and locate the trends of differentiation and casualization that were later extended by the neoliberal phase. Usefully, this discussion of the preceding phase begins with a brief outline of the regulatory regime in agriculture that characterized the post-war phase of restructuring. The second task is to outline the emergence of neoliberalism in the context of apartheid's crisis, which created new pressures leading to the increased employment of Zimbabweans.

The regulatory regime that existed during the preceding phase of restructuring reflected the dominant political imperative of supporting white farmers. Indeed, the assertion of white minority rule rested on the control of land and labour, a project in which white farmers played a central role (Jeeves and Crush, 1997: 10). A brief review of the main aspects of the regulatory regime during this preceding phase can demonstrate how the political imperative of white rule translated into concrete support and can establish how restructuring under these terms affected labour forms.

Some of the key acts of legislation and institutional support for farmers preceded the 1945 period, such as the 1913 Land Act that assigned 87 percent of South Africa's land for white ownership. Some other examples of support included the establishment of the Land Bank in 1912, and extension of state support through the Bank to the emergent cooperative movement (Jeeves and Crush, 1997: 9). The Marketing Act of 1937 created marketing boards and price controls, and effectively lent support to farmers at the expense of other sectors in the economy (Greenberg, 2003a: 99). But after 1948 and the coming to power of the National Party (NP), many of these measures were taken

further, such as tightening control over prices and produce as well as increased subsidies (Vink and Kirsten, 2000: 8). In the early 1950s, the NP also introduced new measures to help farmers control and obtain cheap labour.

Of importance in terms of controlling farm labour were influx controls that prevented Africans from leaving farms, as well as new restrictions that transformed farm dwellers who did not work into illegal “squatters”. The latter restrictions also encompassed stricter obligations for labour tenants, who were compelled to double their labour service to farmers from 90 to 180 days in order to retain access to their residences and land for grazing and cultivation on white-owned farms (Marcus, 1989: 62). The increased pressure brought upon labour tenancy during the 1950s reflected the attempt of the state and farmers to address labour shortages on farms and, in so doing, facilitate the capitalization of white-owned farms (Jeeves and Crush, 1997: 4). The state therefore discouraged labour tenancy and, along with the more capitalized sections of commercial agriculture, sought to transform labour tenants into exclusive farm labourers (Marcus, 1989: 62). Somewhat outmoded as a labour form even by the 1930s, large commercial farmers, in particular, found labour tenancy unsuitable for the intensive, estate agriculture that developed in the first half the century (Jeeves and Crush, 1997: 21). But some farmers sought to prolong labour tenancy, particularly under-capitalized farmers in the northern Transvaal (now Limpopo province) or farmers who faced resistance from tenants as in Natal. For these farmers it was more viable to rely on labour tenancy than to pay wages (Jeeves and Crush, 1997: 22). Thus while labour tenancy was reduced, it still remained widespread as a labour form by the mid 1960s.

However, a set of countervailing forces that emerged in the early 1960s provoked a decisive shift in the state's regulation of labour tenancy and farm labour in general. The new labour forms ushered in by this shift were, decades later, occupied by Zimbabwean migrant labourers in the far north of Limpopo. Consideration then of the forces underlying this decisive shift and its effects on labour forms has a direct bearing on this study.

As a result of the provision of cheap labour, state subsidized mechanization and other forms of support, agricultural output increased rapidly and production on most commercial farms had shifted from labour intensive to capital intensive production by the mid 1960s (Marcus, 1989: 2). For instance, from 1950 to 1970, the area under cultivation doubled (Vink and Kirsten, 2000: 12). As a result, many labour tenants and farm dwellers became surplus to the needs of production. Moreover, these so-called "black spots" on white land were viewed as a political threat. The state thus made tenancy illegal in 1973 in all provinces except Natal (the latter was not outlawed until 1980 due to the fierce resistance of tenants) and assisted farmers in a massive campaign of evictions of tenants and farm dwellers. Thus, between 1964 and 1982, 1.3 million people were forcibly removed from white-owned farms (Marais, 1998: 22) and either ended up in the crowded "homelands" or moved illegally into the towns. This form of restructuring had profound effects on the dominant labour forms and the composition of the agrarian workforce.

While the immediate impact of the removals was a reduction in total farm employment (in 1970 there was 1.35 million people employed in agriculture but only 970,000 in 1980), there was a more fundamental shift during the removals from labour

tenancy as the dominant labour form to an amplified emphasis on migrant labour (Marcus, 1989, 1-7). While most farms retained a small “full-time” or “core” workforce that lived on the farm, labour became more seasonally based and was drawn from the “homelands”, the ghetto areas surrounding “white” towns or from bordering states, depending on which was closest to the farm (Marcus, 1989: 96). Concomitant with the growth of migrant labour was a gradual feminization of the work force as well as a growing use of child and prison labour. The growth of female and child labour reflected efforts of farmers to obtain more easily exploitable labour, while the willingness of women and children to work in commercial agriculture reflected the lack of other employment opportunities open to them (Marcus, 1989: 101). Most of the “criminals” handed over to farmers as prison labour were short-term prisoners who had violated pass laws or tax laws. Prison labour became more prominent and accounted for as much as ten percent of the farm labour force in the 1960s and 1970s (Marcus, 1989: 30, 71).

The shift in labour forms and composition also reflected a process of labour casualization and ultimately intensified exploitation. State subsidized mechanization and new forms of organizing production enabled full-time positions for males to be broken down into “part time” components which could be filled by lower-paid women and children: “So we see one woman and a milking machine replacing three milkers; or women and children replace men in the sugar fields as mechanical means are introduced to stack and load the cane” (Marcus, 1989: 103). Thus the replacement of labour with capital did not necessarily lead to higher wages or more permanent positions for farm workers as neo-classical orthodoxy might have it. While a deepening divide between

“core” workers and seasonal labour was encouraged by this phase of restructuring, capital-intensive production on South Africa’s farms proved compatible and even dependent on increased casualization involving more female, child and prison labour (Marcus, 1989: 3).

As will be demonstrated, the increased incorporation of Zimbabwean labour in the far north of Limpopo in the 1990s reflected a similar coexistence between casualized labour and capital-intensive production. But if the political imperatives of supporting white farmers dominated restructuring during apartheid in the 1960s and 1970s (and earlier), then neoliberal restructuring under which Zimbabweans were incorporated may represent a subordination of political imperatives in favour of “market” imperatives. As from the onset of neoliberal restructuring in the 1980s and especially after 1994, the agricultural sector has become almost entirely deregulated.

The neoliberal phase of restructuring emerged as a response to the recession and the wider crisis of the apartheid state that began in the early 1970s. Because this phase is intimately bound up with the crisis of the apartheid state, it is necessary to elaborate on the broader dynamics of this crisis so that the analysis of agricultural restructuring can be situated within them.

The early and mid 1970s marked the onset of what Saul and Gelb (1981) termed the “organic crisis” of the apartheid state. The organic crisis reflected a simultaneous crisis of accumulation and political legitimacy. In the realm of accumulation, a number of structural weaknesses in the South African economy led to stagnating growth rates, increased unemployment, high inflation and growing poverty among the oppressed

majority in the 1970s (Gelb, 1991; O'Meara, 1996).¹⁰ Politically, the economic crisis was aggravated by renewed upheaval, expressed in the Durban strikes of 1973, the Soweto uprising in 1976 and regional developments such as liberation in Angola and Mozambique (O'Meara, 1996: 172).

This organic crisis had profound implications for agriculture and the incorporation of Zimbabweans in the far north, as it was in the attempts to reform apartheid that the NP turned to neoliberalism and introduced a new round of agricultural restructuring. However, there were also signs during the 1970s that the heavily subsidized agriculture sector had reached its own "limits to growth", and pressure emerged from within the sector itself for reform (Greenberg, 2003a: 102).

However, the first move towards a new phase restructuring was caused by events outside the sector, in response more specifically to financial liberalization. Following the liberalization of the financial sector in the late 1970s,¹¹ the South African currency (the Rand) declined and interest rates increased rapidly. The declining currency led to a faster rise in farm input prices (which had a large import component) than farm output prices. In terms of interest rates, changes to reserve requirements in the banking sector meant that the Land Bank could no longer subsidize farmer's interest rates. As a result, interest payments became the single largest cost of production in agriculture during the late 1970s (Vink and Kirsten, 2000: 17). These pressures contributed to rising debt and declining profitability throughout the sector, and encouraged a process of consolidation

¹⁰ These problems stemmed from a racially structured growth path that encouraged capital intensive production with an emphasis on luxury goods, leading to shortages of skilled labour and a lack of domestic markets. Also, South Africa's historic dependence upon imported capital goods led to a balance of payments crisis after the oils shocks of 1973 and the gold price collapse of 1976 (Gelb, 1991: 5-15).

¹¹ The financial sector was liberalized following the report of the de Kock Commission. Financial liberalization formed part of a broader movement towards neoliberalism throughout the economy, evident in the tightening of monetary policy, a renewed emphasis on exports, the lifting of exchange controls for non-residents and other "free market adjustments" during the early 1980s (Marais, 1998: 45).

of the sector into fewer farming units. Between 1969 and 1984 the number of farming units decreased from 92,000 to 70,000 while the average size of farming units increased (Marcus, 1989: 7).

The process of consolidation thus reflected a deepening divide within agriculture between the unproductive maize and livestock farmers and larger commercial and agribusiness interests (such as the Cape wine interests and deciduous fruit and citrus farmers) that focused on exports. As the economic recession deepened in the 1980s, the larger commercial farming interests became increasingly critical of “aspects the government’s control system in agriculture” (Greenberg, 2003a: 99). As a result of the growing indebtedness and inefficiency of farmers in combination with political pressure from the more advanced agricultural fractions, the government shifted towards a free market approach in agriculture.

Support from the state was increasingly provided on the basis of increased competitiveness, and thus became geared towards encouraging efficiency and viability. As Greenberg (2003b: 49) notes, “(p)olicies were increasingly oriented towards consolidating and supporting these productive branches of agriculture and agribusinesses associated with value-added activities, especially those for export.” The shift towards an emphasis on exports in agriculture was part of the general trend towards opening the economy and following the recommendations of the 1972 Reynders commission.¹² Moreover, from 1986 to 1993 South Africa was party to the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations (Greenberg, 2003a: 97). The resulting GATT commitments led to the removal of some

¹² The Reynders Commission recommended that policies of import substitution shift towards exporting goods, and that exports should be processed goods rather than primary goods (O’Meara, 1996: 178).

subsidies and a shift towards market-based pricing schemes. Thus, budgetary allocations to support white farmers declined by 50 percent from 1987 to 1994 (Greenberg, 2003b: 50). But although the state shifted its agricultural strategy to encouraging competitiveness and free markets, previous levels of state support to white agriculture enabled many farmers to survive the transition to a deregulated framework. While many did not survive as businesses, substantially fewer would have remained on the land without this support (Greenberg, 2003a: 102).

Indeed, the movement towards deregulation in agriculture was itself constrained by the “institutional space” established for white maize farmers who “retained significant control over the processes of change through their overwhelming influence in statutory decision making bodies” (Greenberg, 2003a: 102). For example, in 1992 the state made a R. 2.85 billion payout to inefficient white farmers to ensure that they remained on the land (Van Zyl, Vink, Kirsten, Poonyth, 1996: 737). Thus, while the onset of neoliberal restructuring attempted to resolve the stagnation in agriculture through policies of liberalization and export-led development, the phase remained partial and limited by opposition from politically important white maize farmers.¹³

Beyond the agricultural sector, the inability of the apartheid regime to resolve the deepening organic crisis led to the democratic transition of 1994. But arising out of the compromises made in the course of the transition, one finds part of the answer as to why the neoliberal assertions of the late-apartheid restructuring were deepened and continued in the post-apartheid context, with attendant implications for Zimbabwean migrant farm workers. Indeed, an examination of the “settlement” reached in 1993

¹³ Although unproductive and a financial burden on the state, the white maize farmers were part of the support base for the NP and also played a key role in enforcing apartheid in the rural areas (Greenberg, 2003b: 50).

between the negotiating factions revealed that the devil was in the detail. For here the protection of property rights among other constraints were enshrined, thus severely narrowing the redistributive options open to the ANC when it eventually came to power in 1994 (Marais, 1998: 92).

Indeed, the ANC was guilty of a kind of “political reductionism” that led to an overestimation of what negotiations could actually achieve. In the ANC’s view, the exploitation and oppression of the majority was reduced to “the political and ideological form of the apartheid state”. Accordingly, social relations were seen to “pivot on the state- once it changed, everything else would follow” (Marais, 1998, 72). This privileging of the political over the economic thus contributed to a transition that significantly restructured the political realm but allowed for broad continuity in the economic realm (Marais, 1998: 85). Socio-economic priorities became subordinate to “nation building” and political settlement. Perhaps more cynically, the onset of negotiations provided a window of opportunity for the ANC to capitalize on the ideological hegemony it had established among the popular movement. The ANC had to seize the opportunity provided by this interregnum if it wanted to “cash in” on its status as the “government in waiting” (Marais, 1998: 69).

Nevertheless, entering into negotiations and the eventual ceding of political power to the ANC reflected a gamble on the part of the apartheid state and capital. While some telling signs had emerged,¹⁴ it was not certain that the ANC would merely continue the neoliberal growth path (within which agriculture was subsumed) it had inherited from

¹⁴ Such as the signing by the ANC of the IMF Letter of Intent in 1993, the property rights clause included in the settlement or Mandela’s lambasting of striking auto workers (Marais, 1998: 95). Also of importance was the more subtle process of “Scenario Planning” whereby ANC leaders were incorporated into elite-pacting and underwent a tacit ideological conversion. See Patrick Bond’s *Elite Transition* (2000a: 55-60)

the apartheid state. In Gramscian terms, the class content of the reformulated hegemonic bloc was still undefined, or as Marais put it, it was not clear “which social classes’ interests would become privileged in the resultant hegemonic project” (Marais, 1998: 95). Although it inherited a dualistic and ravaged economy, the new government did have an alternative to the neoliberal strategy (Ginsburg, 1996: 99): a redistributive development strategy remained an option that would extend power and resources to formerly excluded majority – mainly the rural poor, unemployed and women – thus addressing directly the inherited legacy of dualism from apartheid. Such a strategy would have entailed opposition from powerful sections of capital, but might have cast the reformulated hegemonic bloc on a much broader basis, thus potentially securing the conditions for social and political stability over the long term.

As it turned out, however, the compromises ran too deep. The compromises made by the ANC leadership “assimilated them into a web of institutional relationships, systems and practices tailored to service the interests of white privilege and the capitalist class” (Marais, 1998: 98). As indicated, these compromises were not without consequences for agriculture and by extension Zimbabwean migrant farm workers. Arguably, the terms of the transition meant that the “relative autonomy” of the post-apartheid state was substantially rolled back. While the ANC had long declared it would end state support for white farmers, it also long declared that historical injustices related to white dominance in agriculture, such as the uneven distribution of land, would be addressed. Thus, although state-support for white farmers was mostly retracted, the subsequent slow pace of market-led or “willing seller, willing buyer” land reform attests

to a dominance of market imperatives over political prerogatives in the post-apartheid context.

Thus, post-apartheid agricultural restructuring did not depart fundamentally from the neoliberal direction set in place by the NP in the 1980s. The result was a deepening of labour casualization trends that harked back to the 1960s and, among other effects, the intensified exploitation of Zimbabwean migrants. A consideration then of the uneven impact post-apartheid restructuring has had upon the sector as a whole can provide the necessary foundation upon which the adverse incorporation of Zimbabweans in Limpopo can be demonstrated.

First, there must be some elucidation of how deregulation itself took place. As Hall argues (2004a: 221), in agriculture the ANC assumed that a program of “progressive capitalism” and deepening capitalist relations in the countryside, along with foreign investment, would pave the way for economic growth. Thus, throughout the 1990s but especially after 1996,¹⁵ the agricultural sector underwent a thorough process of deregulation, evidenced by the dismantling of apartheid-era marketing boards, privatization of cooperatives and removal of practically all direct subsidies for (white) farmers. Moreover, the Land Bank was restructured and incorporated into the nominal development priorities of the government. Trade liberalization was also accelerated after 1996 when South Africa became a member of the Cairns group, and committed itself to tariff reductions no matter what progress developed countries make in phasing out subsidies (Van Zyl et al, 2001: 728-732).

¹⁵ The complete deregulation of agricultural marketing had to wait until 1996, after the NP left the Government of National Unity (GNU) (Van Zyl et al, 2001: 725).

Restructuring under these neoliberal terms did not lead simply to increased productivity and efficiency among white farmers. Rather, its impact has been uneven across the agricultural sector, as the state has reconfigured the system to channel support towards capital-intensive and export producers (Makgetla, 2004: 270).¹⁶ After considering the impact of restructuring on the sector as whole, including its constraining effects on land reform, the impact upon labour and Zimbabwean migrants is assessed.

The increasingly competitive environment forced many commercial farms out of the sector, while others abandoned field crops for game and livestock farms (Hall 2004b: 45). The 2002 agricultural census noted that there were 57 980 commercial farming units in 1993, but only 45 818 in 2002. Commercial agriculture as a proportion of GDP also continued a long term decline, accounting for only 3.9 percent of GDP in 2002 (Hall, 2004a: 221). Despite the low contribution of commercial agriculture to GDP, it did provide 4.5 percent of South Africa's exports in 2004 (see Figure 1). The sector is also a crucial source of livelihood for some of South Africa's poorest citizens: the approximately one million farm workers and their dependents (Hall, 2004a: 221). Indeed, it was in recognition of the importance of agriculture for livelihoods as well as the need for historical redress that the government introduced its land reform program in 1994.

¹⁶ Some examples of support for exporters include expanded export infrastructure and skills development programs (Makgetla, 2004: 270).

Figure 1: South African Agriculture

Source: World Bank (2006) and Department of Trade and Industry (2005)

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Agriculture As % of GDP	4.60	3.86	4.19	4.01	3.77	3.54	3.27	3.51	4.17	3.70	3.36
Agriculture as % of exports	4.98	4.54	4.83	4.90	3.74	4.05	4.44	4.82	4.44	4.82	4.53

While deregulation and liberalization of agriculture went against the economic interests of most commercial farmers, on other agricultural issues such as land reform the government has largely acquiesced to commercial farmers interests. A consideration of the land reform program's "three pillars" of redistribution, restitution and tenure security can reveal how the land reform program was successfully sidelined and incorporated into the broader project of neoliberal restructuring. The evidently accommodative relationship between commercial farmers and government on the issue of land reform frames the discussion below on the government's policy towards Zimbabwean migrant farm workers.

Redistribution programs and restitution claims were intended to redistribute 30 percent of white owned land by 2015, but together they have only transferred 3 percent from the onset of the program in 1996 to 2003 (Hall, 2004a: 216). In response to slow progress made in redistribution in 1994-1998 (in large measure because of the "market-based" framework and limited budget), the program of became increasingly targeted towards fostering a class of black commercial farmers and became locked into the neoliberal model of black economic empowerment (Hall, 2004a: 224-230). But, as the

statistics above on land redistribution indicate, this process of mere deracialization has also proceeded very slowly.

