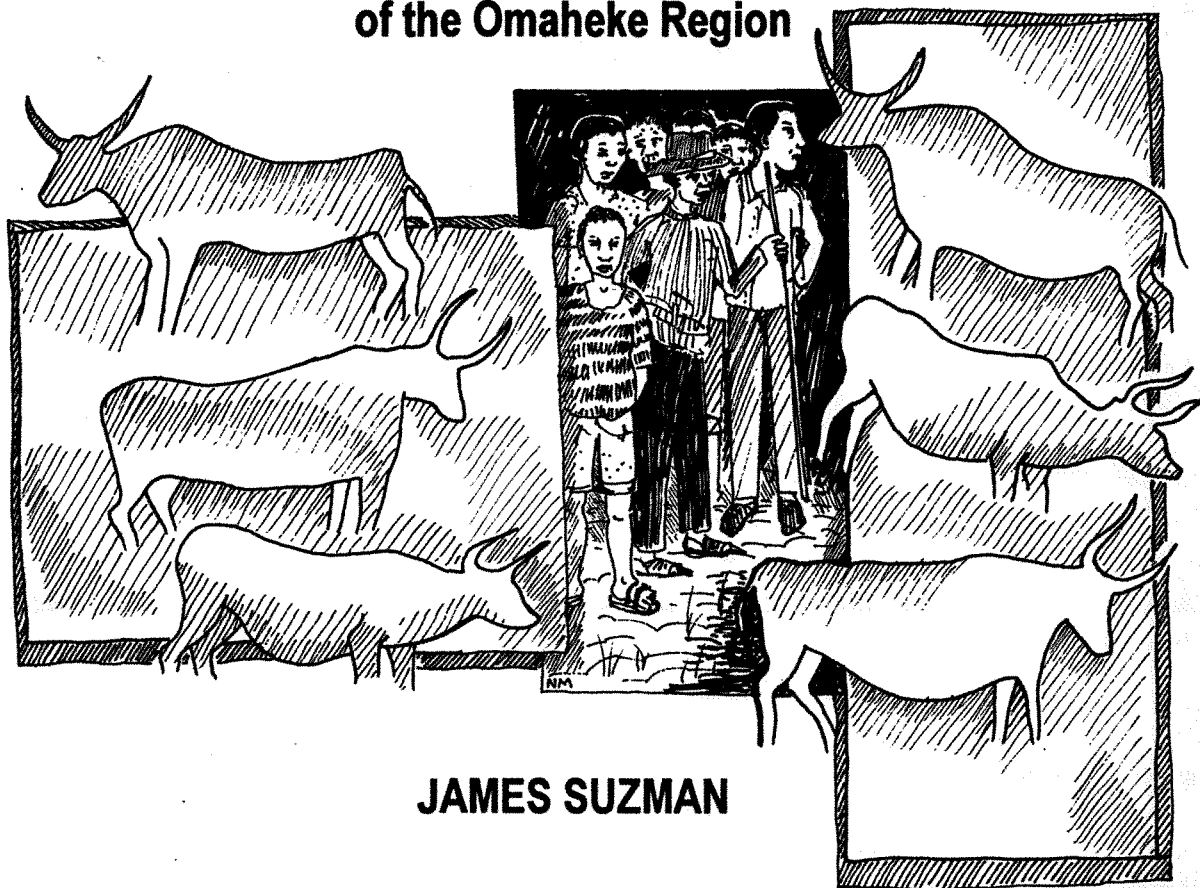


RESEARCH REPORT SERIES NO. 1

IN THE MARGINS

**A Qualitative Examination of the Status of Farm Workers
in the Commercial and Communal Farming Areas
of the Omaheke Region**



JAMES SUZMAN

for the

**Farm Workers Project
LEGAL ASSISTANCE CENTRE**

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
MAY 1995

RESEARCH REPORT SERIES NO. 1

IN THE MARGINS

**A Qualitative Examination of the Status of Farm Workers
in the Commercial and Communal Farming Areas
of the Omaheke Region**

JAMES SUZMAN

for the

**Farm Workers Project
LEGAL ASSISTANCE CENTRE**

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
MAY 1995

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to all those who contributed to this paper. In particular my thanks are due to the many farmers and workers who were prepared to share their time with me. In particular I wish to single out my research assistant, Mr Frederik Langman, without whose help and advice this research would not have been possible.

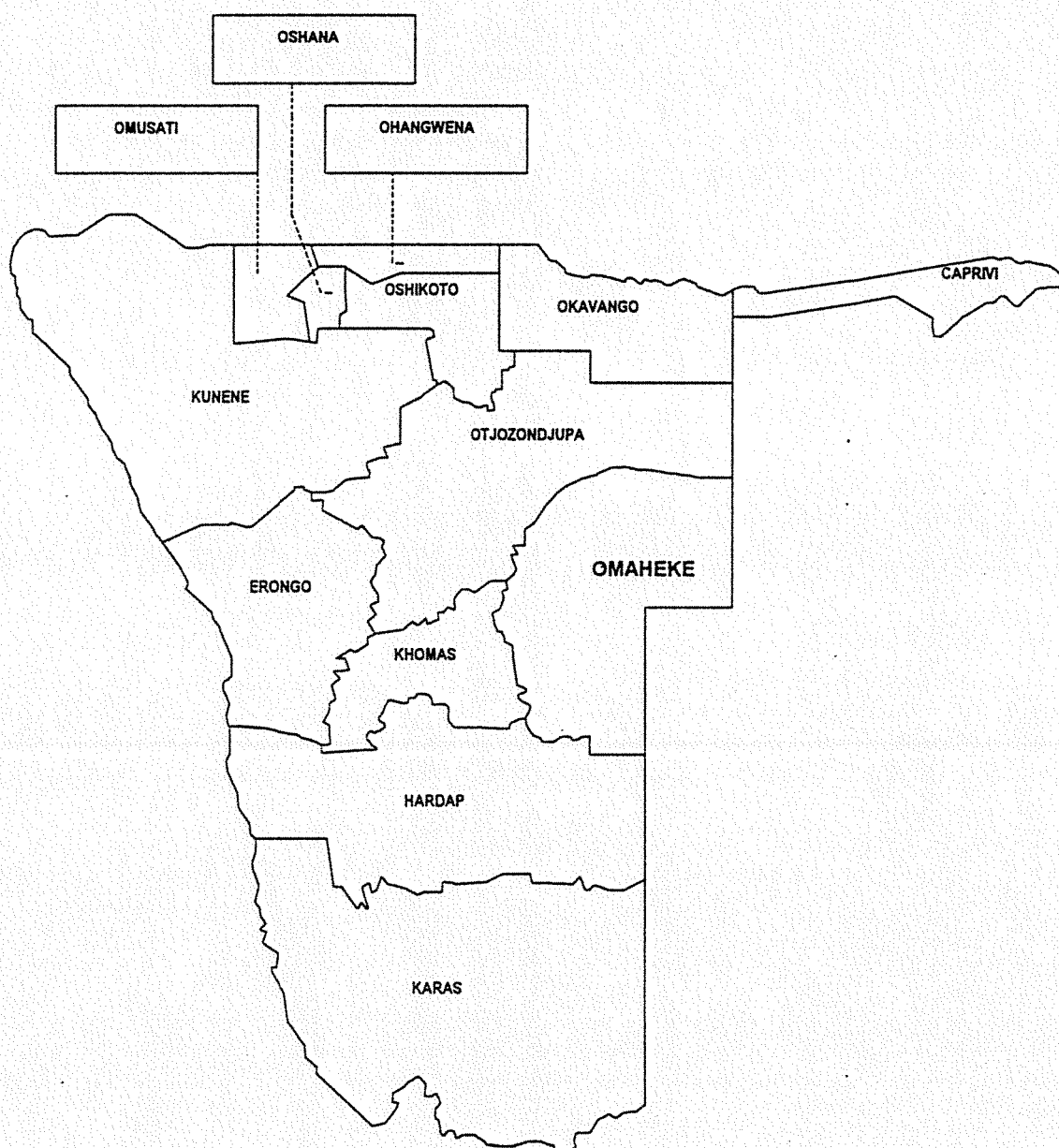
In addition, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following: Steve Katjiuanjo of the Legal Assistance Centre's Farm Workers Project for comments and advice; Peter Rosenmeir and Roger Yates for sharing their knowledge of the research area; Baartman Kaice for his guidance through the Ozorondanda and for insisting on opening the occasional gate; John Ford for his copy of the Labour Act; Perri Caplan of the Legal Assistance Centre for producing the final draft for printing; and Morgan Kowalski Botelle for her ever-insightful comments and ideas.