The slow pace of land reform can be viewed as a result of the program itself which requires potential black landowners to buy land on the open market and “emerging farmers” to compete with international competition in a deregulated environment. The nominal political imperative of supporting black farmers is thus severely constrained by the market-based imperatives of land reform and restructuring more broadly.

In the area of tenure security, which applies directly to farm dwellers and farm workers, evictions have actually increased since the onset of tenure security measures such as the Extension of Tenure Security Act (ESTA) of 1997. The recent *National Evictions Survey* by Wegerif, Russell and Grundling (2005) demonstrated that 942 303 farm dwellers were evicted between 1994 and 2004. When these evictions are taken into account and weighed against the number of households that actually received land through the all aspects of the program, it is revealed that since the onset of the land reform program *more people have lost access to land than those who have gained it* (Wegerif et al, 2005: 21; emphasis mine).

Thus, the market based land reform in South Africa has done little to address landlessness in South Africa. Even where the government has introduced laws to support the landless (such as the tenure security provisions), the effects have been opposite to those intended (increased evictions). Enforcement of new laws such as ESTA is necessary for the implementation of land reform, but the lack of resources dedicated to the program has prevented it from working (Hall, 2004b: 57).

In land reform then, ANC has privileged the interests of larger, export-oriented commercial farmers. The latter seek an orderly process of market-based land reform that can facilitate consolidation of the sector and help create political stability by introducing a class of black commercial farmers (Hall, 2004a: 232).¹⁷ Thus, the lack of progress made in deracializing the commercial farming sector is a potential source of contradiction in the current phase of restructuring.

The slow pace of land reform in general and political backlash in the form of the Landless People's Movement (LPM) has prompted the government to redouble its rhetorical efforts, seen most recently at the Land Summit organized by the Department of Land Affairs and Department of Agriculture in July 2005. At the Summit, the government announced the intention to "review" the market based mechanism underlying land reform, but little concrete change has come out of it. The Summit itself seemed more about providing a venue for the government to appear as if it intended to address the problem of landlessness, rather than actually addressing it. Land reform has, moreover, done little to help those evicted or retrenched because of neoliberal restructuring.

In addition, the uneven impact of restructuring has extended to labour, as some farm workers have had their position as higher paid, permanent or "core" workers entrenched while – as the example of Zimbabwean farm workers in the far north makes clear – others were retrenched or subjected to intensified exploitation, often as seasonal or casual labour (du Toit and Ewert, 2005). Wegerif et al (2005: 33) noted that the total

¹⁷ Some of the smaller or less capitalized white farmers, such as members of the most conservative farmer's union, the Transvaal Agriculture Union (TAU), have a much more negative perspective of land reform and are very hostile towards the ANC. This is not least because many farmers affiliated with TAU have been the most adversely effected by deregulation. See the "Real State of the Nation" in the TAU publication *South Africa Bulletin* (2006, 13/3).

number of paid employees decreased from 1,093,265 in 1993 to 940,815 in 2002. The trend of casualization can be noted in the increased ratio of casual workers over the same period. There were 647,839 permanent workers and 445,360 casual workers in 1993, and 481,375 permanent workers and 459,445 casual workers in 2002.

Another result of the latest phase of restructuring is that migrant labour is now increasingly sourced outside of South Africa. This is the result of several factors, not the least of which is the end of apartheid itself which opened South Africa to transnational and informal migration networks. Since 1994, legal migration to South Africa has increased with many more people migrating illegally (Landau, 2005: 3). While migrant farm workers from neighbouring countries (e.g. Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho) came to South Africa during apartheid, they have taken on a new importance over the last decade (Crush: 2000: 5). Undocumented migrants are attractive to farmers because they are easily accessible and disposable virtually on demand (especially for farms in border areas or along migration routes) and are vulnerable to super-exploitation. As the specific case of Zimbabweans confirms, the employment of migrants has enabled many farms to adapt to the more competitive environment ushered in by sectoral restructuring.

Zimbabwean Farm Workers in the Far North

To demonstrate that the super-exploitation of Zimbabwean labour is partly the result of neoliberal restructuring, this section focuses on the impact of restructuring on the farms of the far north in Limpopo. By situating the broader trends of restructuring in Limpopo and charting the concurrent rise of Zimbabwean labour in the far north, it can

be shown that farms in the far north have tried to remain competitive by resorting to low waged Zimbabwean labour. The example of Zimbabweans in the far north thus substantiates the proposition that the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture, in line with the earlier phase of restructuring, deepens the exploitation of labour. Moreover, and as with the limited results of the land reform program, the policy of the government towards Zimbabwean farm workers reveals accommodation with commercial farmers.

The argument proceeds by first considering the impact of restructuring in Limpopo to demonstrate that it has contributed to a process of consolidation that has resulted in the liquidation of many farming units. To remain profitable in this deregulated environment, farmers in the far north have increasingly resorted to Zimbabwean labour. Second, there is analysis of the government's attempts to regulate Zimbabwean labour in order to demonstrate that the interests of white commercial farmers are prioritized on this issue. Third, the super-exploitation of Zimbabweans is then confirmed by referring to empirical research on wages and conditions on the farms of the far north.

Processes of capital concentration and labour casualization (the trends associated with the third phase of restructuring) have had a particularly marked impact on Limpopo province during the mid and late 1990s. To cite figures from the Department of Agriculture (2006), in 1996 there were 7,200 commercial farming units in Limpopo but in 2002 this number dropped to 2,915. Farmers who were kept on the land by apartheid-era subsidies were no longer viable in the deregulated environment, causing many to leave farming or to shift from farming crops to less volatile game farming and ranching. A small section of the sector appears to have benefited from the process of consolidation, namely the large-scale, export-oriented citrus and vegetable producers,

confirmed by the vast expansion of production and output of the two main crops, oranges and tomatoes, over the past decade (Department of Agriculture, 2006).

The changes in agricultural labour market patterns over the same period reflect the ongoing casualization of labour. Somewhat surprisingly, over the period from 1993 to 2002, the total paid farm employment in Limpopo increased from 93,116 to 101,249 (Department of Agriculture, 2006). This seems to make Limpopo something of an anomaly compared to the national employment trends in agriculture which have seen a total decrease in employment. This anomaly, however, requires two qualifications: the first is that the increase in employment is misleading because the job creation has occurred on the casual or seasonal basis, while permanent or “full-time” has decreased along with the national trends. This can be seen when figures from the 2002 census are compared with an employment survey conducted by the Department of Agriculture in 1997. The latter survey suggests that there were approximately 28,000 casual workers in 1996, and the 2002 census notes a figure of 38,614 casual workers. The second qualification is that the growth of casual employment in Limpopo reflects the incorporation of Zimbabwean migrants as seasonal farm workers on the citrus farms of the far north.

The “far north” comprises an area of 75 kilometers stretching from the foot of the Soutpansberg Mountains north to the Limpopo River, and bordered on the west by Mogalakwena River and east by Kruger National Park. There are approximately 200 commercial farming units in this area, most situated outside the former homeland areas occupying formerly “white” designated territory near Musina (or Messina) and Tshipise (Frantz and Shabangu, 2000). Despite the fact that there is high unemployment and

appears to be a surplus of “local labour” in the former homeland areas adjacent to the commercial farms, commercial farms have increasingly phased in Zimbabwean labour over the past decade (Frantz and Shabangu, 2000). In some instances, farmers have both retrenched and evicted “local” work forces and replaced them with Zimbabwean migrants (Lahiff, 1997: 32). Farmers claim that Zimbabweans are more productive than the local population and are employed because they are “better workers” (Interview with farm owner August, 2005). But recent studies, including the research by this author, indicate that the mostly undocumented Zimbabwean migrants suffer super exploitation and human rights abuses, suggesting that part of the reason why farmers employ Zimbabweans is because the latter are more vulnerable to exploitation than South Africans (Crush, 2000: 8). Other (less apparent) motivations farmers have in employing Zimbabweans include the prevention of “local” populations from becoming “permanent occupiers” on farm property through the security of tenure laws and also the desire to undermine unionization efforts (du Toit and Ewert, 2005).

A report published in 2000 suggested that on the approximately 200 farms of the far north roughly 13,000 people are employed and that of these more than 10,000 were Zimbabwean (Frantz and Shabangu, 2000). This number has probably increased greatly, as a 2004 report from the International Organization of Migration (IOM) notes that the number could be as high as 60,000 Zimbabwean farm workers for the entire province, with perhaps more than 15,000 in the far north. While some of the migrants have worked on Limpopo farms for decades (mainly chiVenda speakers who live near the border), the vast majority of farm workers in the far north of Limpopo have worked

there for not more than 10 years, with most coming in the last 5 years (interviews with a farm owner and farm workers in August 2005).

The fact that Zimbabwean labour has become prevalent during the same period that the sector has undergone significant consolidation, seems to confirm the thesis that farms have integrated Zimbabweans into their accumulation strategies as part of an effort to remain profitable. Moreover, the citrus farms of the far north where Zimbabwean labour is concentrated (especially near Tshipise and areas adjacent to the border) account for a large proportion of citrus exports, especially Valencia oranges (Mather, 2002). Low-waged Zimbabwean labour is probably central to the accumulation strategies of individual farms and subsidizes more broadly the citrus component of South Africa's agricultural exports.

Given the importance of Zimbabwean labour in the far north and the government's tendency to promote large-scale agricultural capital, the state regulations governing the employment of Zimbabweans largely accommodate the interests of commercial farmers. During the mid-1990s the state simply continued with a late-apartheid arrangement that assigned a special status to commercial farmers in the far north and exempted them from going through normal channels regarding work permits, enabling them to employ Zimbabwean labour with relative ease.¹⁸ This special status was premised on two reasons: first, most farm workers coming from Zimbabwe were from Venda communities near the border, and thus had kin ties with predominantly Venda communities on the South African side. This rationale regarding ethnicity fed into the second reason, namely the farmers' claim that there were shortages in labour supply.

¹⁸ For example, Lincoln and Maririke (2000) note how during the 1990s Zimbabwean migrants could get access to designated posts at the border fence for processing their particular documents. There were even certain days of the week set aside for Zimbabwean farm workers to cross at the posts.

The latter claim became more prominent after export opportunities increased for citrus farms and the end of apartheid brought new labour legislation and tenure reform.

The farmers continued to receive this special status until the late 1990s, when pressure from NGOs, trade unions and politicians forced the government to respond to their claims that cheap Zimbabwean labour was taking jobs from South Africans. In response to this pressure, the privileges of farmers in the far north was revoked after 2000, and in 2001 the government momentarily threatened to deport all “illegal” Zimbabweans from the far north (*Business Day*, 2001, 15/10). However, commercial farmers were able to obtain a High Court interdict that prevented the deportations (*Mail and Guardian*, 2001, 18/10). A new agreement was then reached (in a “spirit of cooperation”) between farmers and the government that required Zimbabwean farm workers to have corporate work permits before entering South Africa (Department of Home Affairs, 2001, 14/11).

However, given the difficulties of obtaining such permits while in Zimbabwe, the *de facto* practice since 2001 is that Zimbabweans cross the border illegally and then make their way to the farms. The farmers, who often apply for “blank” permits in advance from the Department of Home Affairs, then actually process the documents after the workers arrive. Once the workers have a corporate permit, they can enter South Africa at the border posts without difficulty. While the permits are ostensibly in process and Zimbabweans are working on the farm, some farmers issue their own identity cards for migrant workers meant to prevent them from being deported. The local police and authorities tend to recognize these informal I.D. cards and not to deport Zimbabweans possessing them. This being the case, some farmers are content simply to issue the I.D.

card without actually obtaining and processing the corporate work permit. Although it is difficult to judge to what extent of farmers in the far north of Limpopo follow the regulations, it is clear that the majority of Zimbabweans, especially amongst seasonal workers, do not have “legal” documents (Lincoln and Maririke, 2000: 51). While the more recent “Memorandum of Understanding” signed in 2003 between the governments of Zimbabwe and South Africa claims to have begun a process of “normalizing” Zimbabwean migrants, it appears to have had little effect thus far on these practices (IOM, 2004: 17).

Thus, while the historical privileges for farmers in the far north have been seemingly revoked, the new arrangement does little to address the concerns of those groups advocating that the farms should employ local labour. However, the token efforts and political posturing of the government help it appear as if it is “putting South Africans first”. As with the land reform program, the government introduces strong “paper” legislation but does little in practice to ensure it is enforced or carried out. The result is that the labour and human rights violations that occur on farms of the far north (and beyond) continue.

A brief survey of the conditions – specifically, wages and accommodation – on farms of the far north can attest to these violations. Lincoln and Maririke’s research in the far north, based on a 1998 survey of 200 former Limpopo province farm workers living in Masvingo, Zimbabwe found that the average monthly wage for Zimbabwean farm workers was R 150¹⁹ with deductions for food allotments (Lincoln and Maririke, 2000: 54). Working hours varied, with most working at least 45 hours a week, sometimes seven day weeks. The same study found that more than half the respondents

¹⁹ R 150 was equivalent to roughly thirty U.S. dollars in 2000.

were accommodated in compounds, with most sharing rooms. The other half used some form of informal structures, including dilapidated farm houses, shacks or huge tents. Access to water was found to be problematic, with few farms offering bathing facilities and in some cases no running water at all (Lincoln and Maririke, 2000: 53). There were also reports of physical abuse by the farm owner, foreman and police, and women farm workers reported sexual abuse by the same groups and by other farm workers.

New legislation since 1998, particularly the introduction of a sectoral determination for minimum wages on farms, has brought some changes on farms in the far north, although the effect on Zimbabweans is questionable. The sectoral determination for farm workers stipulated that workers must be paid an hourly rate of R 4.54 for those who work less than 27 hours per week, or a monthly rate of R 885 for those who work more than 27 hours. Field work conducted for this study in 2005 found that, to varying degrees, farmers have either ignored these laws entirely or subvert them in other ways, for example by paying according to piece work (an illegal payment method) but reporting an hourly wage on pay slips (interview with farm workers in August 2005). While a tiny minority of commercial farmers appear to pay a minimum wage to Zimbabweans, generally, farmers have resorted to Zimbabwean labour precisely as a means of avoiding the minimum wage stipulations.²⁰

These general points regarding wages and accommodation need to be qualified by recognizing the divisions among Zimbabwean migrant farm workers themselves. Some migrants form part of the core or permanent work force on farms and occupy skilled

²⁰ The reports of accommodation, working conditions and forms of abuse on farms were also confirmed by field work in 2005.

positions such as mechanics, sprayers, entomologists, drivers and foremen. These migrants will receive higher wages and tend to have more authority on the farm hierarchy. The bulk of Zimbabwean migrants, however, are seasonal labourers who are hired for the picking season - roughly April to September – and then released. These seasonal labourers work in the fields picking fruit in the far north, mainly tomatoes and oranges, work in packing plants on larger farms, and perform other menial jobs in “gangs” like clearing the bush and weeding. The seasonal migrants receive lower wages and are generally in a more precarious situation. The available evidence therefore suggests that most Zimbabwean farm workers receive less than the statutory minimum wage (often less than half) and generally labour in conditions that can be termed “super-exploitation”.

However, the question does remain as to why the government finds it difficult to act against white farmers? In October 2001, it seemed the government was on the verge of forcibly deporting thousands of undocumented Zimbabweans from the far north. As Billy Masetla, then Director-General of Home Affairs, threatened at the time: “These people must be gone. The deadline stands and we are going to act. We are going to hit the employers to stop this practice. There are going to be a few farmers in trouble” (*Sunday Times*, 2001, 14/10). But these threats proved empty, as have the more recent claims to “normalize” the presence of Zimbabweans, and the practice by farmers of hiring undocumented Zimbabweans has continued unabated.

In sum, there are at least three reasons for the government’s ambivalence or even acquiescence to farmers on the issue of Zimbabweans. First, the commercial farmers of the far north may have convinced the government that there are shortages of “local”

(South African) labour in the region. More likely, however, is that the government has acknowledged the pressures restructuring has brought upon many farmers, and that, without low-waged, easily exploitable Zimbabwean labour, some important citrus exporters might go out of business. Indeed, the very high unemployment rates in the surrounding communities of the far north certainly attest to no shortage of local labour (Frantz and Shabangu, 2000). Second, the broader growth strategy of South Africa is in part premised on attracting foreign investment. As Blade Nzimande²¹ stated during a preparatory meeting for the Land Summit, “government is afraid that if it acts against white farmers it will lose foreign investment”. Given the very negative reaction of foreign investors to Robert Mugabe’s recklessly implemented land seizures (and the regime’s refusal to recognize the rule of law, especially property rights), the ANC may seek to eschew any political interventions on farms that could be perceived as going in a “Zimbabwe direction.”²² Of course, public displays of accommodation with white commercial farmers are unpopular with much of the ANC’s political base, so the relationship with farmers must be carefully managed and presented.

The concern about attracting foreign investment connects with perhaps the most fundamental reason for the government’s acquiescence: the terms of the “managed transition” of 1994 that saw the reformulated hegemonic bloc retain the dominant sections of South African capital as core interests. The composition of the reformulated hegemonic bloc has been described by Taylor and William (2006: 10) as consisting of:

²¹ Nzimande is the General Secretary of the South African Communist Party (SACP). He made these comments at an SACP meeting in June 2005 before the Land Summit.

²² More recently, the new Minister of Land Affairs and Agriculture Lulu Xingwana announced to a prominent audience that South Africa would not copy Zimbabwe’s “shambolic” land reform program (New Land Minister says ‘Zimbabwe’ cannot happen in SA”, 2006, *Sunday Independent*, 11/6).

...elite fractions of the ANC, a developing and increasingly strident black bourgeoisie; and white business elites. The last group continue to control most of South Africa's financial markets, their accumulation patterns are primarily export-oriented, and they are acutely sensitive to trends and developments initiated outside South Africa within the capitalist core.

Thus, the "globalized business interests" that occupy a central place in this bloc are the underlying reason why South Africa pursued a neoliberal growth path after 1994.

Under the terms of this growth path, the restructuring of agriculture created pressures leading to the increased employment of Zimbabweans under very adverse conditions.

While migrants sometimes overtly and covertly resist these conditions, more often than not the little amount of money earned on the farms is thought not worth jeopardizing. Most migrants are supporting multiple dependants back in Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwean crisis has forced many to migrate as a means of survival. The restructuring of agriculture associated with the neoliberal growth path has partly led farmers to resort to low-waged Zimbabwean labour, but it is unlikely that this labour would be widely available if it were not for the Zimbabwean crisis. The latter then is a fundamental push factor, equally if not more important as neoliberal restructuring for understanding the present migration, to which the analysis now turns.

Chapter 2: The Push Factor: The Zimbabwean Crisis

As noted above, in mid-October 2001, South African authorities stood on the verge of deporting thousands of undocumented migrants from farms in the far north of Limpopo province and imposing heavy fines on farmers employing “illegal” Zimbabweans. Replying to the political uproar these threatened deportations caused among farmers, the remarks of then Home Affairs Director-General Billy Masetlha brought into sharp resolution the South African government’s discursive construction of Zimbabwean migrant farm workers: “We are not to blame for this,” Masetlha insisted. “This did not start with Robert Mugabe. This is a practice that has been entrenched for generations²³ because it is a cheap and dispensable form of labour” (*Sunday Times*, 2001, 14/10). Even though the mass deportations of farm workers never materialized, the remarks of Masetlha tellingly revealed how the government ignores the volatile “politics” associated with Mugabe and presents the causes of migration as purely economic.²⁴

This narrow, economistic construction applies not only to farm workers, but extends more generally to most of the estimated 2 million (or more) Zimbabweans who have migrated to South Africa over the last decade. As the Zimbabwean human rights advocate, Solidarity Peace Trust, noted with regard to South African policy towards Zimbabweans in their landmark report (2004: 38): “The general assumption is that the

²³ It should be noted that Masetlha’s comment that Zimbabwean migrants have been working on farms for “generations” is a vast exaggeration. While it is true for a smaller proportion of migrants (particularly Zimbabwean Venda communities that live near the border), most Zimbabwean migrant farm workers have come to the farms of the far north in the last five or ten years (see Chapter 1).

²⁴ When discussing how the “political” is separated from the “economic” by the South African government, the terms political and economic are occasionally placed in quotation marks throughout this chapter. This is to signify that the separation of these terms is done on this provisional basis, not because the author believes the political and economic should be separated.

vast majority of Zimbabweans in South Africa are illegal economic migrants, who have not suffered political victimization and who should be rounded up and deported.”

While there can be no doubt that the economic collapse in Zimbabwe and the need to secure livelihoods are central to the motivations of Zimbabwean migrant farm workers, the ubiquitous application of the term “economic migrant” betrays a refusal by the ANC-led government to come to terms with the real dynamics underlying the Zimbabwean crisis.

In large part, the interpretation of the crisis by the South African government and the narrative put forward by President Thabo Mbeki (2003) coincides with what Raftopoulos (2006:204) has termed the “Left Nationalist” position on the Zimbabwean crisis. Here the economic crisis is viewed primarily as an external imposition (often blaming Britain in particular) or, more precisely in Mbeki’s view, as the product of unsustainable social spending during the 1980s. Mbeki noted in 2003, “Contrary to what some in our country now claim, the economic crisis affecting Zimbabwe did not originate from the desperate actions of a reckless political leadership, or from corruption. It arose from a genuine concern to meet the needs of the black poor, without taking into account the harsh economic reality that, in the end, we must pay for what we consume.” As an extension of this economic reductionism, the fraudulent elections, human rights abuses and forced migration resulting from this crisis are presented as necessary evils that regrettably accompany the resolution of “unfinished business” from the anti-colonial struggle.²⁵

²⁵ Of course, South Africa’s position on Zimbabwe likely has less to do with anti-colonial solidarity and more to do with the pragmatic imperatives of its foreign policy based on “quiet diplomacy” towards Zimbabwe. For a detailed discussion of the politics of Mbeki’s “quiet diplomacy” and the possible reasons for South Africa’s continuing diplomatic and material support for Mugabe, see Linda Freeman’s

Putting aside whatever the motivations of the South African government might be, the negative consequences of the depoliticized label “economic migrant” on immigration policy are evident enough – as seen in the threatened deportation of thousands of farm workers and the overall hostility directed at Zimbabwean migrants in general.²⁶ Thus, insofar as the assumptions underlying Mbeki’s narrative of the Zimbabwean crisis inform the economistic construction of Zimbabwean migrant farm workers, the task of this chapter is to dispel those assumptions. It will be argued here that the political crisis facing the Mugabe regime is the central driving force behind the economic collapse. In the course of defending this conception of the Zimbabwean crisis, the “economic motivations” of Zimbabwean migrants are shown to be bound up with equally fundamental political processes affecting them directly and indirectly.

Yet, to argue that the political crisis facing Mugabe is the central force is not to reduce the complexities surrounding the Zimbabwean crisis to simply “political factors”. As Raftopoulos and Phimister (2004: 355) note, the Zimbabwean crisis has at least three broad and overlapping dimensions: “That of Pan-African solidarity in the face of renewed imperialist aggression,²⁷ the breakdown of the liberation consensus, and the limitations of post-colonial development in the context of globalization.”

While fully cognizant of all three dimensions, this chapter focuses on the breakdown of what Raftopoulos and Phimister (2004: 355) term the “liberation consensus”, defined

recent article (2005a). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage substantively with the relations between the governments.

²⁶ An example of such hostility is the estimate from the IOM that up to 2,000 Zimbabwean migrants are deported each week (*IRIN*, 2006, 10/1).

²⁷ To avoid confusion here, Raftopoulos and Phimister are not proposing that “imperialist aggression” is a “cause” in the sense argued by the Left Nationalist position. Rather, they are referring in this first dimension to how “coincident” acts of imperialism in other parts of the world – most prominently, the U.S. and British led occupation of Iraq – have facilitated (false) constructions of the Zimbabwean crisis that blame external factors for economic decline and ironically help present Mugabe as a Pan-African symbol of anti-imperialism.

as a “unifying ideological vision of development that promised a broad vision of liberation and development.” The responses of the Mugabe regime to this breakdown – namely, its attempts to reconfigure consent while eliminating dissent – provide the “political basis” for the economic catastrophe which began in the late 1990s which intensified after 2000.²⁸ By unpacking and substantiating the political forces underlying the crisis, the problematic assumptions underlying the economic migrant category can be refuted and wider complexities of the Zimbabwean crisis as a “push factor” for the migration can be more fully appreciated.

To demonstrate the political forces behind the Zimbabwean crisis and the migration, this chapter is divided into two sections. The first section considers the 1980-2000 period and traces the interplay of political and economic factors that contributed to the general economic crisis of the late 1990s. Of central importance here is how the political tensions unleashed by the impact of the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) combined with challenges from within ZANU-PF structures from war veterans. The efforts of the Mugabe regime to reconstitute its power base in the face of these pressures brought economic catastrophe. The section begins with a discussion of the circumstances that contributed to the adoption of ESAP at the end of the 1980s. This historical analysis is necessary because if structural adjustment was so central to the unravelling of the “liberation consensus”, it begs the question as to why the original growth path was abandoned. Moreover, a discussion of the previous growth path and the impact of ESAP can dispel a key assumption of Mbeki (2003; see above) that

²⁸ Other analysts such as Bond (1997) emphasize Zimbabwe’s “long-term capitalist crisis” dating from the 1970s as contributing to the economic downturn in 1997-98. This important perspective is not incorrect. However the focus of this chapter is intentionally upon political factors underlying the economic crisis, as these are precisely what are ignored by the economic migrant category.

underlies the “economic migrants” construction: namely, that the economic crisis in Zimbabwe can be reduced to the “overspending” during the 1980s. On the contrary, the section demonstrates how the (failed) attempts of ZANU-PF to reconstitute its power base in the wake of ESAP are the real causes behind the economic crisis of the late 1990s and 2000s.

However, the real watershed moment of the Zimbabwean crisis was the regime’s loss in the February 2000 constitutional referendum. The failed referendum (for ZANU-PF) raised the specter of the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), coming to power, a prospect which sent shock waves through the ruling party. This defeat resulted in a new political strategy from the Mugabe regime which entailed a more explicit reliance upon coercion.

The second section explores the nature and ramifications of this new political strategy that followed the defeat of ZANU-PF in the referendum. The key processes that have characterized this strategy include the state-organized land invasions and intensified militarization, which in turn have led to a collapse in agricultural production and deepened economic crisis. It is argued that the main objective of the land invasions – as was the case with the growing power of security forces and later campaigns such as *Murambatsvina* – was to attack, intimidate and break up the opposition. While the land invasions were part of a political strategy to shore up ZANU-PF support in rural areas, it is clear that this political strategy has failed. Far from renewing its legitimacy, the rule of the party has come to reside almost entirely on coercion. The failed attempts at “political restructuring” and ongoing repression have not come without consequences as the Zimbabwean economy has been devastated especially since 2000. In short, the

efforts of the Mugabe regime to stay in power will be shown to be the immediate causes of ongoing economic collapse in Zimbabwe. But to do so the analysis needs to first hark back to the 1980s and dig out the roots of the Zimbabwean crisis.

Prologue to Crisis

The grim circumstances that have gripped Zimbabwe since the late 1990s stand in stark contrast to the hopeful expectations that greeted ZANU-PF when it came to power in 1980. At that time there seemed good reason to hope that the formerly oppressed majority would see a marked improvement in their lives. The new government inherited significant infrastructure from the former Rhodesian regime, including modern communication, transportation and industrial capacities (Bond and Saunders, 2005: 2). At the time Zimbabwe was a balanced economy with developed mining, agricultural and manufacturing sectors. As Julius Nyerere, the revered President of Tanzania said at the time to Robert Mugabe: “You have inherited a jewel. Keep it that way” (cited in Meredith, 2002: 21).

That these hopeful expectations within and beyond Zimbabwe were not “immediately disturbed” by the *gukurahundi* massacres (1982-1987) where at least 20,000 siNdebele speaking civilians were killed, suggested that (with the glaring exception of Matabeleland and Midlands) the government retained an important modicum of social consent and that the liberation consensus endured throughout the 1980s (Raftopoulos and Phimister, 2004: 355). Thus, to understand how the complete unravelling of social consent came about in the 1990s, it is necessary to discuss the circumstances that led Zimbabwe to neoliberal structural adjustment.

The onset of ESAP was brought about by a convergence of different political-economic processes. Although a complete discussion of ESAP is impossible in the limited space here, three major processes are considered in turn: first, the economic problems generated by the government's initial growth path of the 1980s; second, the shifting international political economy during the 1980s and; third, an internal process of embourgeoisement among a state-based elite. The first process, the economic problems generated by Zimbabwe's growth path, is given the most attention as this process was the most complex.

Zimbabwe's growth path during the 1980s was in large measure a continuation of the regulated system inherited from Rhodesia, with some redistributive elements added in (Brett, 2005: 6). The ZANU-PF government maintained state ownership over utilities and marketing agencies and kept existing control over prices, investment and resource allocations left over from the Rhodesian state-managed economy. At the same time, the government invested substantially in health care and education; social sector expenditure increased from 32.5 percent of GDP in 1979 to 44.6 percent in 1989 (Brett, 2005: 6).

Initially, this growth path enjoyed reasonable success: growth averaged 4.7 percent between 1980 and 1985 (despite a serious drought in 1982) and 4 percent between 1985 and 1990 (Brett, 2005: 7). Moreover, agricultural production expanded among the formerly marginalized farmers in the Communal Areas, as many of them gained access to marketing services, credit and inputs after independence. Inequality was also reduced as a result of improved social services (Brett, 2005: 8).

Nevertheless, the growth path of the 1980s did generate some serious economic problems. For instance, Brett noted (2005: 8) that by the late 1980s there was a growing recognition among policy makers that the initial growth path was placing “long-term constraints on growth”. These concerns stemmed from how the expansion of civil service employment and spending on social services and parastatals had generated a severe budget deficit, high taxes and a large public debt (Brett, 2005: 8). By the end of the 1980s job creation had slowed considerably, especially for well-educated youth. Indeed, as Dashwood notes (2000:18), “the specter of high unemployment rates helped sell the reform program within government.” Moreover, severe foreign exchange shortages led to an inability to import and re-equip industries. Thus, this nascent economic crisis led to a consensus among business groups, donors and technocrats in government that the growth path was not sustainable (Dashwood, 2000: 117, Bond, 1997: 150).

The emerging consensus around the need for policy change also took place against the hegemonic backdrop of global neoliberalism and, in 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union. But these external factors only facilitated rather than caused the gradual shift towards neoliberalism in Zimbabwe. Arguably, at a deeper and more subtle level, the turn towards neoliberalism was a product of the steady embourgeoisement of the state-based elite (Dashwood, 2000: 188; Mandaza, 1986). On coming to power in 1980, this leadership used its access to political power to enrich itself (Dashwood, 2000, 113). In part, the process reflected how before and after independence, the black petty-bourgeoisie was mostly shut out of the private sector by white capital. The latter retained control over key sectors of the economy, forcing the black petty bourgeoisie to

pursue their accumulation aspirations largely through the state (Moyo and Yeros, 2005: 172-175). During the 1980s, the emerging black elite was broadly made up of government ministers, judges, doctors, lawyers, senior army officers, parliamentarians and senior civil servants, but, significantly, not independent entrepreneurs. This class was enriched by acquiring large-scale commercial farms, by engaging in corrupt practices and benefiting from the indigenization process (Dashwood, 2000: 113; Raftopolous and Phimister, 2004: 362). The upshot of this process was that the government became less committed to the welfarist program that reflected the concerns of workers and peasants and increasingly beholden to the interests of agrarian and manufacturing capital (Mandaza, 1986). By the end of the 1980s, this class was calling for an end to foreign exchange controls and liberalization (Moyo and Yeros, 2005: 174).

Thus, the combination of the government's fears over long-term growth prospects and unemployment, the gradual embourgeoisement of senior figures within the Zimbabwean state and the international context led to the abandonment of the initial growth path. The new program²⁹ was largely designed by the government itself and not the IMF or World Bank. It represented a standard set of neoliberal policies calling for the removal of price controls, trade liberalization, export promotion, currency depreciation, the reduction of constraints on foreign investment, deregulation of the labour market and the reduction of the budget deficit (Dashwood, 2000: 146-148). It was hoped that these policies would address foreign exchange shortages and establish sustainable job-creating growth. Instead, economic problems intensified after adopting ESAP and provoked a political backlash against ZANU-PF.

²⁹ While the new policy regime was formally launched with the adoption of ESAP in 1991, there were earlier signs of a policy shift in 1989 with the introduction of a "Liberal investment Code" and in the 1990 *Economic Policy Statement* (Moyo and Yeros, 2005: 175).

ESAP had a devastating impact on the economy. In fact, the economic problems caused by ESAP policies proved far worse than the policies of the initial growth path (Brett, 2005: 10). Inflation increased more than 30 percent from 1991 to 1995 and foreign debt as a percentage of GDP rose from 8.4 percent to 21.8 (Bond, 2000b: 175-176). While the manufacturing sector was meant to be one of the main beneficiaries of liberalization, the overall impact was a process of deindustrialization. Manufacturing output declined by 40 percent from 1991 to 1995 (Bond and Saunders, 2005: 1). As a result of retrenchments and job shedding in the civil service, employment growth decreased from an average of 2.4 percent between 1985 and 1990 to 1.55 percent between 1991 and 1997. Real wages declined from an index of 122 in 1982 to 88 in 1997 and the share of real wages in gross national income from 54 percent in 1987 to 39 percent in 1997 (Raftopoulos and Phimister, 2004:358). While government expenditure as a percentage of GDP did not appear to decrease significantly (30 percent of GDP in 1986-90 to 28.8 percent in 1991-95), the ongoing spending reflected declining revenues from lower taxes. Moreover, currency devaluation and higher interest rates made paying back loans more expensive. Finally, one also has to include here the effect on government budgets of large pay increases for cabinet ministers (Carmody and Taylor, 2000: 4).

At the same time, serious cuts in health care, education and welfare provision reversed the popular gains made during the 1980s. The declining living standards brought on by neoliberal policies, the growth of unemployment among literate youth and negative effects on the organized working class provided fertile ground for opposition politics. The inability of the government to sustain social spending and pro-

labour policies (for example, minimum wage policies and protective job legislation) associated with the initial growth path widened the cracks in the liberation consensus and provided the context for its complete unravelling (Raftopoulos and Phimister, 2004: 358). Compounding the problem for the government was that liberalization had resulted in a depleted public sector, thereby shrinking ZANU-PF's base of patronage (Carmody and Taylor, 2003: 4). The worsening economic conditions in Zimbabwe combined with the end of apartheid in 1994 to increase cross-border migration to South Africa, thus marking the beginnings of what would become enormous migratory movements (Zinyama, 1999: 28).

Despite the growing hardships and periods of drought during the early and mid-1990s, the Zimbabwean economy was still one of the strongest economies in the region. For example, GDP growth was 6.5 percent in 1996 (Brett, 2005: 11). Migration would not reach its highest levels until the economic crisis of late 1990s and its intensification after 2000.

To demonstrate that the migration is intertwined with political forces in Zimbabwe, a more detailed analysis of the unravelling of social consent and government's response is necessary. The economic impact of ESAP and blatant acts of corruption provoked renewed opposition to the regime and sparked a revitalization of labour and civic mobilization. Harare was struck by "IMF riots" in 1993 and 1995, and in 1996 Zimbabwe experienced its first national public sector strikes since 1948 (Raftopolous and Phimister, 2004: 358). While the public sector had previously served as a key site for party patronage, the growing militancy of the public sector signified that ruling party loyalties could no longer be taken for granted. Furthermore, labour's mobilization

capacities grew during this period because of strengthened links between public sector workers and the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and with the civic movement more broadly (Raftopolous and Phimister, 2004: 358).

This growing challenge from labour and urban unrest led the ZANU-PF government to shift its political strategy in the mid 1990s. But with diminished patronage resources, the only tool available for the government's attempted political restructuring was a "racially charged populism" that blamed the affluent white population for economic problems (Carmody and Taylor, 2003: 5). During the 1996 Presidential election, Mugabe sought to placate urban unrest by shifting blame for industrial and urban decline on white capital. However, these efforts did not convince many, as the election was marked by record low turnouts and Mugabe won the Presidency uncontested (Carmody and Taylor, 2003: 5).

As it became evident that urban areas could not be counted on for support, political resources were increasingly channeled into rural areas. For example, measures were enacted to revalidate customary law and thereby ensure the political support of traditional leaders. These efforts culminated in the passing of the Traditional Leaders Act in 1998 (Hammar, 2005: 8). Moreover, while the land issue was not yet politicized as it would be after the referendum, the designation in 1997 of 1,471 commercial farms for compulsory acquisition should also be read as part of these earlier efforts to shore up support for ZANU-PF in rural areas (Worby, 2001: 488).

However, these announced commercial farm designations were also in response to demands from within ZANU-PF structures from war veterans. As Carmody and Taylor (2003: 6) noted, "in the early 1990s the war veterans broke with ZANU-PF over its

conversion to neoliberalism and the consequent lack of opportunities for its members.”³⁰ The veterans became a direct threat to Mugabe in 1997 after it was discovered that their compensation fund had been looted of \$450 million Zimbabwean dollars (equal to \$44 million U.S. dollars at the time) by senior officials and cabinet ministers (Carmody and Taylor, 2003: 6). In response to a government appointed inquiry into the looted fund, veterans organized mass demonstrations and directly confronted Mugabe at his residence. The fact that the war veterans were not resisted by the Presidential guard suggested that they had the support of the army (Carmody and Taylor, 2003: 6). Mugabe was thus forced to placate this grouping and made a 4.5 billion Zimbabwean dollar payout, in the form of lump sums and pension payments, as well as promising the veterans a large share of land in resettlement program noted above (Moore, 2001a: 262).