JAMES SUZMAN

Windhoek

May 1995

STUDY AREA: OMAHEKE REGION



ABSTRACT

This paper is a result of research conducted between August 1994 and May 1995, and was only possible with funding from the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) for whom this report was written.

Most of the information offered in this paper has been gathered informally through conversations and informal interviews with both farmers and workers in the commercial and communal farming areas of the Northern Omaheke District. The intention of this report is to offer a qualitative assessment of the status of farm workers and it is therefore anthropological in bent.

This research does not aim to be quantitatively representative of an entire area, but rather it attempts to highlight some of the issues which affect farm workers' lives. Because interviews were unstructured and informal, it was the interviewees who created the agenda for this report rather than the pre-prepared criteria of a researcher. For this reason I have, where possible, used the interviewee's own words. For reasons of confidentiality I have not included the names of interviewees when I quote them.

In the first chapter I look at some of the historical forces which have created the conditions that precipitated the current labour situation and thereafter examine one of the more glaring features of life for farm workers - mobility and insecurity.

Thereafter I look at the commercial farms, particularly at institutional features such as paternalism and authoritarianism. I also look at the relationship between labour practice and ethnic representation as well as issues such as payment practices, housing and rations.

In the third chapter I examine the processes involved in the creation of a lower tier of labourers in the communal areas and its relationship with the Herero household economy. I also examine payment and labour practice in relation to perceptions of ethnicity.

In the fourth chapter I address other issues, specifically gender, labour complaints and the issue of grazing for generational farm labourers.

In the final chapter I draw the above areas together and look at issues such as legal education and the administration and implementation of labour law.

JAMES SUZMAN

Windhoek - May 1995

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
 Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION	 1
1.1 Historical Overview	2
1.2 Mobility and Insecurity	6
1.2.1 <i>Looking for Work</i>	7
1.2.2 <i>Employee Hierarchies</i>	8
 Chapter 2: THE COMMERCIAL FARMS	 11
2.1 The Farm as Space	12
2.1.1 <i>"Baaskap"</i>	12
2.1.2 <i>Authority and Delegation</i>	15
2.1.3 <i>The "Witvoet"</i>	17
2.2 Worker Discourses	19
2.3 Labour Choice and Ethnicity	20
2.4 Payment and Perceptions	22
2.4.1 <i>Pay Scaling and Ethnic Constructions</i>	23
2.4.2 <i>Work and Pay</i>	25
 Chapter 3: THE COMMUNAL LANDS	 29
3.1 Factors Influencing Labour on Communal Lands	30
3.1.1 <i>Labour and the Household</i>	31
3.1.2 <i>Commercial Labour</i>	34

3.2	Forms of Labour in Communal Areas	36
3.2.1	<i>Contract Labour</i>	36
3.2.2	<i>Salaried Labour</i>	37
3.2.3	<i>Small Task Labour</i>	38
3.3	Good Worker, Bad Worker; Ethnicity and Labour	39
3.3.1	<i>Labour Hierarchies</i>	39
3.3.2	<i>Conflicts Among Workers</i>	46
3.4	Working Conditions	47
3.4.1	<i>Housing</i>	47
3.4.2	<i>Additional Payments</i>	48
Chapter 4:	OTHER ISSUES	49
4.1	Labour Complaints	49
4.1.1	<i>"Domness"</i>	50
4.1.2	<i>What the Figures Might Indicate</i>	52
4.2	Grazing on Farms	53
4.3	Gender	56
Chapter 5:	CONCLUSION	59
5.1	Commercial Farms	59
5.2	Communal Farms	60
5.3	Generational Farm Workers	61
5.4	Administration and Implementation of Labour Law	62
5.5	Education and Awareness	62
References	64

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

As one drives into Gobabis from the west, it is difficult to miss the large statue of a bull which lies just off the main road. Immediately beneath the bull, on its imposing brick pedestal, the words "CATTLE COUNTRY" are emblazoned in large white letters, leaving the casual visitor in absolutely no doubt as to what is both the economic and cultural backbone of the surrounding area, which is also sometimes referred to as "Little Texas".

The Omaheke District is one of the most profitable farming areas in Namibia where, notwithstanding the current drought, extensive cattle farming has proved a comparatively profitable enterprise for commercial as well as communal farmers, with the occupants of the former Hereroland Reserves being considered "the most affluent group of Namibia's communal farmers in terms of livestock capital." (Iken et al, 1994:61) For such farming success, a key factor is labour and it has been the dictates of agricultural labour which have shaped the lives of a large segment of the population in the Omaheke Region. In the commercial farming areas, white, mainly Afrikaans-speaking farmers are the main employers, although there is an ever-increasing number of black-owned (usually Herero) farms. The largest group of labourers on these commercial farms are Nama/Damara speakers, who comprise just over 50% of the workforce, with the Ju'/hoan¹ being the second largest group comprising 27% of the total workforce (source CSO)². Other groups (Ovambo, Kavango and Herero) comprise the remaining 23% of the local workforce. In the northern areas of the commercial block and the former Hereroland East Reserve, where the bulk of my research was conducted, the Ju'/hoan are the most evident group

¹ There is some dispute as to what is the correct term by which to refer to those who have been previously labelled "Bushmen", "San", etc. In this paper I have opted for the term Ju'/hoan (pl. Ju'/hoansi) which directly translated means "real people". I have used this term because in the study area it is seen to transcend the divisions that groups of "Bushmen" articulate between themselves.

² These figures relate to the commercial areas only. There are no such figure available for the communal areas (source: unpublished figures from the LAC Farm Workers Project) .

of farm labourers, with Nama/Damara groups being more prominent in the central areas further south (c.f. Kohler, 1956).

In this paper, I dwell on the status of the Ju'/hoan more than any other group, not only because they are the most prominent group of farm workers in the study area, but also because their status most clearly represents some of the key issues which I address in this paper.

1.1 Historical Overview

Following the German-Herero War of 1904, the prime movers in shaping the then Gobabis District's role in the wider political economy were the dictates of agricultural and labour policy which today still serve to shape the present circumstances of much of the population. The Administration's centralisation of white farmers' needs and the ensuing legislation which served to marginalise others ensured that the labour market was geared to serve and render more profitable white farms (Gordon, 1992 and 1994; Adams, 1990). By 1910 farms covered 13% of the then South West Africa (SWA), a total increased substantially after a further six million hectares were set aside for white immigrants from South Africa after the end of the First World War (Gebhardt, 1978). Despite the Germans' attempts to regulate and create conditions for cheap "native labour", it was really after World War I that the agricultural labour situation was successfully brought under a blatantly exploitative bureaucracy and its instrumental wings - the native commissioners, soldiers and policemen of SWA - ultimately resulting in the Odendaal Plan.

The relationship between the state and the white farmer permitted the farmer to exercise an almost absolute authority on his farm, allowing for it to evolve along with other farms in the Southern African region into "total institutions" where the state ratified rather than sanctioned the farmer's excesses when dealing with staff. Apart from the use of convict labour, the various forms of vagrancy and labour legislation served to devolve a great deal of state authority to the white farmer and increase the relative powerlessness of the workers (c.f. chpt. 2).

INTRODUCTION

A further effect of this was the creation of a very insecure and highly mobile labour force who were dependent on white farmers for their material survival. These groups, who were mainly Damara and Ju/'hoan, had in practical terms no "homeland" to speak of under South African rule, and became absolutely dependent on the labour system for almost all aspects of their livelihood. Their homes were their workplaces and their security depended on the favour of the farmer. Theoretically, Damara-speaking workers resident in the then Gobabis District, for example, had Damaraland, but as a result of dispersal, many had nothing but rudimentary ties with their assigned "homeland" and rather saw the farming areas as their homes. These functionally "homelandless" groups were to emerge as the core of the commercial agricultural labour force, living and growing up on the farms. In this sense, these groups are "generational farm workers" - born, bred and living on farms. In the case of the Ju/'hoan in this area, this is clearly illustrated by the fact that almost all people have a *n!ore* (home) in the commercial or communal areas, although in functional terms they have no rights over the area where their *n!ore* lies³. What is significant is that the existence of *n!ores* in the farming block suggests the degree to which generational workers have begun to see only the farms as their homes.

The effects of labour legislation and the political and economic constraints which were consequently placed on reserve areas were drastic. In tandem with the establishment of labour systems in the "white districts", the reserve areas were to evolve internal labour systems of their own. In some places the implications of this for the household were based on the increasingly important role of women in the domestic economy (c.f. Hishongwa, 1992). In Hereroland East adaptations took a different turn: although a great deal of responsibility was placed on women including, in many cases, the burden of running all aspects of the household, the loss of male householders created a set of conditions within the reserve which resulted in the formation of a further underclass of workers who served to maintain the viability of the Herero economy on a household level⁴.

³ Among foraging Ju/'hoan, *n!ores* were areas over which family groups exercised ownership. Members of other groups had to seek permission to utilise any of the resources which were in another's *n!ore*, and failure to do so often resulted in conflict. The fact that Ju/'hoansi have *n!ores* in the farming district also points to the degree to which generational farm workers see the farms as their homes.

⁴ In 1994, 31% of Herero households were "female centred" due to male absence (Iken et al. 1994).

It is clear that relations between Herero and Ju'/hoan in the newly-created Epukiro Reserve were strained when in 1924 a deputation led by Headman Nikanor presented itself to the Gobabis magistrate to complain about "Bushman depredations in the Reserve." Relations were, however, not always as difficult and it was not uncommon to find a Ju'/hoan family living alongside a Herero family where, in exchange for food, the Ju'/hoansi helped the Hereros with labour. The relationship was a seasonal affair, with the Ju'/hoansi usually moving eastwards to hunt and gather during the rainy season. This apparently benefited both groups: for the Ju'/hoansi the dry season was frequently hard and working for Hereros offered a degree of security as well as the possibility of added luxuries such as tobacco and milk; and for the Hereros it offered a cheap and welcome source of labour in a season that for them was also frequently hard. This then freed male Herero householders to migrate to commercial areas and earn cash on the white farms or in the cities, thereby contributing to the evolution of a dual economy based on the relative values of cash and cattle in and out of the reserve (c.f. Kuper, 1984).

This relationship, despite the apparent benefits to both parties, was by no means equal. The Ju'/hoansi were frequently coerced into work, and labourers who left their employers were occasionally chased down by Hereros using similar methods to those used by the white farmers who had similar problems with their labourers.⁵ It was clearly the Hereros who were in a position to dictate the terms of the relationship, while the Ju'/hoansi were generally assigned to the more unpleasant and arduous tasks, and domestic chores such as fetching wood and water and supervising of cattle at distant posts (*ozohambo*). The relationship which emerged was largely paternalistic - the Ju'/hoansi usually addressing their employers as "Mother" or "Father" (*Mama* and *Tate*), while they were always addressed in junior kinship terms and in some cases by their names. Although it appears that in many cases Herero and Ju'/hoan families lived apart, there are many cases in which young Ju'/hoansi were adopted into Herero families, though they were never granted anything other than the status of a junior kinsperson and generally ended up leaving their adoptive employers at some point.

⁵ Several Ju'/hoansi I have spoken with told of themselves or their parents having been "hunted down" after leaving an employer.

INTRODUCTION

The 1930s saw the beginning of another change in the dynamics of labour in the area, with the arrival of the first migrant Owambo labourers. White-owned farms and particularly other communal farms were regarded as a last option by these migrants, who generally preferred the better payment available in the cities or mines. In Hereroland East, Owambo migrant labourers were differently treated to Ju'/hoansi, who were regarded by the Hereros as culturally and racially inferior. Although also frequently given a junior kinship status, Owambos were treated on more equal terms. Their status was accredited to their poverty, rather than their lack of or apparent lack of interest in cattle, which in terms of reserve politics remains a dominant symbol.

The seasonality of the relationship between Ju'/hoansi and Hereros in a few cases continues today. For the most part, however, Ju'/hoansi are almost totally dependent on government food and payment for labour. At the time of Oswin Kohler's Report on the Gobabis District (1959) the seasonality of the relationship was still its dominant feature, as he claims:

I also did not find a single of the 210 Bushmen quoted in the statistics for 1955. All of them if there ever had been so many had left the western portion of the reserve and had either gone to work on the farms or had withdrawn to the ... inaccessible within and outside of the reserve.

(Kohler 1959)

The dominance of the seasonality in Ju'/hoan interactions with Hereros was to diminish rapidly with the expansion of the reserve area, and in particular the creation of the Rietfontein Block and the consequent expansion of the central political economy into areas where Ju'/hoansi had previously escaped from its grasp during good seasons. The net result of this was an increasing dependency on Herero paternalism and authority as well as an increase in the dependency of many Herero households on cheap year-round labour provided by "outsiders".

The fact that the labour force was constituted by *ovattua* (i.e. non-Hereros; *omuttua* singular; the term has negative connotations) meant that in terms of people's understandings of hierarchy, to be

an *omuungure*⁶ (worker) meant at the same time to be an *omutua*, an inferior outsider. This is still clearly evident in the communal areas where it is a general trend that employees are almost always from an ethnically marginalised group in the areas in which they work.

1.2 Mobility And Insecurity

One of the most significant features of agricultural labour in the study areas was the mobility of the labour force. Many labourers move between farms, staying for a period and then moving on, whether as a result of conflict with the employer or simply a need to go elsewhere. Usually this movement is couched in terms of "wanting to find a better place, a better *baas* (boss), better wages, or better housing." From place to place, circumstances regarding moving on from one farm to another or to the communal areas will differ, but since this mobility is so widespread it is clear that the underlying conditions for agricultural labourers form the basis of this mobility.

This mobility points to one of the most pertinent issues which effect the worker: insecurity. The relationship between farmer and employee in both commercial and communal areas is dominated by the employer, whose authority is in some respects nigh absolute. In other words, the status of the farm worker in any one place is dependent on the favour of the employer, which in terms of worker discourse is a variable and unpredictable phenomenon. As one man pointed out regarding his dismissal from a farm:

Ek het gedink dat ons het geen probleme met mekaar, maar een dag het hy gesê ek moet net loop. Toe moet ek maak soos die baas so ek moet net gaan, al weet ek nie waarheen ek moet gaan nie.

⁶ The term "*omuungure*" (pl. *ovaungure*) means "worker" (i.e. someone in the act of doing work). At the same time it has emerged in local usage as a noun category referring to a "working class". It is in this sense that I use the term.

I thought that we didn't have any problems with one another, but one day he said to me I must just go. Then I did what the boss said - I left although I had no idea where I could go.

(Former foreman, 16/02/95)

This insecurity is pervasive in worker discourse and has many spin-offs. Regarding the most marginalised of the workforce, it breeds despair and resentment - factors which are clearly linked to the high level of alcoholism and its associated violence. Moreover, among workers it ferments jealousies and tensions which are symbolised by the "*inkomer*" (see chpt. 3) and the "*witvoet*" (see chpt. 2).

1.2.1 *Looking for Work*

A central feature of the mobility of the workforce is "*werksoek*" - the process of "looking for work". At present, most of those in the process of looking for work base themselves at the larger settlements of the former Hereroland East, Epako or the government farms and resettlement camps, the latter having been established because of the highly visible groups of unemployed Ju'/hoansi living on the roads.

The process of looking for work is a difficult and arduous one for most as it involves travelling the long distances from farm to farm asking for work while also having to return "home" in order to get food and the like. The process is made even worse by the fact that work seekers are frequently broke, not having received severance pay. One worker described the process very eloquently:

As jy kry nie eers 'n boodskap dat hierdie Boer het werk vir jou, dan moet jy net loop van plaas tot plaas en vra. Maar op elke plaas, jy kry die selfde: "Geen werk hier; geen werk hier, geen werk hier". En wat kan jy doen?

Vokol! Ek het beeste en bokke gehad en nou het ek niks omdat hulle was hier by die reservaat se mense gesteel en ek moet net hier sukkel-sukkel.

If you don't get word that there is work for you at a specific farm, then you must just walk from farm to farm and ask. But at every farm, you get the same reply: "No work here, no work here, no work here." And what can you do? Fuck all! I had cattle and goats, but they were stolen by the people here in the reserve and now I must just stay here and struggle.

(Worker 21/02/95)

1.2.2 Employee Hierarchies

Associated with this mobility is the existence of a hierarchy in worker discourse expressing preference for different employers drawn broadly along ethnic grounds and further subdivided on individual grounds. Most workers express a preference for working for commercial farmers because pay, housing, food and sanitation are generally better. Within this group of commercial farmers, further divisions are made by workers: Germans are seen as less violent and abusive employers, whereas Afrikaans speakers are seen as more authoritative but more likely to give better wages. There is a widespread perception that farmers who give better pay and housing are more difficult to work for than those who pay badly - a belief not without foundation as those farmers who pay better demand a better return on their "investment" in labour. As one labourer points out:

Ons is nie bang vir die werk nie maar as die boer is te kwaai, hy raas met jou en vloek jou. As jy nie die soort man is wat hou an die raas nie, jy bly nie lank op die plaas nie. Dis ook die plaas wat goue lewe het, jy kry genoeg geld en die kos is genoeg vir jou maar jy bly nie lank nie.