While this payout bought Mugabe a degree of loyalty from an important constituency (in a broader context of waning support), the economic impact was enormous. Overnight the currency fell by 74 percent³¹ producing rising inflation, food price increases and contributing to the economic crisis of the late 1990s (Moore, 2001a: 262). Another cause for the crisis was Mugabe’s decision to send over 11,000 troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in support of Laurent Kabila’s government. The IMF subsequently cut off funding to Zimbabwe because the government

³⁰ It is important to situate this instance of contestation in the broader historical relationship between war veterans and government. As Kriger (2004: 2) notes, the relationship demonstrates a “remarkable consistency” based at different times on accommodation, contestation and conflict. Over the course of independence and extending into the post-2000 phase of crisis, both groups have attempted to manipulate each other as they pursued distinct but often overlapping agendas (Kriger, 2004:10). Due to space limits, this chapter cannot elaborate in detail on this relationship.

³¹ The fact the currency could crash in this way was another consequence of ESAP. The openness to foreign portfolio investment (“Hot money”) brought on by ESAP enabled investors to withdraw quickly their capital in the wake Mugabe’s payout to the war veterans (Carmody and Taylor, 2003: 6).

misreported the costs of the intervention, estimated at one million U.S. dollars per day (Moore, 2001b: 915). British aid for land reform was also withdrawn, purportedly because too many farms had been designated for cabinet ministers (Moore, 2001b: 915).

The political problems underlying the economic crisis of the late 1990s were aggravated by the increasingly assertive opposition movement. The attempt by government to impose a 5 percent surtax to cover the war veterans' payout was subsequently withdrawn after a successful ZCTU general strike. In January 1998, price increases in basic commodities triggered three days of "food riots" in Harare. The heavy-handed response of government resulted in about thirteen people killed and thousands arrested (Alexander, 2000: 389).

Significantly, opposition to the regime solidified in 1998 when worker, NGO, student, women and church activists formed the National Constituent Assembly (NCA). Subsequently, the confluence of civic activities led to the formation of a new opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in September 1999 (Bond and Saunders, 2005: 3). Although the NCA's initiative to draft a new constitution was preempted by the government's own "Constitutional Commission", the latter's draft was put to a referendum in February 2000 and was rejected. Zimbabweans turned down the government's proposed constitution because of several contentious amendments. Chief among them was increased executive powers for the President with respect to military intervention within and outside Zimbabwe, and an unlimited term of office for the Presidential incumbent (Hammar, 2005: 3). Moreover, there was a widespread dissatisfaction with the government and the parlous state of the economy. This outcome of the constitutional referendum marked the first ever loss for ZANU-PF in a national

election and raised the serious prospect of the MDC coming to power in the parliamentary elections set for June 2000.

Despite this evident lack of consent, the Mugabe regime was unwilling to cede power. The regime set in place a new political strategy meant to neutralize the opposition and shore up support among its remaining constituencies. By discussing the nature and implications of this political strategy, the intensified economic crisis in the post-2000 period can be shown to arise from the political crisis facing the Mugabe regime.

The “Zimbabwean Crisis” crystallizes

If Mugabe had maintained a tacit understanding with the “white community” (and white farmers in particular) during the 1980s and 1990s, this accommodation ended after the constitutional referendum. Government discourse now asserted that the “imperialist West”, white farmers and black labour were aligned against the interests of peasants and war veterans (Moore, 2001b: 915). The “land question” was made the focal point of government initiations and, in cooperation with war veterans and the military, the government launched a campaign of land invasions (Raftopoulos and Phimister, 2004: 358).

By discussing the political role of the land invasions and the militarization process as well as other government campaigns such as “Operation Murambatsvina”, this section will demonstrate how political imperatives continued to drive the economic crisis during the post-referendum period. In so doing the appellation “economic migrant” becomes a misnomer, not the least because it ignores how these political forces underlie

the migration. The analysis grants most attention to and begins with the land invasions because their scope and economic impact was the most far-reaching.

To demonstrate the political motivations underlying the land invasions, some discussion of the “strategy” underlying their launching is necessary.³² This strategy can be broadly understood as an attempt to “displace” the crisis facing the regime in urban areas and channel it towards rural areas (Carmody and Taylor, 2003: 8). From the ZANU-PF government’s perspective, this strategy made sense for two reasons. First, while the manufacturing sector had declined under ESAP, the mainly white commercial farming sector had benefited from increased export opportunities (along with the mining sector). The fact that white-owned commercial farms continued to prosper throughout the 1990s while alongside them roughly 89 percent of the rural population continued to live in abject poverty and experience land hunger,³³ meant that racial tensions between white farmers and rural black poor were exacerbated (Carmody and Taylor, 2003: 7). According to Carmody and Taylor (2003: 7), the regime believed it could harness the racial tensions brought on by this deepened and visible inequality in the countryside through a campaign of land invasions and thereby generate support for the regime. Second, the direct threat from war veterans and the potential destabilizing influence of urban unemployed youths could be deflected if these groups could be put to use as “shock troops” against the opposition and sent to the rural areas as part of the state-led land occupations (Carmody and Taylor, 2003: 7).

³² To be more precise, it is unclear whether land invasions were pre-designed by the Government or if the latter “took advantage” of some initial war veteran occupations that began “autonomously” from the government (such as in Masvingo).

³³ The initial gains made in redistribution during the 1980s where 71,000 families were resettled proved ephemeral in the context of ESAP (Worby, 2001). That land hunger continued can be attested to by instances of land occupations by squatters throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Moyo and Yeros, 2005: 183-187). Even by the end of the 1990s, roughly 4000 white commercial farmers owned over 80 percent of the land formerly reserved for Europeans in the colonial period (Rutherford, 2004).

While analysts such as Moyo and Yeros (2005) suggest that the land invasions were driven “from below” (by the war veterans and settlers on their own initiative), and although this may have been the case initially, the state and army were the principal driving and coordinating force behind the land invasions from 2000 onwards (Alexander and MacGregor: 2001, Freeman, 2005b). As Alexander and MacGregor (2001: 511) note, “(a)s the occupations spread in the months before the election, it became increasingly clear that the war veterans and ZANU-PF youth who spearheaded the occupations had often been provided with support by the ruling party. Army personnel and members of the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) had been among the occupiers, playing coordinating and leadership roles.”

Although the government hoped to shore up support from rural populations by launching the land invasions, the primary purpose of the land invasions was to dismantle opposition support in rural areas (Alexander and MacGregor, 2001: 511). White commercial farmers were important financial supporters of the MDC and their farm workers were an unreliable constituency for ZANU-PF. Farm workers had historically been considered “foreigners” and tools of the “white farmers” and thus enemies of Zimbabwean nationals (Rutherford, 2004).

The consequence was a chaotic and violent process of land occupations that resulted in approximately 10.5 million hectares of predominantly white commercial farm land being seized by 2003 (Raftopolous and Phimister, 2004: 368). The land invasions did result in redistribution towards the poor, with 87 percent of the beneficiaries on the A1 scheme (small scale plots, accounting for 66 percent of the seized land or 6.5 million hectares) being from the rural poor (including communal area farmers), urban poor and

a few farm workers (Moyo, 2004: 23-24). On the A2 schemes (large scale farms, accounting for 2.5 million hectares) the results were more mixed, with at least 400 of the beneficiaries identified as “influential individuals” (Moyo, 2004: 23). These latter allocations reflect land disbursed to the security apparatus and party officials.

Whatever limited benefits accrued in terms of redistribution, these need to be weighed against the overall catastrophic effects of the land seizures. First, only 10 percent of the crowded communal areas became decongested (Moyo, 2004: 24). Second, most of the post-settlement resources have been allocated to A2 large scale farms. The result has been that land actually transferred to the rural poor has proven very difficult to cultivate, given shortages of seeds, fertilizers and other agricultural inputs (Freeman, 2005b; Sachikonye, 2005: 40). Third, the group most adversely affected by the land seizures was another section of the “rural poor”: the approximately 300,000 farm workers and their families (as many as two million people) whose livelihoods have been adversely affected. At least two-thirds of these farm workers have become unemployed or lost their land on commercial farms since the invasions, comprising more than one million people (Sachikonye, 2003: 2). Fourth, the virtual destruction of one of the most productive agricultural sectors in Africa has left Zimbabwe no longer self-sufficient in food production and masses of people now remain increasingly vulnerable to famine (discussed below).

Moreover, as the violence associated with land occupations and economic decline worsened, ZANU-PF experienced waning support in the rural areas (Carmody and

Taylor, 2003: 7).³⁴ Indeed, it could be argued that, after the unravelling of the liberation consensus, any attempt to secure broad-based legitimacy was bound to fail. The conditions to restore social consent required genuine democratization, but allowing free and fair elections would have meant the end of ZANU-PF's rule.³⁵ The regime's loss of support in both urban and rural areas did necessitate a further entrenching of its alliance with the military and war veterans (Carmody and Taylor, 2003: 8). Since 2002, patronage has been increasingly extended to army officials and war veterans through additional land allocations and a corrupt "fire sale" of state assets (Bond and Saunders, 2005: 5).³⁶

Indeed, the politicization of the military and militarization of the government has been another important feature of the new political strategy (Rupiya, 2004: 79). Zimbabwe's involvement in the DRC war shifted significant resources into the military and opened up lucrative accumulation opportunities for military commanders. After returning from the DRC, sections of the high command were slotted into important government posts, facilitating the re-imposition of authority and discipline within the ruling party itself (Saul and Saunders, 2005: 141). Dramatic evidence of a new political role for the military emerged in the weeks before the June 2002 Presidential election, when a coup was threatened if Morgan Tsvangarai was elected (Rupiya, 2004: 81). On state television the chief of armed forces, flanked by other heads of the various military

³⁴ Carmody and Taylor substantiate the waning support in rural areas by referring to R.W. Johnson's (2000) *Public Opinion and the Crisis of Zimbabwe*, Johannesburg: Helen Suzman Foundation and a 2002 report from the International Crisis Group, "Zimbabwe's Election: The Stakes for Southern Africa".

³⁵ While ZANU-PF did win the 2000 elections, these were widely condemned as fraudulent. Subsequent polls also "won" by ZANU-PF in 2002 and 2005 were also marred by intimidation and vote-rigging. See for example the report listed above by the Solidarity Peace Trust (2004; 2006).

³⁶ This latter process involved transferring state holdings in energy, telecoms and transport industries to interests connected to the party, largely through leasing arrangements, insider trading and privatization (Bond and Saunders, 2005: 5).

branches, announced that the military would “not accept, let alone support or salute” a government that does not observe “the objectives of the liberation struggle”. In addition, the army was placed in control of the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) to facilitate the provision of food on a political basis (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2006: 16). Extending beyond control of the GMB, the military was further empowered in 2005 under the so called “Operation Taguta/Sisuthi” (or operation “eat well”). This process of “Command Agriculture” intended to place millions of hectares of maize and other crop land under military control (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2006: 14).³⁷ While the government claimed the army would help increase food production, the primary reason for their deployment in the “deep” rural areas is to control and intimidate the population.

Generally, the empowerment of security forces has enabled increased repression of MDC organizers and presumed supporters, especially during election periods. A recent report by the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (2006) claimed that more than 15,000 people have been tortured since 1998. The most systematic attack on the opposition and general public since the land invasions has been “Operation Murambatsvina” (or “operation clean up the trash”). Begun in May 2005, Murambatsvina involved the bulldozing and demolition of unregistered homes/structures and also vendor’s stalls in the informal sector to ostensibly “clean up” slum areas around the country. According to a recent UN report (2005), 2.4 million

³⁷ The Solidarity Peace Trust (2006: 3-5) noted that the Command Agriculture program intended to place 1,500,000 hectares under maize production in the 2005/6 season and to produce 2,250,000 tonnes of maize. It furthermore intended to produce 90,000 tonnes of tobacco, 49,500 tonnes of maize seed, 210,000 tonnes of cotton, 750,000 tonnes of horticultural crops. Although the program had a projected budget of Z\$ 15 trillion, the government has failed to raise this money, thus limiting the scope of the operation.

people had property or forms of “informal” employment destroyed and up to 700,000 became homeless. As noted by the Solidarity Peace Trust (2006: 13), security forces close to government appear to have planned the operation.³⁸ Security officials also appear to be the chief beneficiaries of the subsequent “rebuilding” operation, so called “Operation Garikai” (or operation “stay well”) (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2006: 13).

The so-called “slum clearances” and human rights abuses on a mass scale constitute significant additional “political” causes behind migratory movements to South Africa. These examples overlap with the more general economic crisis as “motivations” for migrants. But as the above discussion has demonstrated, the deepened economic crisis is inseparable from political forces.

While the “economic” and “political” motivations of migrants are overlapping, the virtual collapse of the economy is undoubtedly a central “cause” of the current migration, as the following staggering economic indicators attest to. The land seizures resulted in a decline of 60 percent in food production and acted as a trigger for intensified economic crisis (*Zim Online*, 2006, 24/5). The country has experienced food shortages since 2000, with 7.8 million in need of food aid in 2003, 5.8 million people in need of food aid in 2005 and expected 4.3 million in 2006 (*Mail and Guardian*, 2006, 12/3). The food shortages and declining resources for the health sector have in turn worsened Zimbabwe’s HIV/AIDS crisis; one estimate is that 25 percent of the population are HIV positive (*Zim Online*, 2006, 1/2).³⁹ Furthermore, the economic

³⁸ Interestingly, the former Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam, now exiled and staying in Zimbabwe, has also been claimed to be “the brains behind the operation” (*Mail and Guardian*, 2006, 20/2).

³⁹ Despite the high infection rate, the United Nations announced in January 2006 that the infection rate among pregnant women had declined from 24.6 percent in 2002 to 21.3 percent in 2004 (*Business Day*, 2006, 16/1). Over the same period, infection rates among “young people” declined from 25 percent to 20 percent.

implosion is evidenced by the decline in GDP by 38 percent between 1998 and 2003, and a further declines of 4 percent in 2004, 7 percent in 2005 and expected continued decline in 2006 (*Zim Online*, 2006, 4/7). Unemployment is likely now more than 85 percent, giving Zimbabwe the highest unemployment rate in the world (*Reuters*, 2006, 9/6). The government's official inflation rate for June 2006 is 1184.6 percent, with the actual inflation rate probably above 2000 percent (*Zim Online*, 2006, 11/7). The Zimbabwean currency has also been in freefall, in 1998 the exchange rate was 24 Zimbabwean dollars to one U.S. dollar, but as of August, 2006 it was trading for 650,000 Zimbabwean dollars to one U.S. dollar.

Despite these economic indicators and their clear political precursors, Mbeki's position on the Zimbabwean crisis (that in turn underlies the "economic migrant" category) remains decisively reductionist. Instead of recognizing the central political crisis, Mbeki's (2003) narrative points blindly to sacrifices the "people" of Zimbabwe will need to make to counter the legacy of state subsidies: "To come out of this crisis, the people of Zimbabwe will have to make serious sacrifices and take a lot of pain. This has been demonstrated by the sharp increases in the prices of petroleum products and the resultant rises in transport costs, as the government has reduced the unaffordable fuel subsidy." If the need for economic adjustments comprises the heart of the crisis, how indeed could Zimbabwean migrants be anything else then "economic migrants"? To the extent that Mbeki acknowledges a political problem, it is not the tyranny of Mugabe, but simply the challenges of a "brokered transition" and of bringing the two sides (MDC and ZANU-PF) together. Again, despite all signs to the contrary,

Mbeki (2003) believes that “the leadership of the country is sensitive to this requirement, for all to act in unity to achieve the common good”.

However, the Mugabe regime shows no signs of implementing a coherent economic strategy to replace the collapsed ESAP program of the 1990s, let alone participating in productive negotiations with the opposition. While the regime has imposed price controls, regulatory bodies and exchange rate controls, these policies have been introduced in an *ad hoc* fashion and have been connected only rhetorically or nominally to a broader program of agricultural transformation and the land occupations (Raftopolous and Phimister, 2004: 371). Even the much touted “Look East” policy has not drawn significant assistance from China or elsewhere.⁴⁰ The absence of a coherent strategy to steer the country out of economic crisis and ongoing state repression, reveal a grasping and deeply compromised regime unwilling to cede power. Indeed, the form of domination exercised by the Mugabe regime is now almost entirely coercive.

While it might seem reductionist to locate the source of the crisis in Mugabe’s efforts to stay in power, the analysis here has also pointed to the security apparatus that surrounds and supports Mugabe. It remains uncertain as to how long the security apparatus will support Mugabe and block the necessary political resolution to the crisis. Given the deepening crisis, at some point these security forces may recognize that their best interest resides in a controlled transition that enables them to retain their privileges. Another force at play here are the personal motivations of Mugabe. The comments of former Information Minister (2000-2004) and now opposition politician Jonathan Moyo

⁴⁰ One exception in this regard is the recent 1.3 billion dollar (U.S.) agreement that may see China build thermal power stations in exchange for chrome (*News24*, 2006, 12/6).

on a recent radio broadcast (*SW Radio Africa*, 2006, 20/6) revealed the importance of security forces as well as the personal motivations of Mugabe:

He ultimately and always consistently listens to his security people. His economic advisors are his security people. His political advisors including who to appoint to cabinet, who to appoint to Central Committee or Politburo are his security people. He is a security president...He is very single minded and now he has had to discover only too late that the situation in Zimbabwe is almost irretrievable and I see that he is concerned about his legacy. I also see that there are influences on him; let us remember he has a young wife and a young family and he must be quite concerned about the future for that family. ...The possibility of President Mugabe facing all kinds of legal suits after office is something which play heavily and regularly on the minds of his advisors and so we are now dealing with a President who will simply not leave office without trying to win certain safeguards regarding possibilities of prosecution; whether within Zimbabwe or internationally.

Thus from the personal motivations of Mugabe, to the political elite and emboldened security forces, these are the central interests that have driven economic collapse within the Zimbabwe and are likely to shape its resolution. These interests are not the only dynamics behind the Zimbabwean crisis – which has deeper historical and international dimensions – but how these groups have sought to shore up their interests at all costs constitutes the immediate cause of ongoing economic collapse.

The vast majority of Zimbabweans have been left to cope with the fallout of the Zimbabwean crisis, many of whom have migrated to South Africa as a means of surviving. The crisis has forced people to migrate for “economic” and “political” reasons: examples of political motivations include victims of human rights abuses and intimidation, former Zimbabwean farm workers displaced by the chaotic land seizures and many of those whose livelihoods and homes were destroyed during *Murambatsvina*. Although it is difficult to gauge what proportion of this group migrates to South Africa (and within that number the proportion of those who work on farms of the far north)

overall these groups number over one million. But even laying aside the significant number directly motivated by “politics”, the argument of this chapter is that the economic collapse is the result of political crisis, thus indirectly imparting a political dimension even to professed “economic migrants”.

Postscript: Diverse Motivations

The general thrust of the comments made here is that the “economic migrant” category obscures more about actual motivations than it reveals. In fact, the separation between economic and political motivations is itself a moot point. The underlying issue at stake is contested notions of the Zimbabwean crisis and through these notions, the approach of South Africa to the millions of Zimbabwean migrants crossing its border. A meaningful discussion on the “motivations” of migrants must attend to all the complexities that matter to a given individual. Consider in this regard three “narratives” of Zimbabwean migrants, two of whom are farm workers in the far north.