INTRODUCTION

We are not frightened of work but if the farmer is too aggressive and he swears at you and if you are the sort of man that doesn't like to get hassled, you don't stay long on the farm. It's also the farm where the money is good enough and the food is enough for you, but you don't stay long.

(Worker 18/11/94)

This hierarchy is then further subdivided along the lines of individual farms and with farmers being categorised as "good baas" or "bad baas". Given the experience of individuals on particular farms there is some conflict about which farms are better and which are worse, but there are certain farms which stand clearly above others in the rankings and some which stand clearly below. Despite these preferences, the worker is ultimately at the mercy of circumstance and will usually take work wherever it is offered and move on if conditions are too unbearable. One well-established and unusually aware commercial farmer elaborates about employee mobility with reference to some of his colleagues' treatment of employees:

Jy kan vir my NS10 000 of NS20 000 gee elke maand maar as my werkgewer vloek my en slaan my elke dag ek sal ook loop!

You can give me NS10 000 or NS20 000 a month, but if my employer swears at me and hits me every day, I'll also walk!

(Farmer, 04/04/95)

Communal employers are not as highly thought of as their commercial counterparts. The reasons for this are in one sense straightforward: the average communal employer does not have the resources to provide housing, pay and other facilities to the standard of the wealthier commercial farmers. There are some people, however, who prefer the worse material conditions of working in communal areas because they dislike the rigour and discipline which commercial farmers

demand from their workers, as well as the coercive authoritarianism which is common on many farms.

Of the communal employers, it is a general rule that the employee is "ethnically different" from the employer and also of a lower hierarchical status. It would thus be unusual to find, for example, a Herero working for a Damara employer whereas it would not be surprising to see the converse. In general terms though, Tswana and Damara speakers are seen as the better communal employers in terms of pay, rations and facilities, but also in terms of the ease of the relationship. Herero speakers, who are the most prolific of the communal employers in the research area, are regarded as the worst. Usually a work seeker without special contacts or opportunities will look for work in this order, frequently biding time at Post 3 or one of the other larger Herero settlements, surviving on food, money or alcohol earned through doing the odd small job (c.f. chpt. 3).

The advent of independence in Namibia brought a marked change to the situation. The commercial farms lost their state ratified power in terms of labour legislation and this resulted in most farmers dramatically altering their employment practice to stay in line with the new Labour Act passed in 1992. At the same time, following independence questions were raised concerning the status of the communal land farms which still remain unresolved leaving communal farms in a liminal zone. This liminality has meant that as yet, labour practice in the communal area is still dominated by the informal systems which evolved during the apartheid period and the lower level labour on which it came to depend (c.f. chpt. 3).

*

*

*

I have divided this paper into three broad areas: in the first two chapters I look at farming in the commercial and communal districts respectively, including how wider political and economic forces shape the dynamics in these areas; and in the third section I draw together these two areas looking at the ways in which they are linked as well as at certain issues which apply to both areas, such as grazing for labourers and processes of labour complaints.

Chapter 2

THE COMMERCIAL FARMS

Although most farms in the commercial farming areas of the Omaheke are white-owned, there is an ever-increasing proportion of black (mainly Herero) farmers, buying up commercial plots (c.f. Adams et al, 1990). There is also a huge disparity between farms and farmers: some farming families own as many as four or five farms totalling more than 20 000 hectares, whereas others may have only one farm of about 3 000ha. Larger farmers may well diversify operations, establishing shops and setting aside large portions of their land for game management or other pursuits.

This diversification of operations does not do much to deflect the dominance of cattle farming as an activity within the area, although factors such as the current drought, which farmers claim is the worst in living memory, may do something to change this. In an average year, farmers expect around 400-500mm which is sufficient to maintain the viability of their cattle operations at a grazing density of around one large stock unit (LSU) for between 10 and 12ha.

From the period of colonisation onwards, commercial ranching in Namibia has been a tricky activity, especially given the high aridity and variable rainfall experienced over much of the country. As a consequence, settler farmers were often buoyed above water through state assistance in the form of loans, subsidies and other kinds of aid (ibid pp. 52-56). In conjunction with this material assistance, a panoply of labour-related legislation as well as policies for reserves and later homelands, served to provide a steady flow of cheap labour for settler farmers which drastically improved the viability of these farms (c.f. Gordon, 1994). At the same time, these laws gave the farmer a great deal of state ratified power over their labourers: the Masters and Servants Proclamation (34/1920), for example, allowed for criminal penalties to be made for "withholding full effort", "desertion" and "unauthorised absence from work" (Gordon, 1994:3).

In many areas, due partially to the inadequacy of police services as well as the vast distances needed to be negotiated to report or deal with offences, many farmers dispensed justice themselves, the effect of which was the evolution of specific forms of farm "culture", centred around the authority of the *baas* as well as political and economic hierarchies of which, in the case of the study area, groups of generational farm workers occupied the lowest position.

The advent of independence in Namibia, has changed much in the commercial farming sector through the dismantling of much of the legislation which bulwarked the commercial farmer's previously privileged status. New legislation has gone some way to improve both the material and financial conditions of farm workers: housing is generally more acceptable and wages are much better than they were in the past. Nevertheless, many of the key features of pre-independence farm life still remain, and although diminished, the authority of the *baas* remains a defining feature of it.

2.1 The Farm as Space

The farm is more than a geographical space: it is a social space in which, given the context, certain social rules apply, and central to these rules are certain key symbols around which action is oriented, a key one being "*baaskap*".

2.1.1 "*Baaskap*"

In many senses, farms - particularly during the apartheid years - emerged as "total institutions" with little or no outside interference (c.f. Du Toit, 1992). Workers' mobility was highly restricted and consequently links articulated between workers on different farms were diminished where strong links might previously have existed. The key factors which mitigated against the emergence of farms as "total institutions" in any absolute sense were the mobility of the workforce, and later the development of a worker consciousness which opposed workers to bosses. At present, despite the existence of a workers' consciousness, a unified discourse addressing the aspirations of workers has not emerged in any realisable or cohesive form.

Tensions articulated on ethnic grounds, low self-esteem, alcoholism and cultural fragmentation all hinder such developments, thereby diminishing the status of the worker's voice (c.f. Sect. 2.3).

In contrast to this, in terms of the farmer's discourse, the farm is regarded as an absolute domain in which his voice is dominant and this dominance is represented through several symbols, the central one being that of *baaskap*. The "*plaas*" (farm) and the "*baas*" (boss) are mutually defining terms: the *plaas* is dominated by the *baas*, and the *baas* is not a *baas* without a farm. In the social or geographical context of the farm, workers must address their employers as "*baas*", but outside of the farm context, employers generally insist on being called "*Meneer*" (Mr or Sir). In contrast to this, the farmer will always address employees by their first name or in some cases by diminutive racial epithets. These naming practices serve to symbolise the relation between farmer and employee on the farm with the farmer as superordinate and the worker a subordinate, and they demarcate the social contexts of action in the categories *plaas* and non-*plaas*. In this sense then the "*plaas*" is a context in which certain forms of social action take place under the authority of the *baas*.

In tandem with this, very few farmers bother to learn or communicate with employees in their own languages. Although there are some farmers who speak some of the other local languages, Afrikaans has emerged as the dominant language of the farming block. Most workers are fluent in three languages and some as many as five, so Afrikaans is generally not the medium of conversation among workers when not in the presence of the *baas*. In the recent past the dominance of Afrikaans on farms was seen to represent the farmers' political, cultural and even racial superiority epitomised in the farmers' paternalism. On one level, farmers were reluctant to learn an "inferior" language, but on another they were "educating" their labourers by bringing to them a "modern" language. A further aspect of this lies in farmers' notions of civilisation and savagery through which the farmer emerges as an ambassador of enlightenment. He is, among other things, bestowing skills, knowledge and in some cases religious truth upon those who work for him. Perceptions of cultural, if not racial, superiority play a major role in the legitimisation of farmers' relations with workers, particularly in paternalistic terms. At present, although labourers see the advantages of Afrikaans as a regional *lingua franca*, it is seen as symbolic of their

dispossession at the hands of the whites. The use of Afrikaans between workers and *baas*, although a practical necessity, symbolises in both workers' and farmers' discourse, the farmer's ownership of the farm and his authority over it.

In conjunction with this, there is also the wider political symbolism which applies to *baaskap*. In terms of the oppositional discourses which were to emerge during the struggle for independence, Afrikaans and *baaskap* emerged as symbols in workers' discourse of their oppression - a factor which has played a marked role in the emergence of a nascent workers' consciousness. The currency of this symbolism is such that Herero farmers will usually forbid their workers to address them as *baas* in order that their employment relationships are not equated with those of white farmers.

A central tenant of *baaskap* is paternalism - a term which is applied more to some employees than others.(see below). The paternalism expressed by the *baas* embodies, in an ideal form, a series of rights and obligations between workers and the *baas*, with the *baas* occupying the position of a "father" figure dispensing discipline and advice while "providing" for his workers. Crucial to this discourse is the notion that the farmer "provides" for a worker who would otherwise have nothing and hence the worker should be grateful to the *baas* for what he or she receives. Because many workers are almost totally dependent on farm work for a living, it is in many ways true that the farmer is the prime provider for the worker, but at the same time, it is the farmer's position within the political economy that creates the conditions which demand the worker's dependence on the farmer.

The level of paternalism, while applying to all farm staff, applies differently to different ethnic groups - a fact which is evident in matters such as payment, delegation of responsibility and ultimately working practice. It is those workers who are deemed the most "primitive" who warrant the farmer's paternalism, whereas those who are sufficiently "civilised" are treated on a more professional basis. Inevitably it is the Ju'/hoansi and to a lesser extent the Damara who are most likely to fall under the umbrella of the farmer's paternalism, whereas Owambos, Kavangos and Hereros are less likely to tolerate or receive the farmer's paternalism. Much of the reason

behind the Hereros' "arrogance" in white farmers' discourse emerges out of the farmers' refusal, in some cases, to concede to the "superiority" of the *baas*. As will be made clear below, differing levels of paternalism applied along ethnic lines play a major role in determining the relationship between the *baas* and his workers.

What is crucial though, is that paternalism is central to how farmers understand their relationship with employees and not how workers understand their relationship with their *baas*.

2.1.2 Authority and Delegation

Unlike other commercial activities, farming management is centralised and workers are characteristically recipients of and not participants in decision-making concerning the farm. Although clearly variable from farm to farm, workers' opinions on matters are not generally sought, and in some cases not even tolerated. Even if workers feel that they have a better understanding of or a solution to a problem, they are loathe to offer their opinions on the given matter for fear of retribution from the *baas*:

Met jou baas, jy moet altyd versigtig wees. Jy kan nie seker wees wat hy sal doen nie. As jy iets sien wat verkeerd is, jy moet net jou mond toemaak en na hom kyk.

With your boss, you've got to be careful. You never can be sure what he'll do. If you see something that is wrong, then you must just keep your mouth shut and look at him.

(Worker 22/11/94)

Apart from fear of physical retribution, which is certainly no longer as common as it once was, fear of being fired is another factor behind workers' "obedience":

Op die plaas is jy nie op jou eie nie. Die eienaar sê "Maak so ...," en as jy dit nie doen, of jy klag, dan is jy in die pad.

On the farm you are not on your own [independent]. The owner says "Do this ...," and if you complain or don't do it, then you are on the road [fired].

(Worker 18/11/94)

On some farms, especially where the *baas* has other concerns, a *voorman* (foreman) might be appointed. The role of the foreman is to organise and distribute work on the farm. Foremen frequently receive slightly higher wages than other farm workers, but this is again dependent on the individual farm⁷. The foreman cannot act independently and whatever authority he has stems from the *baas*: a good foreman is considered to be someone who will carry out the *baas*'s instructions according to the *baas*'s specifications. In this sense, the foreman exists as an extension of the *baas*'s authority on whose will he acts; rather than having authority in his own right. On many farms the role of the foreman is contested and this frequently leads to conflict among labourers and accusations of "*witvoetery*" and other trickery.

On farms where the *baas* is an absentee, the foreman generally has a lot more freedom in that his actions are not under the constant scrutiny of the *baas*. Nevertheless, his power is strictly limited and if something unusual occurs, the worker is expected to telephone his *baas* immediately. The key difference between these farms and those with a live-in *baas* lies in the fact that workers are given more freedom to do a job in the way they would do it. One foreman describes his weekly meeting with his employer:

As hy kom, hy vra hoe die werk is. Hy sê, "Is jy klaar?"

Ek sê, "Ja ek is klaar."

Hy vra, "Is die beeste reg?"

⁷

I have heard of foremens' wages ranging from N\$30-N\$400 per month.

Ek sê, "Ja die beeste is reg, alles is reg, voer wat ek gegooi het is reg, water is reg, alles is reg."

Toe gaan hy weer terug.

When he [the baas] comes, he asks how the work is going on. He asks, "Are you finished?"

I say, "Yes I'm finished."

He says, "Are the cattle okay?"

I say, "Yes the cattle are okay, everything's okay, the fodder is okay, water is okay, everything is okay."

Then he goes back again.

(Foreman 24/02/95)

2.1.3 The "Witvoet"

There is frequently a degree of tension among workers on many farms, and this tension usually manifests itself in the person of the "witvoet" - a character common to many farms in the Southern African region (c.f. Du Toit, 1992).

The individual farm, being in some respects "closed" space, creates within it its own internal politics in terms of promotion, pay, treatment by the *baas* and the status of the individual worker. Since the *baas* is seen as the ultimate authority in the context of the farm, the *baas's* favour usually has tangible benefits for a worker, and hence some workers will attempt to win his favour through "betraying" fellow workers. Such a person is considered a *witvoet*:

Hy is skelm-wit. Hy is tussen die Boere. Jy sien nie dat hy wit is nie maar hy is wit daaronder sy skoene. Hy is n witvoet.

He is a "crooked" white. He is among the Boers. You don't see that he's white, but he is, underneath his shoes. He is a "white-foot".

(Worker 25/11/94)

The *witvoet* is usually characterised as a new employee on the farm - someone liable to upset whatever status quo has been established through seeking his own ends at the expense of the more established workers. Often an unexpected dismissal is blamed on the workings of the *witvoet*, who is prone to lie when necessary to meet his ends.

The role of the *witvoet* in worker discourse extends beyond the tensions and jealousies which might develop on a farm and into a realm where it emerges as a statement of workers' consciousness. The *witvoet* is seen to transgress the power hierarchies on the farm and through this "betray" his community, i.e. the other workers, because he is "*tussen die Boere*" (among the farmers/whites) - the people who in the context of life on the farm are the workers' defining Other.

In some cases it is clear that a person who has been labelled a *witvoet* by his co-workers may well be guilty of furthering his own ambitions at the expense of others, but in general, the term "*witvoet*" is used by workers to express tensions which develop between them, in many cases independent of the *baas* and his favours. It is a common feature of marginalised groups to take out tensions on people in a similar position and frame these tensions in the form of betrayal as in the case of the *witvoet*.

The *witvoet* thus serves to articulate workers understandings of their status as well as the fact that workers on the farm regard themselves as a separate community to the one in which the *baas* lives. So, while the *baas* describes the farm as an autonomous entity, despite the lack of union presence the workers see themselves as a group which cuts across the boundaries of individual farms.

2.2 Worker Discourses

Despite the fact that the farmer's voice is dominant, his discourse is but one of several which constitute the farm and the farm emerges as a contested space. The paternalism which has been seen to dominate farm life in Southern Africa exists as part of the farmer's rather than the worker's discourse. The term "*baas*", which in the context of the *plaas* symbolises the farmer's authority, is rarely used outside his presence. Rather, labourers tend to refer to their *baas* in his absence as "*die boer*" - a term laden with negative connotations while also indicating that the *baas*'s authority does not colonise every level of the worker's consciousness.

Indeed, it is clear that despite the paternalistic discourse of the *baas*, workers' discourse, when not in the context of the *plaas*, opposes itself to the farmers' discourse. Workers, especially generational ones, make counter-claims on the farm, frequently referring to it as "their place", a fact clearly illustrated by the Ju'/hoansi who make claims on specific farms as their *n!ores* (c.f. Sect. 1.2):

Hierdie plek is Ju'/hoan en Damara se plek. Hierdie is my n!ore.

This place is a Ju'/hoan and Damara place. This is my *n!ore*.