The narratives of Tongai, Justice and Mavis⁴¹ give a sense of the diversity of motivations for migrants. The narratives also attest to the fact that most of the recent Zimbabwean migrants do not seek “permanent settlement” in South Africa. Rather migrants engage with the South African economy in strategic ways to supplement and make more meaningful livelihoods (Crush and Macdonald, 2002: 4). The general sentiment from talking with many migrants is that people would rather remain in Zimbabwe if livelihood opportunities existed there, or as one migrant put it, “when the situation is better” (interview with Zimbabwean farm worker, August 2005). Beginning with Tongai, his story highlights the impact of Murambatsvina and the desire to support

⁴¹ These are not the real names of informants.

his family. While not a farm worker, Tongai is someone I met walking along the road in the border area (Interviewed in August, 2005).

Tongai is 29 years old and was working until recently as a tailor in Mbare, an industrial district in Harare. Tongai came from a rural area called Chitambo but had been staying and working with his wife and child in Harare since 1999. At the time of Murambatsvina his home was destroyed in Harare and he was forced to rent a room for 1 million Zim Dollars a month, while his wife and child moved back to Chitambo. As he only earned 1.7 million as a tailor,⁴² he could in this context only barely cover his living expenses. With prices rising for rents, basic goods and bus fares, his salary soon became insufficient.

After a few months of fruitlessly trying to make ends meet, Tongai quit his job and moved back to Chitambo in August 2005 to prepare for migrating to South Africa. He made this decision because the areas around Chitambo were suffering from famine and he did not see a way to improve the situation. Tongai sold his family's goats and cattle, important family assets, in order to gather funds to make the journey to South Africa. He left with eight other men from his village and they planned to go to Pretoria where a relative offered to support them and help them get jobs as construction labourers. "I am going to Pretoria because I want to support my family. How else are they going to get food? I will stay in Pretoria for four months and soon after I will go back to Zimbabwe."

While Tongai's narrative highlights the desperation of many recent Zimbabwean migrants, one would not want to romanticize the reasons for Zimbabweans coming to South Africa. Not all migrants come to South Africa in positions as desperate as Tongai's and not all have noble intentions of supporting their extended families back in Zimbabwe. Take the example of a young migrant farm worker, Justice (interviewed in August 2005).

Justice is 25 years old and well educated, completing his studies until form 6. He came to South Africa for the first time in 2003 because he saw other returning migrants near his home in Masvingo and admired the commodities they brought with them, especially radios, high quality clothing, bicycles and cars. His desire to also have these commodities led him to go south of the Limpopo and to seek work at a certain commercial farm, Maswiri Boerdery, a farm he had been informed about by other returning migrants. He worked

⁴² By the time I met Tongai in August, 2005, roughly 70,000 Zimbabwean dollars was equal to one U.S. dollar.

there for three seasons as a fruit picker, each time returning to Zimbabwe after the picking season with small amounts of money, enabling him to buy a radio and nicer clothes.

Talking of his future plans, he confesses that he is disappointed with a life of working on farms, mainly due to the low wages and exploitative conditions. After this season in 2005, his ambition is not to return to Zimbabwe, but to go straight to Durban where he has an older brother and will pursue other employment. He speaks of a longer term goal of becoming more educated, becoming a lawyer. He will eventually return to Zimbabwe, but wants first to establish himself in South Africa.

Alternatively, consider the motivations of another farm worker, Mavis (interviewed in August, 2005). Her motivations highlight gendered forms of power that contribute to migration.

Mavis is 25 years old and comes from Mwenezi. She was married when she was 20 years old, but her husband proved to be abusive and of a cruel family with whom she stayed. She then secretly left them after one year. With no other perceived options, she came to South Africa hoping to find work. While in Beit Bridge she met some younger men who were seasonal workers at Alicedale commercial farm, and she travelled with them across the river and eventually to the farm. She has worked there now for three years, going back to Zimbabwe only during Christmas. While she has made a home at the farm compound and is relatively satisfied there, her ambition is to leave the farm next year and develop a business in cross border trading.

To conclude, categories such as “economic migrants” or “permanent settlement” fail to capture and obfuscate the actual motivations of migrants. While motivations are detailed and particular, there are common structural forces (“push and pull” factors) that shape the migration in general. This chapter has asserted that the Zimbabwean crisis “push factor” imparts an important political dimension to the current migration. Having clarified then the content of two major structural factors shaping migrant farm workers – the Zimbabwean crisis and restructuring of agriculture – the task of the next chapter is to probe the more localized relations enmeshing migrants on farms.

Chapter 3: Localized Hegemony on Two Commercial Farms

In January 2003, the Minister of Labour from South Africa, Membathisi Mdladlana, and his Zimbabwean counterpart, July Moyo, inspected farms in the far north of Limpopo province. The ministerial tour was in response to public pressure to stop exploitation and employment of “illegal” Zimbabweans on farms. Although the two ministers signed a new “memorandum of understanding”⁴³ following the inspections, to a large extent, the tour seemed scripted. For instance, the ministers avoided farms where exploitation was known to be widespread. When the ministers actually met with Zimbabwean farm workers, the workers were dressed in suits and seemed appointed by farm management. An organizer with Nkuzi Development Association, one of the groups that had pressured the government for inspections, noted at the time: “It was pure window dressing. Where have you seen a farm worker working in a suit and tie? You could see the clothes were new and bought to deceive the ministers. One was even looking very uncomfortable in a pair of new shoes” (*African Eye News*, 2003, 13/1). Nkuzi had also organized a picket involving unemployed South Africans that coincided with the ministerial tour. While the Nkuzi organizer described the picket as supporting both Zimbabwean and local labourers who suffer abuse, another demand was that South Africans should be considered first for jobs (*African Eye News*, 2003, 13/1).

This snapshot from 2003 revealed in two respects a fundamental “ambivalence” associated with Zimbabwean migrant farm workers. First, it demonstrated the ambiguity of civil society groups like Nkuzi towards migrant farm workers. While

⁴³ This MOU called for a “normalization” of the employment of Zimbabweans in Limpopo. It called for new measures to provide permits to Zimbabweans. As was discussed in Chapter One this MOU seems to have had little impact on stopping the employment of undocumented Zimbabweans.

Nkuzi's farm worker program is one of the few sources of support for Zimbabwean migrants in the far north, the NGO's "first order" concern is to advance the interests of South African farm workers. This condition places the NGO in a difficult if not contradictory position when extending assistance to Zimbabwean farm workers. Second, there is the ambivalent condition of Zimbabwean migrant farm workers themselves. Migrants are effectively caught between an intolerable crisis in Zimbabwe and conditions of super-exploitation on farms (not to mention the hazards of "border jumping" and clandestine migration). Nevertheless, many depend on farm employment for survival and, as such, have very little "leverage" in the power relations between them and the farmer. This being the case, more often than not, Zimbabweans accede to the farmer's demands, even if it means masquerading and making their working conditions seem better for inspectors or government ministers.

A perspective that relied wholly upon macro-structural explanations – including "push and pull" factors – is unable to come to terms with how this ambivalence plays out in localized settings. For example, a political economy approach might deny the question of ambivalence altogether and root its analysis solely in the class dynamics of super-exploitation (see, e.g., Marcus, 1989; Weiner, 1988). Such perspectives often lament the daunting challenge of organizing farm workers and impute in them a "false consciousness", while contrasting farm workers with more militant industrial workers.⁴⁴ Other meta-narratives, such as the neoliberal approach, with its all-encompassing logic

⁴⁴ For further elaboration on this tendency, see Andries du Toit (1993: 317) and Charles Mather (1993: 425).

of “market incentives”, present equal problems in conceptualizing the complexities surrounding farm workers (Rutherford, 2001: 8).⁴⁵

While understanding the broader political economy surrounding farm workers is crucial, it is equally important to attend to how Zimbabwean migrants cope with, accommodate and resist shifting configurations of power on particular commercial farms. This is especially necessary if one is to understand how these engagements can be best supported in their locally situated manifestations.

By referring to case studies of two commercial farms, this chapter explores the “micropolitics” of contestation and negotiation on farms as a way of supplementing the national-scale political economy deployed in Chapters One and Two. What is described as the “ambivalent” condition of Zimbabwean migrants can be thought of as constituted by these micropolitics – the irreducibly local engagements of farm workers with hegemonic power enmeshing them on farms (du Toit, 1993: 317). Rather than provide definitive answers or examine farm politics in all of its detail (the latter is impossible in the short space here), the approach to the two case studies is to “tease out” some of the main aspects of power enveloping migrant farm workers (du Toit, 1993: 319). In addition, discussion of how migrant farm workers can be supported will be examined by, in one case study, unpacking the “ambivalent” posture of Nkuzi and showing how its interventions can have a significant impact in helping migrants.

However, in attempting to analyze the forms of power that enmesh Zimbabwean migrants and examine how such power can be contested, it is important not to “fetishize resistance” by creating conceptually separate spaces of “power” and “resistance”. As

⁴⁵ Blair Rutherford (2001: 7–10) describes how liberal and political economy “dual-economy” discourses reinforce the marginalization of farm workers. According to these discourses, “farm workers will progress by becoming what they are not: urban workers or full-time peasants”.

Donald Moore (1998) points out, this problem of “separate spaces” characterizes the influential work of James C. Scott. The latter asserts a “hidden transcript” or formula through which cultural practices of subalterns become interpreted as “everyday acts of resistance.” As Moore (1998: 351) notes, “from this angle, resistance becomes the intentional thwarting of external forces from an imagined space of autonomy conceived as outside or beyond power.”

To demonstrate how resistance and power overlap, the analysis employs the Gramscian conception of hegemony and its application to the local context of commercial farms. Hegemony, it is to be recalled, does not simply refer to indoctrination or a finished and static ideological formation. Rather, it represents a contested political process governed by historically-contingent discursive articulations. These articulations are inherently unstable and must be constantly defended, reworked, renewed and rearticulated to obtain consent (Hart, 2002: 27-30). For example, in one case study examined here, a rearticulated paternalistic discourse is shown to shape power relations on farms even as the farm exudes “participatory management” practices and stable labour relations. Moreover, in the Gramscian conception of hegemony, acts of resistance do not stem from the space of “originary autonomy” or pure class conflict (Moore, 1998: 351). Instead, where contestation occurs it is bound up with “culturally constructed meanings, definitions and identities, and with the exercise of power, all part of the historical process” (Hart, 2002: 27). When farm workers challenge power relations, they do so on the terrain of “common sense” using material and symbolic resources given from the past (Hart, 2002: 29).

To illustrate the importance of attending to micropolitics and hegemony, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explains the different circumstances that shaped my fieldwork at the two farms. While these constraints were broadly discussed in the Introduction, it is necessary to discuss them here in more detail. The different constraints and opportunities I faced had direct bearing on the types of insights I have drawn from the case-studies.

The second section focuses on a strike that erupted at Maswiri Boerdery farm and the intervention of Nkuzi during the strike. By considering the culmination of grievances that contributed to the strike and the forms of resistance deployed by migrants, the case is shown to exemplify an unstable hegemonic formation. The pickers' grievances stemmed from specific paternalist practices and their convergence with more "material" contradictions in the production regime itself. Specifically, a key site of contestation within the production regime was the "regime of payment" – how fruit pickers (the section of the workforce that went on strike) were paid for the bags of oranges they picked under a piece rate system. The abrupt change by management from a punch-card system to a computer tag system is shown to be the fulcrum through which the strike emerged. The role of Nkuzi is also examined throughout to show that despite its ambivalent posturing towards migrants, it is capable of extending meaningful assistance to Zimbabweans. This provides a useful example for other South African organizations that face a similar inherent ambiguity.

The third section considers how the "investor" approach to farming at Alicedale farm brought participatory management practices and relatively good conditions for Zimbabwean farm workers. After comparing the generally better working and living

conditions at Alicedale with Maswiri, this section discusses some aspects of micropolitics on the farm. Specifically, the subtle contestation that surrounded how pickers were remunerated will be explored, echoing the importance of this issue to pickers at Maswiri. Second, the case explores the more extensive incorporation of Zimbabweans into middle management structures to examine its effects on worker solidarity.

In both case studies, the focus is upon “fruit pickers” because they represent a large number of workers (usually at least 50 percent of the workforce during the picking season) and are among the most marginalized. Fruit picking is also among the central processes at the point of production. Fruit must be picked at a very specific time to avoid going rotten, and the smooth functioning of other processes, such as packing and shipping, depends upon receiving fruit according to a well-structured schedule. This importance of pickers in the production chain, combined with the fact that they are usually among the lowest paid, makes them both marginal and potentially threatening in the eyes of the farmer. To understand how hegemonic formations operate, it makes sense to focus on more marginalized groups, who might otherwise be assumed to be lying outside the matrices of hegemonic power and subject to strict domination. The farms themselves were selected because of their deep and useful contrasts, facilitating the argument that one must go beyond sweeping structural explanations and attend to how power is modulated in particular sites.

A Tale of Two Farms: Maswiri and Alicedale

Maswiri Boerdery and Alicedale are very large commercial farms located in the citrus producing belt of Tshipise, each employing more than one thousand workers, the bulk of whom are Zimbabwean migrants. In the opinion of some farm workers and Nkuzi organizers, the two farms are the largest in the far north of Limpopo. Although separated from each other by less than twenty kilometres and of similar size, labour relations at the two farms are very dissimilar. Research at the two farms was carried out under very different circumstances, and thus the farms are considered separately and approached differently.

Before engaging with the case-studies, I will discuss some of the different circumstances that shaped my fieldwork at the two farms. To begin with Maswiri, throughout my engagement at this farm the management assumed I was an NGO worker affiliated with Nkuzi. This was because upon my first arrival at the farm, I helped an Nkuzi organizer represent workers in meetings with farm management in attempts to resolve a strike by Zimbabwean fruit pickers. This perception of me as an NGO worker was cemented further by the fact that over the ten-day period of the strike, I was coming and going to the farm with an Nkuzi organizer. Because of this perceived affiliation, when I attempted to interview management figures, an atmosphere of hostility prevailed. For example, they would give short, one word answers to my questions or simply complain about disloyal workers and the “injustice” of the strike itself. They also lamented the role of outsiders in the strike, including myself (in more subtle terms). This hostility was exemplified on one particular morning during the strike when, upon

our arrival at the farm, the farm gate was locked and management threatened to call police if we stayed on farm property. While these threats proved empty (as we entered the compound and nothing was done), the example concretized what was until then an implicit or verbal hostility.

This unproductive relationship with management led me to spend the bulk of my time with the striking pickers in the compound, where my perceived affiliation with Nkuzi seemed to have an opposite effect. On several occasions I was thanked by pickers for being their “advocate” (along with Nkuzi) and many were enthusiastic about sharing their experiences, often lining up to be interviewed and crowding around me in large groups.⁴⁶ The examination of Maswiri thus reflects disproportionately the views of pickers, with a limited management perspective.

Conversely, at Alicedale, my presence on the farm was sanctioned and regulated by the farmer. I arrived at the farm alone and identified myself strictly as a researcher from Canada, not revealing my connections with Nkuzi or previous involvement at the Maswiri strike.⁴⁷ The farmer welcomed my research project and allowed me to stay in his lodge normally reserved for hunters. I was given access to all areas of the farm, and even provided with a personal “guide” who accompanied me to the compound during the evenings and occasionally translated during interviews. While the farmer may have had his own motivations in granting me access to the farm – such as advertising through

⁴⁶ While this tendency of the pickers to crowd around me while I was conducting interviews reflected their enthusiasm, eventually I had to request that interviews be conducted one at a time. I did this because it was difficult at times to focus on an individual’s story while dozens of others watched and listened. Moreover, I was concerned that potentially controversial information might be withheld if others were witnessing the interview.

⁴⁷ While the farmer may have had no concerns about Nkuzi, I thought it more expedient not to mention my connections with the NGO. Nkuzi is disliked by many farmers because of its prominent role in organizing landless people for restitution claims and preventing evictions or other instances of “interference”.

my thesis the relatively good working conditions he provides for Zimbabweans – my research benefited from the detailed interviews I was permitted to conduct with both management and workers.

If I had any perceived affiliation in the eyes of farm workers, it was as an ally of the farmer or some kind of political agent connected to the MDC. The perceived affiliation with the farmer stem from whether out in the orange trees with pickers, in the packhouse or tomato fields, the farmer typically traveled with me to these areas and announced to large groups of workers that I was “going to ask some questions”. This sort of introduction seemed to link me symbolically to the farmer, as I noticed in interviews (especially in comparison to Maswiri) that some workers were guarded in their observations about the farm and hesitant to criticize the farmer. Although this hesitancy partly reflected genuine “approval” of the farm, workers with whom I developed closer relationships did discuss some problems on the farm. My alleged connection to the MDC seemed also to make some farm workers hesitant to share information, although this problem was only revealed to me by my “guide” several days after I had been on the farm (see the “Methodology section” in Introduction for further discussion on this point).

Thus, the research at Alicedale reflects the views of the farmer in a way that Maswiri does not. However, a potential problem with Alicedale is that because of the increased time I spent with the farmer, my impressions may be too sympathetic towards him and I may place undue emphasis on the stability of labour relations. I attempt to offset this potentiality by deploying Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and referring to my observations of micropolitics on the farm. Moreover, there is somewhat uneven

treatment to the two cases studies, as the Maswiri case receives more attention. This uneven treatment is for two reasons. First, I spent roughly ten days at Maswiri during the strike, as compared to the four days at Alicedale, leaving me with more information about Maswiri. Second, explaining the dynamics underlying the strike entails a very detailed discussion that is not required in the Alicedale case. Having made these clarifications for both case studies, let us turn to an examination of micropolitics at Maswiri.

Maswiri Boerdery - “The Only Thing *Legal* Here is the Oranges on the Trees!”

The quote above comes from Shirhami Shirinda, the Nkuzi organizer, with whom I worked closely over the course of the strike at Maswiri farm. This comment came while Shirinda addressed 460 Zimbabwean fruit pickers who were on their fourth straight day of a “wild-cat” strike. Although Shirinda made this point while describing to pickers their “rights” (limited as they were) as mostly undocumented migrants and how Nkuzi could help them, the phrase took on a double meaning. While it served as an explicit condemnation of various aspects of illegality at Maswiri (including paying below the minimum wage and other labour law violations), it also underscored Nkuzi’s own emphasis on citizenship distinctions and concerns over “illegals” employed on commercial farms.