(Worker 24/02/95)

On another level, workers make claims in terms of knowledge of what is happening on the farm, as a foreman pointed out concerning his *baas*:

Op die plaas, hy dink hy sien alles, maar jy wat altyd op die plaas is, jy sien alles; jy is sy oë en sy hande.

The farmer thinks that he sees everything on the farm, but you, who are always on the farm, you see everything; you are his eyes and hands.

(Foreman 24/02/95)

This is a widely held perception among workers, who argue that their better "local" knowledge legitimates their claims to the farm in terms of their discourse. Except on farms where the farmers are absentees, workers' claims to superior knowledge of the farm are in many cases doubtful given firstly their mobility and secondly the long tenure of many farmers. Nevertheless, what this indicates is the opposition between farmer and worker in worker discourse - a conception which is clearly different to the incorporative paternalism of the farmer. Most significantly, it expresses both the vacuum of understanding between farmer and worker as well as the fact that the workers constitute their relationship with the *baas* in terms of class - opposing "*boer*" to "worker" but not in the paternalistic terms often expressed by the employer.

2.3 Labour Choice and Ethnicity

In Gebhardt's 1978 survey of The Social and Economic Status of Farm Labourers in Namibia, she hints at the role of ethnic stereotyping in the processes of farm labour practice:

Most farmers still in 1972-73 preferred Owambo labourers to other labourers for their steady routine type of work. Before the strike, they were regarded as "reliable" and "disciplined". They were preferably employed in the farmer's household or in the garden with cattle and sheep. San [Ju/'hoan] are regarded as "intelligent", "agile" and "technically able". The Damara are "servile", "submissive" and "diligent" ... and ... Hereros are least liked by farmer for their "arrogance"...

(Gebhardt, 1978:168)

There is a clear continuity between these stereotypes expressed to Gebhardt and those which still pervade the commercial farming areas today. In general, the ethnic traits applying to individual groups are held to be true by all the various segments of the commercial farming community, but there is variation from farm to farm as regards which group is seen to constitute the best workers. Some farms will, according to their choice, employ people from only one ethnic group, whereas others might have staff from different ethnic groups.

In the study area, Ju'/hoansi, Owambos, Kavangos and Damaras are the most abundant employees, with Hereros being less favoured because, as Gebhardt makes clear, farmers see them as "arrogant" despite having "no equal" as cattlemen (c.f. chpt. 1). Owambo and Kavango labourers are considered the best workers in terms of professionalism and confidence, but are also regarded as "expensive" and as a result of this are not necessarily the most sought after labourers. The relationship which is usually established between a farmer and an Owambo employee is done on a more businesslike platform than is the case for other workers. Frequently an Owambo speaker will be employed for specific tasks according to a specific agreement, and at the same time receive better wages than other workers who are engaged in all-round farm labour.⁸ It is also worth noting that there are considerably less labour complaints made by Owambo speakers than anyone else.

Ju'/hoan and Damara workers emerge as the labourers of choice in the study area. This is partly a result of the fact that they are, for the most part, generational farm workers and are well-versed in almost all aspects of farm life. Among these groups the skills passed from parent to child cover issues ranging from borehole mechanics to how to appease aggressive farmers. Further to this, Ju'/hoan and Damara speakers are cheaper workers, being almost totally dependent on the farms for minimum necessities (c.f. Sect. 4.1).

⁸ Although on many farms workers are paid the same, it is clear that on certain farms where ethnic groups are mixed, some groups will be better paid than others. One farm, for example, paid its Ju'/hoan workers N\$120 per month whereas the Owambo labourers received N\$200 per month.

2.4 Payment and Perceptions

Payment practices on farms are highly variable. I have come across workers who receive only rations and others who clear as much as N\$400 in a month⁹. Currently, the mean range of wages among those workers I interviewed is between N\$100 and N\$200 per month.

Part of the farmers' discourse is related to the maintenance of workers' welfare, a crucial aspect of which in the past was the giving out of rations, clothes and other such items in lieu of or in addition to pay. Wages, if given, were often paltry and frequently served as a token gesture although the migrant labourers strike served to change this, at least for Owambo-speaking labourers. In the case of Damara>Nama and Ju'/hoan workers, payment has always been low partly as a result of their "*domness*" (ignorance or stupidity) as well as, in the case of the Ju'/hoansi, the elaborate mythology constructed around them in Afrikaner discourse (c.f. Sect 4.2.1 and below).

In the past, farmers rationalised their low payment in terms of *their* perceptions of workers' perceptions of monetary economics. Workers were regarded as "too primitive" to understand the *real* value of money and hence payment in cash would be a useless endeavour - a belief which is still held to pertain to the "childlike" Ju'/hoansi. Further associated with this is how farmers interpret workers' constructions of what is valuable. In the case of most workers, this was generally seen in terms of the apparent value of livestock. Prior to independence, many farmers gave stock to workers as a "bonus" for their labour on top of the rations and whatever salary they may have received under the belief that such a gift had more value than money to the labourers. This usually took the form of a goat or a calf, often given at Christmas. As a result of this, some workers managed to develop herds of up to 40 head of cattle (often husbanding with the farmer's bull), although in general, workers' stock was not allowed to exceed certain limits and resulted in farmers buying and in the odd case taking their workers' stock from them (c.f. Sect. 4.3). In the

⁹ One worker I interviewed at Skoonheid Resettlement Camp who had left his job in December 1994 claimed to have received *no* cash payment at all from his former employer in the six years he worked there. All he received were clothes, rations, a total of four calves and the occasional cash for leave.

period since independence, less farmers are giving out such gifts partly as a result of labour legislation but also because farmers have less faith in the loyalty of their staff.

2.4.1 *Pay Scaling and Ethnic Constructions*

Despite changes in payment practices following independence, pay scaling is mediated on ethnic grounds. On many farms, especially those where the staff is constituted by people from several language groups, workers may all receive the same salary despite a widely held perception on the part of the Ju'/hoansi and Damaras that other workers *always* receive better pay. On many farms though, Ju'/hoan in particular and Damara workers do not receive wages which an Owambo or a Herero speaker might receive for equivalent work.

The reasons for this lie in farmers' constructions of ethnic categories pertaining to their workers as well as the economic security of the individual worker. Hereros, Owambos and Kavangos are generally the highest paid of the workforce - a factor pertaining to the fact that these better educated groups have developed higher expectations than the more marginalised and powerless Damara>Nama and Ju'/hoan groups. Those groups who are most marginal in terms of the regional political economy develop significantly lower expectations of minimum living standards than those who are better placed. Young Hereros, for example, have developed high expectations such that farm work in commercial areas is scorned because of its unprofitability (c.f. Chpt. 3). Similarly Owambo and Kavango migrant labourers demand a higher wage than the "generational farm workers" such as the Ju'/hoansi or the Damaras who will work for very little if need be.

The reason behind these workers' low expectations can be understood on one level as being a consequence of their landless status and their correlated inability to accumulate wealth or resources (c.f. 4.3). On another level, however, it relates to farmers' constructions of them as ethnic groups, a discourse which constitutes part of the political and economic forces through which the workers' status has emerged. The Ju'/hoansi, who are considered ill-equipped to deal with money and receive less than other workers, are spoken of as "primitive" and hence incapable of responsible action with their earnings:

Not with the others ... but the Bushmen are like children: you give them money on Friday and on Saturday it's gone again and he has a *moer* of a *babelaas* (a bad hangover). With the Bushmen, you must make sure they spend their money properly 'cos otherwise they'll just drink it.

(Commercial Farmer 02/01/95)

In the case of the Ju'/hoansi, this is further legitimated in terms of other ethnic stereotypes. There is a widespread belief that the Ju'/hoan aptitude for drinking and apparent irresponsibility is a result of the fact that "he [the Bushman] is no longer in his *natural* environment," where a "live for the day" attitude was appropriate. The Ju'/hoan's technical ability, which is highly regarded, is also seen to be a consequence of this. Thus some farmers claim that "it is for their own good" that Ju'/hoansi receive less pay than others. The result of this is a perception among Ju'/hoan workers that any money is better than no money, as one worker points out:

Ons dink nie op betaling nie, want ons weet dat ons mag nie. Die eienaar moet self sê hy kan vir jou N\$40 of N\$50 betaal en jy moet net "Ja" sê. As jy nie "Ja" sê nie kan jy maar gaan ander plek soek.

We don't think about pay because we know that we mustn't. The employer can say that he can give you only N\$40 or N\$50 and you must just say "Yes". If you don't say "Yes" then you can just go and look for another place [to work].