By detailing the role of Nkuzi and the strategies of pickers during a ten-day strike at Maswiri, this section will unpack the ambiguous role of Nkuzi and reveal some aspects of hegemonic power that enmeshed Zimbabwean farm workers at Maswiri. The analysis first sketches a background of how Zimbabweans came to be employed at this

farm for two reasons: first, it is important to situate the strike within the original incorporation of Zimbabweans on the farm, as the terms of this incorporation shaped the form of labour relations that emerged. Second, consideration of this incorporation enables a parallel discussion of Nkuzi's first intervention at the farm. This earlier intervention demonstrates that Nkuzi's "first order" interest is to uphold the "rights" of South Africans, while its later role during the Maswiri strike shows how Nkuzi can support the struggles of migrants despite its primary constituency of South African farm workers. After the historical discussion regarding Maswiri, there is a detailed analysis of micropolitics surrounding the strike itself. Specifically, I will look at the grievances of the workers, their strategies of resistance and Nkuzi's attempts to facilitate the resistance, all of which reveal a very tenuous hegemonic formation at Maswiri.

The Maswiri Boerdery company owns many farms, most of which are located in Tshipise in the far north of Limpopo. The farm of concern here is called "Hayoma". The company harvests and packs citrus products, predominately oranges, which come in several different varieties. Zimbabwean migrants came to be employed at the Hayoma farm during 1998, after the previous South African labour force of four hundred or so workers – the vast majority of whom were Venda labour tenants – had been dismissed following strike actions which had allegedly not followed proper procedures (Lahiff, 1998: 39). The South Africans had joined a union (the Trade Union of South African Authorities, or TUSAA) and went on strike to obtain higher wages, which at the time were between R 150-180⁴⁸ per month (Lahiff, 1998: 37). The union challenged the legality of the dismissal, but, to the disappointment of its members, the union settled out

⁴⁸ Although sectoral minimum wages for farm workers had not yet been introduced in South Africa, in discussions with Nkuzi workers who were involved at this farm in 1998, this wage was much lower than neighbouring farms. It was equivalent at the time to about 20 or 30 U.S. dollars.

of court with the employer and the dismissed workers were forced to reapply for their jobs. A clause within the settlement also stated that workers who did not regain employment would be compelled to leave the farm property, despite the fact that most families had lived there for many generations. Very few workers were able to regain their jobs and as a result most were given eviction notices.

At this time, Nkuzi became involved, and was able to prevent the eviction by demonstrating that the union's legal settlement could not affect the land rights of residents under the provisions of Extension of Security of Tenure Act (ESTA) (Lahiff, 1998: 38).⁴⁹ While the eviction was prevented, the employer was able to obtain a court interdict restricting the movement of residents. For several months residents were harassed and arrested by farm security and the police, for offences such as "collecting firewood, using the bush for their toilet needs, and walking on farm roads" (Lahiff, 1998: 40). Nkuzi was also able to overturn the interdict, demonstrating it also to be a violation of ESTA.

While the South Africans were able to keep their homes on the farm land, Nkuzi could not force the employer to give them their jobs back. Instead, at least five hundred Zimbabwean migrants were recruited and brought down to the farm in large trucks to replace the dismissed workers (Interview with farm worker, June, 2005). The Zimbabweans were housed initially in the barn where cattle feed was stored (Lahiff, 1998: 38).

Some elaboration here on Nkuzi's "ambivalence" towards Zimbabwean migrants is necessary, as this ambiguity is related to evictions of South African farm workers.

⁴⁹ This use of ESTA to prevent the evictions demonstrates that post-apartheid farm worker/dweller legislation can be effective when it is enforced. Of course, the problem with laws like ESTA or minimum wage laws is that they lack enforcement by the state (Hall, 2004a).

Indeed, the Nkuzi intervention in 1998 was only one example of many where it tried to prevent evictions after Zimbabweans were brought in as replacements (interview with Nkuzi fieldworker, June, 2005). It might therefore be unsurprising that Nkuzi maintains something of an ambiguous official stance towards Zimbabwean migrants. While Nkuzi argues that all farm workers (including migrants) should receive minimum wages and other legal protections, it has also argued that South Africans should receive first consideration for jobs in commercial agriculture (*African Eye News Service*, 2001, 13/01). Although Nkuzi is not known to advocate deportations of undocumented migrants, it nevertheless did not speak out against deportations, specifically, the mass deportations that were threatened in 2001. As Rutherford has argued (2006), this ambiguity towards deportations can be located in Nkuzi's deeper "appeal to the state" that underlies its interventions. In other words, by prioritizing the "rights" of South Africans in its activism and appealing to the state to defend those rights, Nkuzi can easily support a position of deporting undocumented migrants. However, Nkuzi has thus far not called for deportations. In fact, Nkuzi is one of few organizations that extends meaningful support⁵⁰ to Zimbabwean farm workers in the far north, as its role during the 2005 strike demonstrated.

To understand Nkuzi's intervention in 2005 as well as the basis of the strike itself, it is necessary to discuss the differences between 2005 and 1998 (when Zimbabweans were first employed) and, in so doing, trace the origins of the strike. During the initial years of the Zimbabweans' employment on the farm, it appears that working conditions

⁵⁰ The support Nkuzi extends is more "meaningful" than other organizations because its fieldworkers actually go out to the relatively isolated farms. From my research, it seems clear that other organizations in the north of Limpopo, such as the IOM, the Legal Support Centre and even the Department of Labour tend to stay in the towns of Musina and Makhado (formerly Louis Trichart).

at Maswiri and relations with management were better than in 2005 at the time of the strike. Some of the reasons mentioned to me by pickers included the relatively higher rates of pay because the bag used to collect fruit was smaller, so that it could be filled more quickly and allowed workers to earn more money. By the 2000 picking season, Zimbabweans no longer had to stay in the barn, as a compound was built with small hostel units. Although there was some hostility at first from evicted South Africans, after the first few years these tensions dissipated (Interview with farm worker, June, 2005).

Another contributing factor to stability was that the relationship with foremen (who were mixed between Zimbabweans and South African Venda) was more cordial until the 2002 season. During the picking season of 2002, the farmer hired a certain Venda foreman named “Mahondo”. I was told that this foreman was especially harsh on pickers. He often punished pickers for not filling their bags of oranges to the required weight, forcing them to fill bags without pay and even beating them. As one of the Zimbabwean management workers put it during the strike: “I am not like that guy Mahondo, who just demands of his workers. He does not explain why people are punished, he just punishes them. If someone makes a mistake, ah! Mahondo- he is the reason for the strike.”

However, according to many other pickers, the reasons for the strike went beyond just the actions of Mahondo (which, after all, stem from 2002). The most important factor that led to the strike in 2005 was changing methods of recording and accounting that governed the piece rate payment mechanism. Before 2005, pickers were paid according to a “punch card system” whereby each picker carried an individual card that

was hole-punched for each bag of oranges dumped in the trailer. The person responsible for hole-punching was a foreman who supervised the operation. The picker would submit their card at the end of the day to the foreman, and receive payment once a month for the number of bags accounted for on the cards.

The punch-card system was preferred by pickers over the technologically-intensive “computer-tag system” implemented in 2005. This latter system required pickers to carry a small electronic tag and, after dumping a bag of oranges in the trailer, to press the tag against a scanner attached to the trailer, which was supposed to record electronically the picker’s bag count. When I spoke with pickers who had worked on the farm before the 2005 season (returnees), they compared the punch card with the computer system.⁵¹ The comments of Edward, a picker who was among the first Zimbabweans brought in 1998, are instructive:

Q: Can you describe how the strike started?

E: It was because of the computer system... when we were told the results (the number of bags picked), and we said no, the computer system is wrong. You could find that someone who was picking more bags than me was having less bags recorded beside his name. So because of this situation, we started to quarrel.

Q: Why has it taken until 2005 to have this strong strike?

E: There was the matter of money, it was better before. Even though it was the bag system (piece-work system), we were able to earn more and be satisfied about the results. The system before the computer allowed us to see what we had done, to check our counts with the boss.

⁵¹ Although I was unable to interview all the pickers, I was told by some pickers that roughly half were “returnees”, that is, they had worked previous seasons on the farm. Moreover, most of the pickers seemed to be “seasonal” labourers. They came to the farms during April until September, with most returning to Zimbabwe for the planting season from October to March. A minority stayed on the farm to perform jobs like fertilizing or clearing brush. Others stayed in South Africa and sought employment further south.

Other pickers I spoke with felt the technology was faulty; sometimes the scanner and tag did not function properly and consequently bags dumped in the trailer would go unrecorded. Conversely, the punch-card system was seen as more transparent and pickers could monitor their own counts and compare them with management. When the computer-tag system was imposed, the sense of transparency and oversight that pickers felt they had under the punch card system was denied.

I was unable to discuss in detail with the farm manager⁵² why the farm changed to the computer system. However, he did mention problems with pickers and foremen cheating on the counts derived through the punch card. In his own words, he said the computer system was meant to reduce “human error” and “to get full value from lazy workers”. He also expressed a hesitancy to switch back to the punch card, as he had claimed to have invested “several thousand rand” for its installation.

As is explained further below, the conditions that led pickers at Maswiri to strike in the summer of 2005 were a culmination of grievances. But, at the center lay the issue of wages and, through it, the question of how payment was conferred. The importance of regimes of payment and how this grievance was bound up with hegemonic power on the farm, can be revealed through a more detailed analysis of the strike itself. At the same time, this discussion of the strike allows one to flesh out the role played by Nkuzi.

The strike began somewhat spontaneously in June 2005 over a dispute regarding payment of wages. When the pickers received their monthly pay, many of them had been paid for less bags than they had actually filled. While I was unable to assess the full extent of discrepancies caused by the computer, many pickers described a feeling of

⁵² At Maswiri, a white “manager” was the authoritative figure on the farm. The actual owner of Maswiri (the “farmer”) did not play a direct role in farm operations. In contrast, at Alicedale “the farmer” (meaning here the main “owner”) was directly involved.

disbelief when they received their pay slips. As one picker noted: “We refused the computers because we felt cheated”. Moreover, pickers were only being paid 28 cents per bag of oranges picked. Under this system most earned less than R 300⁵³ a month. The strike seemed to arise from a combination of feeling cheated and the existing low pay scale.

In the days after the disputed payment, pickers discussed plans for having a strike. One morning thereafter, the pickers went out to the field but refused the directives of their foremen to start work, demanding a meeting with the manager regarding their payment. Edward described the onset of the strike:

The computer system could not tell us what we have done. We went to the foremen, asking ‘why is this so?’ Those foremen called the manager, and he came to us. When he arrived, he did not ask what our problem was. He only said those who want to work stand on this side, and those who have a problem stand on the other side. So he was trying to divide us. But people did not move, they just stood there. Then the manager left, and the foremen tried to form people into their team groups. But people did not cooperate. Some people tried to follow the foremen’s instructions but stones were thrown at them and the foremen, and the foremen just ran away.

The bulk of the pickers then marched down the main road towards the compound in a demonstration.

At this time, the field worker from Nkuzi, Shirhami Shirinda, and I came upon the workers. It was a random encounter in the sense that we were in the area responding to another issue at another farm in Tshipise. But after discussing with the workers the nature of the problem, Shirinda went and met with the manager of Maswiri farms and the latter agreed to negotiate and attempt to resolve the dispute the following day. It was not clear exactly why the farmer agreed to allow Nkuzi to mediate. However,

⁵³ At the time, this was less than U.S. 50 dollars a month. This wage was also less than half of the legal monthly minimum wage.

based on the relations I observed between the white manager and Zimbabwean workers, I had a sense that the white manager simply did not know how to resolve the strike in an orderly way. Although the manager spoke both chiVenda and chiShona, it was simply not part of the dominant political and discursive practices at Maswiri for white supervisors to sit down and talk on (even nominally) equal terms with black workers about problems. His willingness to accept Nkuzi's involvement likely showed that he wanted to resolve the strike quickly and, if possible, avoid the hassle of firing 460 workers (which would itself be a difficult process now that Nkuzi oversight was involved).

When we arrived to Maswiri the next morning, the 460 (all male) pickers were grouped around the office, awaiting our arrival. The pickers represented roughly half of the total work force. The pickers informed us of their collective grievances, with an understanding that afterwards we would take the grievances to management on their behalf. Perhaps out of fear of retribution from the farmer or of creating divisions, the pickers were hesitant to form any kind of "committee" or elect representatives and thus consented to our facilitative role. The pickers huddled around us and began to shout out, one at a time, problems they had with wages, working conditions, living conditions and the manager himself.

Among the litany of grievances listed by the pickers that morning were the confusion and mistrust of the computer system, dangerous working conditions and poor accommodation at the compound (where most slept in groups of eight or ten in small rooms). The pickers also demanded actual work permits so that they could cross the border legally, as the vast majority of pickers were "undocumented". Most were only

issued I.D. cards made by the farmer for which workers paid R 12. But these cards were not recognized by police or other authorities outside of Tshipise. Moreover, the pickers also demanded that all forms of “punishment” be halted, including cases where workers were penalized for not cutting fruit properly from the tree, and being forced to fill bags for free. When pickers were hired at the farm, they had to sign contracts that bound them to the “punishment system”. Under this system, if a picker was caught not filling bags to full capacity, or cutting fruit improperly from the tree, they would be compelled to fill bags of oranges without being paid. The system was organized so that the first infraction meant one unpaid bag, the second meant three unpaid bags, and the third meant five unpaid bags. They also complained of abusive behaviour by foremen and management. For example, in one instance, the white manager called a picker a “baboon.”⁵⁴ The pickers also demanded transport to the fields where they picked oranges. They claimed that they walked five kilometers to get to and from the field. Lastly, workers wanted an extra day off at the end of the month when many pickers return to Zimbabwe. It was felt that the time allotted was too short and they were often fined for returning late.

With each shouted out grievance, the pickers made noises of agreement, conferring to Shirinda and I their unity. However, some of the underlying politics came up when pickers mentioned the problem of wages. It was pointed out by several speakers that this was the issue of most concern, that at 28 cents per bag the wages were very low. But the pickers had contrasting views about what an acceptable per bag rate would be: one shouted out “32 cents”, others “40 cents” and another “36 cents”. After much

⁵⁴ This kind of abuse and racist remarks are relatively frequent throughout farms of the far north. In one famous case, a white farmer shot and killed a Zimbabwean farm worker whom he claimed to have mistaken for a baboon (*Mk Magazine*, 2004, 5/7).

yelling among the pickers (most of it in chiShona), they were unable to come to a consensus, except that 28 cents was too low. Clearly, divisions existed as to what constituted an acceptable rate of pay.

Nevertheless, Shirinda and I noted all the grievances of the workers and then took them to the manager in order to help resolve the strike. The manager negotiating for Maswiri rejected most of these demands when they were brought to him, claiming aloofness at some of them. These reactions were typical: “What do you mean the toilets are bad? I set those up two years ago” (he had not gone near the toilet area since then), or “If someone is injured, why doesn’t he come tell us? We will give him twenty rand to take a taxi to the hospital.”⁵⁵ While he admitted that he should have listened when the pickers first brought their concerns to him, he expressed frustration – even a feeling of being betrayed – at the pickers’ “lack of cooperation” and their decision to strike. He complained that overseas fruit orders were now threatened with disruption, and that the two days of work stoppage had cost the farm R 100,000. In the end, his only concession (after conferring by phone with the owner of the farm) was to raise the rate per bag to 32 cents, claiming that the farm could not be profitable if it was higher.

When we brought back to pickers the offer of 32 cents, the pickers rejected it. During the time we had met with management, the pickers had apparently come to their own resolution: they collectively now made a minimum demand of 40 cents per bag. The manager came to address the crowd of pickers, explaining that 32 cents was all the farm could afford. But the pickers rejected him and began dancing and singing as he walked away. For the pickers, this was a kind of moral victory and a taste of elusive

⁵⁵ The Manager’s claim that he paid for injured workers’ trips to the hospital was contradicted by pickers. One picker I interviewed said “If you are hurt, the boss will not take care of you. You are sent back to the compound, and someone comes to replace you”.

justice, almost making up for past abuses. The yell of one picker in response to the farmer's intransigence seemed to capture the moment: "Better to suffer in Zimbabwe than be exploited here!" Shirinda, however, followed the manager and asked for a few more days to resolve the strike, to which the manager agreed.

As it happened, negotiations continued for another four days until another offer came from management in the form of an "ultimatum". During those four days of negotiations, the pickers had altered their demands and Shirinda succeeded in getting the Department of Labour involved. Although Shirinda had contacted the Department on the first day of the strike, the Department did nothing until the third day, when a representative traveled out to the farm. The only reason the Department went to Maswiri was because Shirinda harassed labour officials in their office in Makhado on two occasions about their lack of attention to the strike. Nevertheless, the Department's intervention was important because it informed both the pickers of official wage stipulations and made it clear to Maswiri that their methods of paying piece-rate were "illegal."⁵⁶

After being informed of the minimum wage stipulations, the picker's changed their demand from 40 cents per bag to the full monthly minimum wage of R 785 and working more than 27 hours a week.⁵⁷ The "ultimatum" from Maswiri arose from the intervention of Department of Labour and the demand of pickers. Maswiri offered to pay the minimum hourly wage of R 4.03 per hour (working 27 hours per week), but demanded that workers produce a minimum of 13 bags per hour as a standard of

⁵⁶ The Department of Labour did not, however, take any actions regarding the problem of "undocumented" labour, as they claimed this was a matter for Home Affairs.

⁵⁷ At the time in June 2005, the sectoral wage determination for farm workers was either an hourly wage of R 4.03 that applied if working less than 27 hours per week, or a monthly minimum wage of R 785 for working more than 27 hours per week.

production. Maswiri also stipulated that workers who produce more than 13 bags per hour (or 65 per day), would receive 28 cents per bag on top of the minimum wage. This offer was a significant concession from Maswiri as it represented compliance (albeit still partial) with minimum wage laws. The introduction of an hourly wage was a major shift from the “bag system” but still retained aspects of it in the form of a “standard of production”

The pickers, however, still rejected this proposal. They demanded nothing less than the full monthly minimum wage of R 785 and more than 27 hours work a week. These demands were rejected by management and the workers then resigned *en masse*. It took a few more days for management to compile the last payments⁵⁸ for the workers, a process that Shirinda and the author supervised until the end (for the pickers distrusted management and requested that Shirinda monitor the last payment). On the last day after receiving their pay, most of the 460 pickers got into pick-up trucks (owned by a third party, likely from Musina) parked outside the compound and headed back to Zimbabwe. I wrote the following reflection at the time:

As the workers received their meager wages and prepared to leave, I could not help but feel that the scene was anti-climatic. They got their money, climbed into pick-up trucks, and then sped off as a group towards the Musina border and ultimately Zimbabwe. Where was the closing rally? Where were the cries of solidarity and forging of a future movement? This was the real life of people on the margins, the life of men who had families waiting for them in Zimbabwe. They had tangible concerns and empty stomachs waiting for them, but they had taken the noble decision to resign from an exploitative though paying job. What made them take this decision? Their future was uncertain and full of adversity, but for now they were going home.

Even though some of the pickers likely wanted to accept the “ultimatum” from the farmer, the pickers as a group remained unwavering in their demand for the monthly

⁵⁸ These last payments covered the pay-period before the strike and, if the workers returned their I.D. cards, they received R 12 back. Many pickers did not want to return this card, however, because they wanted to continue to use it in their travels.

minimum. Clearly, pressure from other migrants to “stay united” involved avoiding retribution or exclusion for breaking ranks. One picker revealed to me these internal politics: “Some individuals are afraid. They are just following the others, and fear what may happen. But they are not a good (sizable) number”.

Notwithstanding the marginalization of these (relatively few) voices that might have accepted the offer, the strike represented a hegemonic crisis on the farm. While the causes of this crisis were rooted in the sedimented grievances of pickers going back to 1998 and the overall low rates of pay, the real spark of the crisis was the disagreement caused over the switch from the punch-card to the computer system.

Why was it that regimes of payment for pickers were so central to hegemonic power on the farm? To answer this question one must consider the dominant discourses at work on the farm. Maswiri was characterized by an uneasy co-existence between a neo-liberal discourse and vestiges of a racial paternalism. Under neoliberal discourses, Maswiri justified its piece-work arrangements and adoption of the computer-tag system in market-defined terms as “getting the most out of lazy workers” and maximizing profit. But management also mobilized paternalistic discourses to govern the enforcement of these mechanisms. Thus, the “punishment system” and the expectation by the manager that workers would simply obey his will reflected paternalism. Note in this regard the exasperation of the manager at “the lack of cooperation” by pickers after the strike began.

But paternalism is a double-edged sword. As du Toit (1993: 320) argues, racial paternalism constructs the farm as a “family”, with the white farmer as father and black workers as children. While these arrangements clearly enforce the authority of the

farmer, they also entail mutual obligations. Although the farmer expects deference and loyalty, workers can make certain claims. Importantly, these claims are not understood as unalienable “rights”, but they constitute provisional claims over areas that are of most importance to workers (du Toit, 1993: 322). For pickers at Maswiri, the limited control over the production process through the punch-card system was one such claim.

While this “claim” by pickers reflected specific dynamics at Maswiri, it may also speak to more a more general tendency regarding social relations on farms. Charles Mather (1993) details similar causes underlying a strike by female vegetable pickers in the then Transvaal Lowveld (now part of Mpumulanga province). In this strike, Mather identifies the catalyzing moment as the farmer’s introduction of piece rate system to replace a prior arrangement based on a daily flat rate. Mather (1993: 433) notes: “The daily rate system must have allowed a certain amount of control over the pace of work in the fields...a limited control of work had always been an aspect of working in the fields, and must have become an accepted and everyday part of life on the farm. It was a system that was legitimate.”

This “limited control over production” implied by the different regimes of payment (whether a daily flat rate or the punch card system) suggests “regimes of payment” are crucial because they often straddle both paternalistic and class dimensions of power on farms. In this light, it becomes clear why at Maswiri the imposition of the computer-tag system led the (already unstable) hegemonic formation to break down.

Furthermore, the strategies of resistance adopted by pickers belie any notion of “separate spaces” for power and resistance. Specifically, the tactic of resigning *en masse* drew upon the culturally symbolic practice of “desertion” and connected with an

historical process of hegemonic struggle. As Murray (1997: 92) notes, desertion has been a dominant feature since the early 1900s throughout the farming areas of Transvaal where migrant labour has been employed. Desertion served a cultural purpose because, through it, farm workers realized a kind of symbolic retribution against the farm. As one Zimbabwean farm worker mentioned to me after he resigned, “I am concerned about the future, but at least they (the farm) are left without pickers”.

This mass desertion and gains achieved by the strike were facilitated by Nkuzi. Before discussing the next case study, some analysis of Nkuzi’s role is necessary. The strike did bring some “positive” changes on the farm. In talking with pickers in August 2005, as a result of the strike Maswiri implemented the “ultimatum” it had made to the pickers, bringing the former piece-work system partially into line with legal requirements. Two months after the strike, I was told that Maswiri now paid the minimum hourly rate of R 4.03 but kept the 13 bag “standard of production”. In addition, labour time was reorganized so that pickers could be nominally listed as working 27 hours per week. However, the pickers I spoke to said that their weekly hours still went beyond 27, although the hours were less overall compared to the time before these changes. While Maswiri could have continued to enforce the piece-rate system, it seems management wanted to avoid strikes in the future and also feared enforcement of the laws by the Department of Labour.

Were it not for the Nkuzi intervention (that led to the Department of Labour’s involvement), the manager could have called the police or army and deported the pickers without paying them (several pickers told me this practice had occurred before on other farms). While the pickers started the strike, Shirinda was instrumental in

sustaining it and forcing the farmer to negotiate.⁵⁹ Another important tactic deployed by Nkuzi was bringing media attention to the strike. On the first day of the strike Shirinda notified SABC, newspapers and other local broadcasters who all covered the strike (see *African Eye News*, 2005, 27/6). This enabled the strike to reverberate throughout the region, enabling other farms (and throughout the country) to hear about the strike. From talking with other pickers at another farm in the far north two months later, they spoke about the “Maswiri strike” with a tone of notoriety, as though the strike achieved a heralded status among Zimbabwean farm workers. Thus, despite the fact that Nkuzi promotes the interests of South African farm workers as a “first order” concern, their intervention at Maswiri shows how Nkuzi can navigate the underlying ambiguity and support Zimbabwean migrants.

Yet, the Nkuzi intervention became problematic when Shirinda (and myself) reinforced the tactics of some pickers that silenced and corralled “doubters” (for example, those who would have accepted the “ultimatum”) into line. In meetings with the pickers and in negotiations with the employer on behalf of the pickers, Shirinda and I received and presented demands as a unitary will of “the pickers”, and thus promoted a false unity under which some voices were silenced or marginalized.

Ironically, those voices that were marginalized may have been more prudent than the clamour of the majority. The manager had little trouble in quickly replacing the resigned 460 pickers and, two weeks after resigning, many pickers returned to the farm and asked for their jobs back. According to discussions I had with pickers and other workers at Maswiri two months after the strike (August, 2005), roughly 25 percent of

⁵⁹ As was noted above, the farmer did want to keep the pickers and avoid the “hassle” of deporting them. But this only became a “hassle” when the oversight of Nkuzi was brought to bear on the equation.

the 460 pickers were accepted back at Maswiri farm. As for the other 75 percent of former pickers, some were turned away by the manager whom he identified as “troublemakers”, some found jobs on other farms, others “took their chances” by moving further south, but the majority were left unemployed. Since most pickers I spoke to worked at the farm in order to support people back in Zimbabwe, this meant that livelihoods of not only many former pickers, but also their dependants, came under increased strain.

However one evaluates the strike, the value of the Maswiri case study is that it showed how “regimes of payment” can often be important components of hegemonic power on farms. The importance of this aspect of the production regime was also confirmed a few kilometers down the road at Alicedale, albeit under very different conditions.

Alicedale: The Winning Recipe?

Alicedale farm exemplified the “investor approach” to farming. Here capital-intensive production coexisted with a developmental emphasis on the workforce. A “citrus academy” and skills development program, secondary and primary schools, an adult literacy program and participatory management practices helped establish what the farmer called an “equilibrium” and “winning recipe” on the farm. But, on closer examination, one could see some uncomfortable ambiguities on this farm, not the least of which was a continuation of paternalistic authority.

This section will not only illustrate some dimensions of Alicedale’s stable hegemonic formation, but will also demonstrate how a rearticulated paternalism has

created deepening divisions among the work force. To do so, the section first gives an overview of Alicedale farm, noting how Zimbabweans were incorporated and the general conditions on the farm when fieldwork was conducted.⁶⁰ The section then considers certain aspects of micropolitics on the farm, specifically, the engagement of fruit pickers with the regime of payment. A subsequent discussion of the contradictions generated by the combined “investor approach” and rearticulated paternalism explains how divisions have deepened.

Alicedale farm is one of the largest farms in the far north and, like Maswiri, focuses on the production of oranges. It employs more than 1,000 workers during the harvest season, the vast majority of whom are Zimbabwean chiShona speakers, with only a minority presence of South African chiVenda speakers. From interviews, I was able to garner that Alicedale was acquired by its current owner in the early 1980s. Originally, the labour force was predominantly South African Venda, but they were gradually phased out during the mid 1990s as more Zimbabwean labour became available. It is not clear how the previous work force was phased out or how many people were affected. Unlike Maswiri, it seemed not to involve evicting people or dismissing large amounts of people at one time, but occurred gradually over the course of the 1990s. One of the managers said that Zimbabweans became employed because they are “better workers” than the South African Vendas. Moreover, the farmer explained to me that expanding operations on the farm during the 1990s required more labour than the nearby Venda settlements could provide.

⁶⁰ Unfortunately, historical information on Alicedale farms is not available or as accessible as information on Maswiri. But I was able to piece together a general background of the farm from interviews.

Visiting this farm almost two months after the strike at Maswiri, I found that some of the pickers who resigned from Maswiri had got jobs as pickers at Alicedale. One of them noted that “there is a big difference here from Maswiri. Money is better and the conditions are better: we are provided with overalls here, the ladders we use are stronger and the orange trees smaller... the work is safer. The compound is better, water is plenty.”

Furthermore, livelihood strategies among pickers at Alicedale were basically similar to that of Maswiri, in that most pickers were seasonal workers who returned to Zimbabwe during the planting season. However, at Alicedale, there was relatively less turnover among pickers and more prevalence of returnees from successive seasons, suggesting more regularized migratory practices than at Maswiri (Interview with farm workers, August, 2005). From talking with a wide range of informants, over 90 percent of Zimbabweans at Alicedale had corporate work permits, and were thus “legally employed”. Of course, most migrants arrived at the farm by jumping the border and worked without documentation for up to two months while their permits were processed.⁶¹ Those without permits tended to be pickers who arrived late in the picking season, leaving too short of a time before the end of their contract for the farmer to process the documentation.

As with Maswiri, most pickers were supporting dependants back in Zimbabwe. But, unlike Maswiri, their engagement with power relations and management was one of accommodation and not open resistance. This can be illustrated by detailing how pickers engaged with the production regime at Alicedale.

⁶¹ From what the farmer said, it could take up to two months to process the corporate work permits.

The production regime at Alicedale was similar to Maswiri in that it was also based on a piece rate system for paying the pickers. However, at Alicedale, the piece rate was much higher at 40 cents per bag and the punch-card system remained in effect. In stark contrast to Maswiri, the pickers at Alicedale endorsed the production regime and were able to exercise “limited control” over it without resorting to strikes. For instance, the punch card system not only afforded a sense of transparency and broader sense of control over the regime enmeshing them, but also enabled pickers to increase their bag counts illicitly. After dumping the bag of oranges in the trailer and having their card punched by the foreman, sometimes pickers would feign returning to the trees only to come back to the line where pickers waited for their card to be punched. In this way, pickers could be credited for two or three bags after dumping only one bag in the trailer. While often a picker would be caught and prevented from doing this by a foreman, it seemed foremen would rarely report such activity to the manager and thus it would go unpunished. Another example was corruptible foremen who would hole-punch a picker’s card in exchange for tobacco, debt or other favours.

The farm management was aware that such transgressions under the punch-card system occurred. But these instances did not occur at such a high rate that management felt compelled to implement the computer system as at Maswiri. The farmer explained it in these terms: “Look, we’ve had problems with this in the past. He (the foreman) might punch the ticket twice for trading tobacco or, if he doesn’t like the picker, he might not punch it all...It’s fine for the stronger to take from the weaker, but we have to do what’s right for the farm. It’s quite an investment to put in a computer system.” Whatever the motivations of management, the pickers at Alicedale seemed to exercise a

certain self-restraint over the extent to which “cheating” occurred. Foremen seemed to permit only a limited scope for illicit activity and, beyond that, enforced the strictures of management.

Indeed, the role of foremen and their relation to the pickers at Alicedale was significantly different than at Maswiri. The foremen represented legitimate channels in the eyes of pickers through which disputes could be resolved, unlike at Maswiri where foremen were perceived as *de facto* representatives of management. There was no “Mahondo” at Alicedale. If Maswiri’s strategy with foreman emphasized the disciplinary role of foremen – meant to serve in the first sense as the “eyes of the farmer” as one picker at Maswiri put it – at Alicedale, the practice emphasized the mediating role of foremen.⁶² When I asked my “guide” (who was familiar with all the people on the farm, having worked at Alicedale for 8 years) what pickers do if they have a problem, he said “they will take the issue to the foremen, who will address the matter with the baas. If it is serious, they can call the police”. Interestingly, he had never heard of Nkuzi and claimed all farm workers’ problems at Alicedale could be resolved within the farm. In contrast to Maswiri, where at least half of the foremen were South African Venda, at Alicedale all the foremen were Zimbabwean. This seemed to reflect a conscious strategy by the farmer to facilitate smooth relations between levels of the farm’s hierarchy. Indeed, the role of foremen in mediating disputes mirrored a wider use of farm workers in middle-management structures.

⁶² This point about foremen at Alicedale mirrors Rutherford’s (2001: 100) general point that foremen in Zimbabwe play a mediating role between white farmers and farm workers in the relations of what he called “domestic government”, or the dominant paternalistic power relations between management and workers.

But this attempt to foster “equilibrium” on the farm through expanded middle management structures was complicated by paternalistic dimensions of power on the farm. Similar to the discursive formation at Maswiri, a neoliberal discourse coexisted with racial paternalism. However, at Alicedale, neoliberalism was tempered by a developmental slant – leading to what is termed here the “investor approach” to farming.

It is useful to review the origins of the “investor approach” so that its relationship with paternalism can be well situated. The immediate roots of the investor approach are traced to the early 1980s when a “farm management movement” arose in response to the crisis in agriculture and wider crisis of the apartheid state. One organization that was formed in response to the crisis was the Rural Foundation, founded in 1982, and tasked with extending “community development” to the farms. Along with the Rural Foundation, several organizations tried to popularize participatory concepts of management and argued for improvements in working and living conditions (du Toit, 1993: 317). The movement brought increasing emphasis on worker productivity, training, motivation and participation. As du Toit (1993: 320; emphasis in original) noted: “Above all, it led to an emphasis on farm *management*, the idea that what farmers must do is not to *farm* but to *manage*...The procedures by which judgement operates, the criteria by which it happens, the consequences with which it is invested – all became objects of intensified concern. Management goes hand in hand with bureaucracy.”

However, as was evident at Alicedale (discussed below), du Toit (1993: 325) argues that this turn towards management did not represent a clean break with previous

traditional paternalism. While the management movement challenged some fundamental strictures of traditional paternalism, it led to a rearticulation of paternalistic relations, although the process had a different impact on different farms. At Alicedale, the select devolution of responsibilities and promotion of some farm workers into middle management positions remained tied to paternalistic authority – du Toit (1993: 328) explained how this can happen: “the fact that workers draw their authority from the farmer/manager’s *appointment* means that the gaze of the farmer – the question of whether one is in or out of favour – never entirely disappears...This means that it becomes almost impossible to establish the *independent* authority of a worker who has been appointed as an overseer or as a spokesperson. That authority is still too closely linked to the farmer’s word.”

While Alicedale’s investor approach called for a ceding of responsibility to farm workers, the ongoing reach of paternalistic power ensured that these appointments would be perceived as “cooptation” within the farm’s hierarchy. The upshot of this process was growing divisions among the work force that became apparent for me in the social spaces of the compound. Some examples of how these divisions took place among Zimbabwean migrants at Alicedale included Edgar, the supervisor in the packhouse. Edgar, by the nature of his position, met frequently and worked closely with the white farmer. But this closeness with the “baas” set him apart from other farm workers. He lived in a separate house from the other hostel units where most farm workers stayed and did not socialize with other workers in the packhouse. Similarly, John, the farm’s head mechanic, seemed regularly to drink beer alone after work. Both Edgar and John were permanent workers who travelled back to Zimbabwe only

occasionally.⁶³ The foremen also pursued their own social activities, and were not among the pickers during the revelry that came with pay-day.

Another example of this rearticulated paternalism was revealed when I tried to interview people in the tomato area. Dozens of male and female farm workers were bending over large bins of tomatoes, removing rotten tomatoes with their hands (for which they were being paid an hourly wage). I arrived in the area with the farmer in his pick-up truck. When we arrived, the farmer called for everyone's attention and then indicated to them that I was there to "ask some questions".

While this gesture gave conditional approval that workers could leave their task to be interviewed, it also publicly affiliated me with the white farmer. This affiliation was borne out by the fact that, to my astonishment, no one left the swarms of fruit flies and generally unappealing work to sit with me and be interviewed. In this case, their hesitation stemmed not from "suspicion"⁶⁴ of my research, but from my white skin and perceived affiliation with the farmer. Unlike my image at Maswiri as an NGO worker, which made farm workers willing to speak with me, here my intuition suggested that I was seen as "with the farmer". Because of this perceived affiliation, if a worker left the job while others were busy working, the one who left could be stigmatized as a "farmer's favourite" or a potential informer. In retrospect, it was unsurprising that, for farm workers, it was more important to retain the respect and acceptance of their peers than to have momentary respite from their work.

Although Alicedale's vestiges of paternalism fostered divisions among the work force, paternalism did not undermine the hegemonic order on the farm. Ultimately, the

⁶³ For both Edgar and John, they traveled back to Zimbabwe less than three times a year.

⁶⁴ In the Introduction I discussed how some Zimbabwean farm workers thought I was affiliated with the MDC.

complications brought on by rearticulated paternalism were offset by the relatively high rates of pay, the maintenance of the punch-card, the cordial industrial relations and the better working and living conditions.

It is tempting to assign the stable hegemonic formation and “progressive” characteristics of Alicedale solely to the “investor approach” to farming. But the “investor approach” itself needs to be unpacked, for it entailed both developmental principles and a neoliberal thrust. The peculiarity of Alicedale was its emphasis on the developmental side of the equation, reflecting a priority of fostering stable labour relations. Nowhere was this more evident than in the micropolitics surrounding the punch-card system. The pickers could cheat and increase their bag counts, but exercised restraint so as not to amplify the problem. The farmer was aware of such cheating, but almost pretended not to notice, as if to avoid the issue and disruptions that might accompany changes to the punch-card system. The farmer thus implicitly recognized the importance of pickers having “limited control” over the production regime and, as such, it became a matter of unspoken yet intense compromise.

Conclusion

In comparing Alicedale with Maswiri, it is clear that pickers could pursue their livelihoods better at Alicedale. But, as mentioned, the “better treatment” of pickers at Alicedale cannot be read as simply the result of the investor approach to farming. Indeed, aspects of the “investor approach” were also present at Maswiri, specifically in terms of its neoliberal discourse. A key difference here was the developmental

emphasis at Alicedale and a dependence on paternalistic authority to enforce decisions at Maswiri.

One general thread that ran through both case studies warrants further elaboration. This was the importance of regimes of payment for pickers within hegemonic formations on the farms. As was demonstrated in the Maswiri case, regimes of payment were found to be crucial because they overlapped both class and paternalistic power. This observation is significant because it calls attention to how relations of production (class relations) intermingle with other central relations in the matrices of power on farms. By drawing out the class relation in this way, this chapter contributes to the wider literature that seeks to understand resistance to neoliberalism in peripheral zones. As noted in Chapter One, Zimbabwean migrants are incorporated not only in the accumulation strategies of individual farms, but are also enmeshed at a broader level in the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture.