(Worker 26/03/95)

Such a statement is characteristic of the defeatism in generational workers' discourse. For these workers, the farms offer the only accessible opportunities in life: they have neither the knowledge nor the support structures of other groups who have ties to land outside of their work. The low

expectations emerge as part and parcel of the low self-image many farm-working groups have of themselves and the concomitant problems such as alcoholism.

2.4.2 *Work and Pay*

Overtime and Holiday Pay

Despite the fluctuations in payment for workers, there are several clear continuities in terms of payment practice. In general the working week for a farm labourer will involve working full days from Monday through Friday and a half day (usually) to 1pm on Saturday, with some workers engaging in essential duties on Sundays such a milking. The average working day as described to me involves working through the morning from 7am through to an hour's to two-hour lunch break and then continuing through the afternoon until 5pm or 6pm in summer and until dark in winter. Frequently though, work may continue until such time as the job at hand is finished. In a practical sense then, many workers work "overtime" during the week without additional financial remuneration, although hard workers may receive bonuses or favours from the *baas*.

Issues such as overtime have not as yet entered into farm worker discourse. Agreements made between employer and employee are almost always made in terms of monthly (or rarely weekly) payments. Overtime and other additional payments are not even considered in the agreement. If a worker feels that he is underpaid, he will usually signify his disapproval by leaving rather than complaining (c.f. Sect. 4.3).

On the other hand, if workers are given holiday leave, they will frequently receive payment for the month or so for which they are absent. This seems to have been a common practice on many farms for some time and paid leave is generally expected of a *baas* even if not discussed at the time of making a contract. Practices in how this payment is made vary from place to place. Frequently though, a worker will only receive such payment *once he has returned after his leave* - a tactic used by farmers in order to ensure the worker's return.

One issue which workers frequently raised was that of sick leave and medical assistance, as one worker explained:

Die grootste probleem vir ons plaswerkers is, as jy siek is is daar geen genade nie. En jy kan eerlik sê dat as jy siek is jy moet maar werk totdat die eienaar self kan sien dat jy siek is en teen daardie tyd is jy klaar swak.

The biggest problem for farm workers is that if you are sick there is no compassion. You can say that if you are sick, you must just work until the owner can see that you are sick. But by that time the sickness is already serious.

(Worker 16/02/95)

In farmers' discourse, one of the obligations of paternalism (in an ideal form) is to care for sick workers. I have heard several stories of some farmers driving workers to hospital in the middle of the night without a word of complaint and farmers' wives assisting as midwives on occasion, but equally so, I have heard of farmers refusing to acknowledge workers who are seriously ill as being ill until it is too late and farmers who have charged workers for the drive to the clinic or the hospital when such an exigency arises.

The physical health of many farm workers is declining as a result of poor nutrition, alcoholism and poor hygiene, especially in the case of the most mobile of the workforce - the Ju'/hoansi (Dr E. de Kok, personal communication). Consequently, there emerges an increased need to address workers' health. Although on many farms a clear understanding has emerged between workers and the farmer as regards medical needs, there appear to be as many farms where workers' health seems largely ignored. Part of the reason for this emerges from a widely held perception that workers are lazy and that most claims to sickness are attempts to dodge work. Although it must be true that workers do occasionally feign sickness, it must equally be true given the fact that

workers are frequently fearful of telling the *baas* that they are sick, that many times the *baas* is wrong.

The key issue here lies not in the extent to which a *baas* is prepared to help his workers, but the lack of clarity as to what obligations an employer has to sick employees. At present, farmers' attitudes range considerably and workers often out of fear of retribution sometimes work while ill.

Payment and Deductions

One system of payment which has emerged as an institutional feature of farm life is that of ration-giving. Ration-giving, usually in the form of food, tobacco and occasionally a "*dop*" (drink) was, during the early period of white farmer settlement, the principle form of payment, especially for Ju'/hoan labourers who were perceived neither to understand, nor to have any use for money. Overtime as cash payment became the norm on most farms, and rations still remained a central feature of farm life although in some cases with cash payments came deductions, and a worker's pay was frequently deducted to the value which the farmer placed on the rations issued. In some cases this left the worker with only a negligible cash sum, if any at all, at the end of the month.

The practice of ration deduction still continues on many farms today, although it must be said that I interviewed several workers who received rations on top of their agreed payment figure. Many farmers now run shops at which workers hold accounts, and whatever workers purchase is deducted from their end of month payment¹⁰. It is unusual for a worker to accrue large debts to his employer as farmers will rarely allow workers to accrue debts beyond what can be reasonably paid off in the short term, i.e. more than a month's salary. In terms of the Labour Act (Sect. 34(d) (i) and (ii)), no farm worker is under any obligation to use a farmer's shop. However, since workers will get goods wherever convenient and given the cost and difficulty of visiting another shop, workers will usually buy from their employers if the option exists.

¹⁰ In many cases, the amount deducted exceeds the stipulated maximum deduction of 33% from the workers' monthly pay (c.f. Labour Act, Sect. 36).

Another issue which emerges in terms of payment revolves around the issue of rent for workers' housing. As I have already made clear, living conditions for commercial farm workers are, as a general rule, considerably better than in the former reserve areas. Most farmers provide concrete housing and running water for labourers; in several cases I came across communal bathing facilities for workers and their families and in one case private facilities existed for each family¹¹. However, it is clear that several farmers deduct rent from workers' monthly pay in clear contravention of the terms of the Labour Act. Frequently what happens is that the salary agreed on between farmer and worker when the worker is employed is what the worker will receive at the end of the month following deductions for rations and rent. In other words, if the farmer pays out the previously agreed N\$200 per month to the worker, the ledger will register N\$600 in payment less N\$200 each for both rent and rations, a feature which benefits the farmer in terms of tax declaration.

¹¹ In the period 1987-88, the Department of Agriculture gave more loans to farmers for staff housing than any other category of loan. A total of R1 098 567 was given out for this purpose in 57 loans (Adams and Werner, 1990).

Chapter 3

THE COMMUNAL FARMS

Ek sien geen meer kanse in hierdie plek nie. Ek mors my tyd en my bloed.

I don't see anymore chances in this place. I'm wasting my time and my blood.

(=a'/ae, Epukiro Post 3, 02/02/95)

Post 3 lies roughly 10km from the large and furious-looking fence which demarcates the boundary between the former Hereroland East reserve and the largely white-owned commercial farming lands. It has become a major stopping point for farm labourers moving to or from commercial or communal lands looking for work. The town's population is dominated by Herero speakers, but has significant numbers of Ju'/hoan and other Bushman language speakers as well as a handful of Damara/Nama speakers.

There is also a growing population of migrant labourers from other communal areas (mainly Owambo and Kavango speakers) as well as several people from further afield¹². Most of these people have been working or looking for work in the commercial districts to the south and west of Post 3 and for one reason or another have headed for the communal lands in search of work, refuge or because they have nowhere else to go.

Towards the eastern edge of the town near the large cattle pens, there is a growing shanty town known locally as "*die lokasie*" or "*ozorondanda*" where most of those without work or working casually for small amounts of money gravitate and spend time drinking *tombo* (homemade beer), chatting and occasionally fighting. The most conspicuous group of drinkers at any one time are usually Ju'/hoan, who are considered by many other residents of Post 3 to be "a problem".

¹² I have had informants from as far away as Angola and South Africa

3.1 Factors Influencing Labour on Communal Lands

It is tempting to describe the communal areas in general terms, but to do so would be to create a spurious uniformity. Discourse among Herero speakers and other possible employers in communal areas is fragmented in terms of context and content. In the former Hereroland East reserve area, apart from party politically-based rivalries between those Herero speakers who label themselves Herero and those who label themselves Mbanderu, there are conflicts of interest between the richer and poorer farmers as well as rivalries between different farming associations and cooperatives. On top of this there are conflicts of interests between *ovaingure* (workers) who are generally outsiders in terms of Herero discourse and are thus labelled by the Herero as "*ovatua*"¹³.

In terms of labour practice, the reserve area is markedly different from commercial areas, and in many ways more complicated. Most labourers who end up in the communal areas or on government farms tend to be "surplus" from the commercial farms. Almost all my informants spoke favourably of life on commercial farms where housing, pay and perks are considered to be considerably better, and they claimed that moving to the reserve was almost always a last option. In this sense the reserve area, government farms and resettlement camps become a lower tier labour pool, where labour can be picked up cheaply and with little trouble by Herero or other communal or commercial farmers. Moreover, the fact that most potential labourers who end up at Post 3 are destitute means that they will be prepared to take on anything at almost any wage in order to get some cash, food or alcohol.