More fundamentally, the chapter suggests that broader political economy analysis should be supplemented by detailed examination of the differing localized dynamics on particular commercial farms. In this regard, it is important to emphasize that the strike at Maswiri was exceptional. More often than not, Zimbabwean migrants accommodate rather than challenge power relations between them and their employer, even when conditions are extremely bad. But in some circumstances, as the Maswiri case demonstrated, migrants move beyond their accommodation with power relations (or individualistic, atomized forms of struggle) and towards overt, collective challenges that can potentially change conditions on farms.

However, in terms of the strike, the role of Nkuzi is not to be underestimated. The role of Nkuzi clearly showed how assistance can be extended despite its deeper loyalties to South Africans. But if Nkuzi is to move beyond the kind of sporadic “on the ground” assistance it can offer to Zimbabwean migrants, and towards advocating the institutional changes that could help farm workers much more, it must resolve its ambiguous position towards migrants and change the way it “appeals to the state”. How can Nkuzi change the way it appeals to the state without alienating or abandoning the South African unemployed? I consider this question in relation to the wider context of South African civil society in the conclusion.

Conclusion: An Age of Desperation?

The experiences of Zimbabwean farm workers in Limpopo province appear to counter the assertion of Thabo Mbeki that South Africa has entered an “Age of Hope”. Referring back to the “two narratives” presented at the beginning of this thesis, Mbeki’s claim of an “Age of Hope” forms part of a wider state narrative that portrays South Africa upon a trajectory of high growth and prosperity, with a gradual yet assured redistribution of wealth and opportunity. In contrast, a “radical left” (broadly defined) narrative points to the ANC’s adoption of neoliberalism and emphasizes the deepened inequality in South Africa since 1994. Before discussing the wider significance of the arguments made here, I will first sum up the central argument of each chapter in relation to the two narratives.

The state-discourse portrayal of South Africa as an “upholder of human dignity” amidst an unproblematic economic “take off”, where prosperity trickles down to the formerly excluded is contradicted by the central theme explored in Chapter One: how South Africa’s neoliberal growth path has adversely affected the poorest in post-apartheid society. Far from tasting the fruits of an “Age of Hope”, entire sections of society – including farm dwellers, the rural and urban poor, women, youth and migrants – appear to have been condemned to a life of poverty in what is more aptly described as an “age of desperation”. By examining only one of these adversely affected “sections of society” – the 15,000 or so Zimbabwean farm workers in the far north of Limpopo – Chapter One demonstrated how the neoliberal growth path has shaped a process of agricultural restructuring and deepened trends of labour casualization throughout commercial agriculture. In addition, this adverse incorporation of Zimbabwean

migrants also reflects a general tendency of restructuring to intensify the exploitation of labour in order to renew profitability.

A peculiarity of the neoliberal phase of agricultural restructuring is that farmers have turned to casual labour as a “defensive response” to government restructuring initiatives, rather than the government directly facilitating these shifts on behalf of or in tandem with farmers. This peculiarity stands in contrast to the post-war phase of restructuring when the apartheid state maintained an open alliance with white farmers and directly assisted in the control over the labour force, in the provision of prison labour and the forced removals of farm dwellers.

Despite this distinction between phases, the hesitancy of the ANC-led government to intervene on white farms and enforce post-apartheid legislation suggests that, in practice, the apparent antagonism between white farmers and government is in fact often a relationship of accommodation. This widespread failure to enforce laws on farms – such as preventing illegal evictions or labour law violations – cannot be passed off as the simple result of superficial problems such as “administrative inefficiency”, “corruption” or “low budgets”. Rather, the hesitancy to intervene on farms ultimately reflects how neoliberal imperatives have come to be prioritized in South Africa under the terms of its present growth path. This prioritization of neoliberal imperatives – which include export-led development, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and maintaining cordial relations with capital – reflects, in turn, the class configuration of the current hegemonic bloc in South Africa.

Another dimension of the Mbeki narrative is a presentation of South Africa as the “vanguard” of the Global South and a progressive force in Southern Africa (Bond,

2004b). But as Chapter Two demonstrated, the South African government's relationship with the Zimbabwean people refutes this image of solidarity. The labelling of practically all Zimbabwean migrants as "economic migrants" and the hostile immigration policy directed towards them reveal a profoundly misleading interpretation of the Zimbabwean crisis by policy makers in South Africa. This interpretation effectively denies the role of "politics" as a cause of the crisis, or more specifically, the efforts of the Mugabe regime to stay in power. Instead, the causes for the crisis are viewed as essentially "economic"- rooted particularly in the excessive social spending of the government during the 1980s (Mbeki, 2003). Although the South African government refuses to acknowledge the political causes behind the Zimbabwean crisis, this study shows that the political crisis facing the regime was the fulcrum through which the wider crisis and economic decline has emerged. Because of this centrality of the political crisis, Zimbabwean migration has an overarching political dimension.

While Chapter Two demonstrated the "political" causes of the Zimbabwean crisis, it also suggested that classifying the Zimbabwean migrants as "economic migrants" or as seeking "permanent settlement" denies the diversity of motivations at work. To connect with the diversity of motivations, one must conduct fine-grained research at the local level to in order to attend to all the specificities.

This turn towards localized analysis defined the approach of Chapter Three. In this Chapter, it is not only the official state narrative that can be found to be problematic in relation to Zimbabwean migrant farm workers. As was demonstrated, "progressive" civil society groups such as Nkuzi Development Association act towards Zimbabwean

migrants in ambiguous ways. While the Nkuzi example showed how this ambiguity can still work to Zimbabwean farm workers' advantage, this is not always the case.

Moreover, the theoretical approach of Chapter Three calls into question totalizing descriptions such as the condition of "desperation" itself. When one attends to how farm workers engage with dominant forms of thought and power in the localized space of particular commercial farms, a micropolitics of contestation and accommodation reveals Zimbabweans as "historical agents" in their own right. In this regard, the chapter explored how Zimbabwean migrants drew upon paternalistic discourses to make claims over processes which directly affected their livelihoods, such as "regimes of payment." These engagements and claims by farm workers did not therefore stem from some imagined space of "originary autonomy," but were embedded in the hegemonic forms of power on particular farms.

Nevertheless, if Zimbabwean farm workers throughout the far north are to realize significant improvements in their grim conditions of work, a less ambiguous form of cooperation and assistance from South African civil society is necessary. To assess the challenges facing Zimbabwean migrants, Ben Cousins and Thembela Kepe (2002) usefully argue that sustainable rural development will not be possible without a "decisive shifts in power relations" and a "redistribution of political and economic power in favour of the poor". In turn, these shifts require "that the rural poor, together with their allies in the labour movement and progressive political formations...organize to renegotiate the terms and conditions of permanent and seasonal labour in the commercial agricultural sector."

While these authors refer to an alliance between civil society formations and South African “rural poor”, practically no researchers have explored how progressive forces in Limpopo can link up with Zimbabwean migrant farm workers in the far north. This concluding section assesses the possibilities for solidarity between Zimbabwean farm workers and South African organizations. In considering this potentiality, the wider significance of the arguments made in this thesis can be extracted and situated. First, the various constraints facing different organizations that work with farm workers in Limpopo are discussed. In revealing these constraints, the arguments of this thesis are then considered to chart how such limits might be overcome.

Prospects for Solidarity

In addition to Nkuzi, there are three other relatively large organizations of relevance: the Landless Peoples Movement (LPM), the Food and Agricultural Workers Union (FAWU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). While each of these organizations has some involvement with South African farm workers in Limpopo, each does little or no work with Zimbabwean farm workers in the far north. In discussing the reasons for this lack of activity, an obvious problem is the economic and logistical constraints that prevent a sustained presence in isolated farm areas. But this is not the only reason. Similar to Nkuzi, each organization is in some sense “ambivalent” towards Zimbabweans. Moreover, the forms of intervention these organizations make have their own inherent limits. The most salient of these limits are sketched out in turn below, although the observations here are more of an initial sketch of “possibilities” rather than

a definitive account of civil society politics surrounding Zimbabwean migrant workers.⁶⁵

While the LPM has a limited involvement among South African farm workers in general, its activity is even less apparent with Zimbabwean migrants.⁶⁶ Although this inability to work with farm workers stems largely from economic constraints, the relationship with Zimbabwean migrants is complicated by politics surrounding the Zimbabwean crisis. As the LPM advocates a radical redistribution of land in South Africa, the LPM leadership supported (both rhetorically and symbolically) government-organized land seizures in Zimbabwe since 2000.⁶⁷ At a large demonstration in Durban outside the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002, the LPM speaker, addressing a crowd of over 20,000, shouted “Viva Robert Mugabe, Viva!” (cited in Saunders and Bond, 2005: 6). While some activists associated with the LPM may not support the Mugabe regime, two prominent LPM leaders interviewed in June, 2005 expressed ongoing support for Zimbabwe’s “land reform”.

Similar to the problematic interpretation of Mbeki, these sections of the LPM who support Mugabe reduce the Zimbabwean crisis to the “land question”. This view of the “land as the economy and the economy as the land” – to quote the ZANU-PF slogan for the 2000 parliamentary elections – justifies all forms of human rights abuses and undemocratic practices in the name of fulfilling the incomplete liberation struggle (Raftopolous, 2006). Because of this reading of the crisis, the LPM can similarly

⁶⁵ There is a paucity of information dealing with the relationship of these organizations to Zimbabwean farm workers.

⁶⁶ Most of LPM’s membership is drawn from restitution claimants, rural unemployed or the urban landless (Interview with LPM spokesperson, June, 2005).

⁶⁷ Based on interviewing a leading LPM activist (June, 2005); part of the reason for their support of the Zimbabwean land invasions is that LPM sees them as “driven from below” where the state has only played a facilitative role.

reduce Zimbabwe migrant farm workers to “economic migrants” or unfortunate casualties of the necessary process of reclaiming the land.

While LPM’s intervention is based on a confrontational approach to the state (such as through land occupations) to obtain land for landless communities, the FAWU and SACP approach involves a corporatist “appeal to the state” and aims to improve conditions on farms. An affiliate of the ANC-aligned COSATU, FAWU attempts to establish union structures and collective bargaining institutions on farms. In these efforts, they have had limited success, particularly in the far north of Limpopo, where FAWU has virtually no presence (Interview with FAWU organizer in the far north of Limpopo). Farmers have generally opposed unionization on farms and FAWU’s own limited resources prevent sustained involvement on farms in deep rural areas (du Toit and Ewert, 2005: 329). FAWU has also been accused of having an urban bias, as its membership is mainly drawn from processing and retailing industries, as opposed to actual farm workers (du Toit, 1993; du Toit and Ewert, 2005).

Connected to the “urban bias,” FAWU’s organizing strategies rely heavily on the traditions of “industrial trade unionism.” This form of unionism refers to urban or factory based organizing methods and FAWU’s application of these methods to commercial agriculture. Underlying these methods is a conception of farms as simply “factories in the fields” (du Toit, 1993:329). Accordingly, the almost exclusive focus of union activity is to improve wages and collective bargaining procedures. This focus has meant the increasingly seasonal or part-time portion of the agricultural workforce tends to be at the margins of FAWU activity. A key reason for their marginalization is that casualized farm labour does not “fit” the model of industrial trade unionism. With their

intermittent presence on the farm and vulnerability in power relations with the farmer, this section of the workforce can be difficult to organize under typical FAWU methods. In addition, farm workers are concerned not only with wages, but with access to land, housing, transport and potentially service provision off the farm (of course, many of these other concerns apply to “full-time” farm workers or farm dwellers as well).

While FAWU’s industrial unionism tactics pose difficulties for organizing “part-time” or seasonal South African workers, it’s even more problematic for Zimbabwean migrant workers. FAWU’s intervention is fundamentally premised on using the existing legal framework for union organizing and collective bargaining. The mostly “undocumented” – and therefore “non-citizen” – Zimbabwean migrant farm workers are effectively disqualified from becoming part of union activities.

Although the SACP has a large membership in Limpopo province, few of these are farm workers. While farm workers are not actively recruited, the SACP does stage demonstrations and lobbies government “on behalf” of farm workers’ rights. One significant example was the SACP’s “Red October” or Mawubuye Umhlaba (or “Bring Back the Land”) campaign launched in 2004. This campaign highlighted farm worker concerns throughout South Africa and the slow progress government had made in redistributing land. Significantly, throughout this campaign the SACP connected farm worker problems such as wages with other farm worker concerns, notably, the question of land access and oppressive relations with farmers.

While the “Red October” campaign showed how the SACP (more than FAWU) acknowledges the diversity of farm worker concerns, the SACP intervention with farm workers remains essentially “top-down”. For example, the main goal of SACP

interventions is to pressure the government for “improvements” in conditions for farm workers. There is little sense of how change is “driven from below” or recognition that, in the event of changes made from “above”, that these changes will have little effect unless they are articulated by farm workers themselves and consolidated by farm workers in the localized arrangements of power in which they live and work.

Similar to FAWU, the SACP approach is also problematic for Zimbabwean migrants as the thrust of its intervention is to call for “the law” to be applied to farms (which then becomes the basis for improving conditions for farm workers). As was discussed in Chapter Three, this position or “appeal to the state” can go against the interests of undocumented Zimbabwean migrants. For example, “applying the law” to farms could just as easily translate into deporting all “illegal” or undocumented migrant farm workers.

Despite their weaknesses, FAWU and SACP seem more likely to extend support to Zimbabwean farm workers than the LPM, as, unlike the LPM, they are critical of the Mugabe regime. COSATU (of which FAWU is an affiliate) has denounced the growing authoritarianism in Zimbabwe and has sent well publicized observer missions to Zimbabwe (*Mail and Guardian*, 2005, 7/2). The SACP has produced insightful analyses of the Zimbabwean crisis and has, along with COSATU, been critical of the ANC’s “quiet diplomacy” approach to the Mugabe regime. For example, the SACP (2002) differentiates its “socialist interpretation” of the Zimbabwean crisis from what it terms the “Africanist position” associated with Thabo Mbeki and groups such as LPM. While the Africanist position holds that “it is our duty to defend ZANU PF in the light of a common history”, the socialist interpretation “places principal blame on externally

enforced SAPs for the economic crisis, and the bureaucratisation and the embourgeoisement of the upper echelons of ZANU PF for the internal stagnation”.

Here the argument of Chapter Two takes on greater significance. By demonstrating that the political crisis is the driving force behind economic collapse, Chapter Two not only refuted the position of some LPM leaders (and Mbeki) on the Zimbabwe crisis, but also dispelled the “economic migrant” category, presenting Zimbabwean migrants as caught in the fall-out of political-driven crisis. Put in this light, the extension of solidarity to migrants becomes more imperative and justifiable. They can no longer be viewed as the unfortunate consequence of a progressive land revolution.

Moreover, if the argument of Chapter One is accepted, there are reasons to think that solidarity from FAWU and SACP might be more forthcoming than might be thought otherwise. As Chapter One demonstrated, the fundamental process underlying both the reproduction of landlessness and unemployment for South Africans and super-exploitation of Zimbabwean farm workers is the neoliberal growth path. Having identified this “common ground” (or “common enemy”) as the neoliberal growth path, it becomes more difficult for South African organizations to avoid assisting Zimbabwean migrants under the xenophobic justification that they “take South African jobs”. The implication of this argument for South African civil society organizations is that instead of, for example, focusing on the farmers who hire undocumented Zimbabweans and “appealing to the state” to stop the practice (potentially entailing deportation of migrants), the focus of opposition should shift to a more broader level of contestation with the neoliberal growth path itself. How such contestation is waged is another question altogether. Suffice it to say that Zimbabwean migrant farm workers

can be understood as allies in such a struggle and need not be viewed as opposed to the interests of South African workers.

For this theoretical possibility of solidarity to become a reality, South African organizations claiming to be against neoliberalism ultimately need to overcome their own national biases. Yet, even if such support is extended, the engagement will likely still be premised on appealing to the state. Such an appeal could involve pressure upon the Department of Labour for inspections and easier ways for migrants to obtain legal status. As the example of Nkuzi showed, this kind of engagement can bring gains for Zimbabwean farm workers.

However, for it to bring more far reaching changes, the ambiguity underlying “appealing to the state” must be addressed. To offset this ambiguity, organizations must make a clear political choice and affiliate openly with Zimbabwean migrants. This open affiliation means a salient anti-deportation stance alongside calls for more effective state intervention.

Even more challenging than simply establishing support from South African organizations will be the necessary shifts in organizing tactics to make these interventions effective for Zimbabweans. Indeed, the SACP’s top-down approach and FAWU’s “urban bias” will face difficulties in facilitating the specific concerns of Zimbabwean migrant farm workers. One immediate concern is that most Zimbabwean migrants are seasonal workers, possibly on the farm for only five months (or less) with relatively high turnover rates among workers between seasons. Clearly these conditions pose problems for organizing strategies that rely on permanent or full-time workers for recruitment. In addition, a specific concern for the mostly undocumented migrants is to

obtain legal status. With such status, they can potentially avoid the dangers associated with “border jumping” and vulnerability to exploitation or deportation as an “illegal”.

The question is what forms of organizing can address these specific concerns and conditions? The question is important not only for Zimbabwean migrant farm workers, but also for the bulk of the commercial agriculture labour force that has become increasingly casualized and at the margins of unionization (du Toit and Ewert, 2005). Here the wider significance of the argument in Chapter Three becomes apparent. The tactics of industrial trade unionism, premised as they are upon enlisting full-time or “core” workers and focusing almost exclusively on wages, are unlikely to be effective. These tactics are too often based on constructions of a “proletarian consciousness” that fails to capture both the differing priorities of farm workers and the forms of power enmeshing them. Commercial farms are, after all, not “factories in the fields”. Rather, they have their own localized hegemonic forms of power in which rearticulated paternalistic discourses remain a salient feature.

Organizations that seek to help farm workers need to understand more about how the paternalistic universe operates on different commercial farms. In addition, they must target their interventions to facilitate existing localized engagements with power relations. As the example of contestation around “regimes of payment” made clear, farm workers draw upon paternalistic discourses to make claims over the production process. Interventions will be more fruitful where they increase the ability of farm workers to make these kinds of claims. In so doing, interventions can draw upon, rather than replace, the “existing cultural repertoire and traditions of farm workers’ resistance and agency” (du Toit and Ewert, 2005: 329).

Finally, ideological biases that construct the farmer and farm workers as “natural class enemies” must be discarded. Interventions that seek only to create instability within labour relations will not help the livelihoods of farm workers. This is especially true for Zimbabwean migrants, where wages earned on the farms (meagre as they are) can be a matter of survival for them and their dependants. If neoliberalism is a central force behind super-exploitation of Zimbabwean migrants, contestation will have to shift towards the sources of neoliberalism at both national and global levels, a struggle in which workers and the farmer may in fact have common ground. For example, establishing higher wages and better working conditions for farm workers may require creating pressure upon the buyers of farm produce. As has been addressed in other research on farm workers (Mather and Greenberg, 2003), this question of how Zimbabwean migrants are enmeshed in global commodity chains and the wider agro-food complex is a crucial one that must be explored in future studies.

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