The experience of the reserve area for Herero speakers who come from commercial farming areas is, it should be noted, different from that of "*ovatua*". Returning Hereros not only have kinship and "cultural" ties in the area, but in many cases are themselves employers. There are, however,

¹³ The term "*ovatua*", meaning "non-Herero", has negative connotations. A recent trend to emerge is also the hiring of Herero-speaking Ovazemba from the north-east. I did not have the opportunity to interview any Ovazemba, but employers were well aware of their presence. Ovazemba are considered to be useful workers because firstly they are Herero-speaking, secondly they are pastoralists and thirdly they are "outsiders".

few Hereros who choose to work or look for work on the commercial farms as most are drawn to the allure of the city.¹⁴

3.1.1 Labour and the Household

At present, unemployment in the reserve area is high enough to be visibly conspicuous. Apart from the Ju'/hoansi who are always around, there are a number of young Herero speakers who hang around the shop and the new "Hair and Beauty Salon Night Club Shebeen House" with not much to do. Many young Herero speakers show little interest in continuing on their fathers' farms, preferring unemployment with the prospect of wage labour to working on the family farm, where they have no immediate rights over the livestock until such time as their father dies and hence, in many cases, no cash income. Many older Herero speakers lament the "state" of their youth, who are considered to be without initiative, lazy and in many cases criminal.

This highly evident generation gap, however, is of considerable significance in terms of economic practice. Cash and "modern" commodities have emerged as a far more important symbol among many younger Hereros, who as one man said to me are "more interested in televisions and luxury cars," than cattle. However, despite the lament of their elders, most young men still value cattle highly, although it clearly jostles for position among luxury cars and television sets in their value hierarchies. The crucial issue lies in the fact that the latter objects appear in the short term to be more accessible. All are aware that at some point they will inherit from their parents and, to a degree they rely on this. However, at the same time they are equally aware that working on the family farm is unproductive in terms of cash, with only some farmers giving out what amounts to, in their sons eyes, "pocket money". In this sense, not only is working on the family farm financially unrewarding in the short term, but also lowly valued as an activity. As one man (well out of earshot of his father) put it: "That work is the Bushmen's and Owambos'." Working on one's father's farm is seen as a last option and is tacitly regarded by some with outside cash incomes as a sign of failure, while simultaneously the ability to be able to acquire stock before one inherits is tacitly esteemed.

¹⁴ According to the University of Namibia's Social Science Division (SSD) survey of eastern communal areas. 7% of household heads were farm workers (Iken et al. 1994:41).

The net result of this is that children who might otherwise be economically valuable to the household are not contributing to it, and in certain cases where they are still dependent on the household, they can become a burden on its resources. This is further compounded by the fact that many children are away at school for much of the time, a factor of far more significance since the demise of apartheid and the advent of equal schooling.¹⁵ In both the short and long term this affects the dynamics of labour in the communal areas: in the short term because potentially productive householders are absent while at school, and in the long term because of the opportunities and ambitions that better schooling might offer, thus furthering the urban pull and the communal farmers' dependence on outside labour.

The "pull" of the urban centres on people in the communal areas is not a new thing. Part of the rationale for the establishment and continuation of these areas by the South West African Administration was the fact that cheap, primarily male, labour could be drawn from these areas and in this sense, made the more marginal household economies in the communal areas partially dependent on incomes (however small) generated out of the reserve areas. With the growth of the urban centres, it was most frequently the male household head who was drawn towards these centres, thus leaving a vacuum in the household economy which needed to be filled to ensure its viability and continuity.¹⁶ Thus building on hierarchies which predated European colonialism, ethnic minorities were drawn in to fill the gap created by the absence of male householders. As Edwin Wilmsen points out:

Ethnic minorities, San speakers in particular, played a critical role in providing a second tier labour pool, thereby releasing ... men for labour migration who might otherwise have been indispensable for household productive activities.

(Wilmsen, 1990:20)

¹⁵ An average of four children per household attend school. The mean number of children per household according to the SSD survey is 7 (6.9) (Iken et al. 1994).

¹⁶ According to the SSD survey, at the time of doing research 23% of household heads were absent. "Of this group, 41% are reported absent half of the time and 33% are absent most of the time" (Iken et al. 1994).

From this it is clear that the development of household demographics in Hereroland East plays a significant role in the constitution of the former reserve areas' labour market. There are several draw factors which have over time pulled economically active males away from the communal areas and this has served to create a lower tier labour force which was constituted primarily by "*ovathu*" (outsiders). Similarly, in other communal areas in the northern Omaheke, other ethnic groups who had tenure over an area also employed outsiders to fulfil the gaps that the political economy had made in household production. Tswana families at Epukiro R.K and other areas in the Omaheke have evolved similar labour systems, drawing in lower tier labour through which the household economy is maintained (cf. Wilmsen, 1988).

In terms of the evolution of the household there therefore emerges a "need" for a lower tier labour force to maintain the economic viability of several households whose running at the current level depends on the maintenance of an external income coupled with those incomes generated from small-scale farming activities. Moreover, in terms what is still the dominant discourse of prestige and power, cattle ownership and its related activities are of crucial importance and still play a major role in terms of the value systems espoused by many residents of the communal areas, thus making the maintenance of the household economy not only valuable on a purely "economic" level, but also on a socio-cultural level

This being said, it still remains to be seen to what extent such systems are used. Although many households that I spoke to had outside labour for all or part of the year, there were some which relied solely on labour drawn from the household or family. I came across several Herero families where, for example, children weren't sent to school, partially so that they could remain to engage in household economic activities. In many cases these tended to be poorer families, who claimed not to be able to afford the necessary school fees.¹⁷

¹⁷ The fact that some households rely almost entirely on the labour of junior kinsmen poses certain problems in terms of defining the role of "labourer" in the communal areas. This is because, in many cases a labourer, especially for smaller employers, is frequently treated as "one of the family" (cf. Sect. 3.3) in all respects save inheritance rights. A worker's wages are frequently of the same amount that a Herero working for his father might receive in "pocket money". For the purposes of this paper I refer to "labourers" in the communal area as people with no entitlement to any of the assets owned by the household for which he or

3.1.2 Commercial Labour

A key issue in the communal areas is the gap between rich and poor. Among Herero speakers, this gap is very evident and features highly in poorer people's discourse. It is articulated, amongs other things, in terms of the relationship between farming and the maintenance of the domestic economy. Whereas poorer farmers generally talk of their farming operation in terms of the *maintenance* of their household's economic viability with respect to subsistence as well as prestige, richer farmers tend to be more concerned with the *creation* of more wealth.

Although in terms of numbers the bulk of labour in the communal areas is taken on by the household, there are several larger farmers who may employ as many as seven or eight full-time labourers to tend to their farming operations. Although many poorer Herero as well as many other poorer residents of the area (Owambo and Ju'/hoan) assert that wealthier farmers are more "stingy" and prone to cheat their labourers than the poorer farmers, I found this generally not to be the case. The richer farmers generally run their operations on a more commercial tack, offering contracts and giving better salaries (I heard of salaries ranging from N\$160-N\$300 per month) after deductions for rations. However, these farmers tended to compete more with commercial farmers than the poorer communal farmers in terms of labour and in most cases employed people who had extensive experience on the commercial farms. As one farmer pointed out in connection with employing Ju'/hoansi:

As jy wil hê dat 'n Boesman moet vir jou werk, dan moet jy versigtig wees, en seker maak dat hy kom van die boer se plase af omdat hulle ken die plaaswerk beter as die anders en hulle sal ook nie weggaardloop nie soos die ander Boesmans nie.

she is working. In other words, a worker is an individual admitted to the household specifically for labour and does not have any power in household decision-making processes.

If you want a Bushman to work for you, then you must be careful and make sure that he comes from a commercial farm because they know about farm work better than the others and they will also not run away like the other Bushmen.

(Employer 19/02/95)

In general, labourers who have extensive experience in the commercial farming block are regarded as more reliable and competent and thus command higher wages. At the same time this offers for the workers the option of comparatively high wages without the strictness typical of many of the white-owned farms.

A great deal of the rationale behind the "commercialisation" of labour among the richer farmers lies in the land issue. The fact that the status of communal lands remains an unresolved issue as far as government is concerned means that farmers are keenly aware of the liminal status of the communal lands as a category of tenure. As a result of this, fencing is taking place on a large scale, with farmers claiming "legal" tenure to whatever land they are fencing. As one such farmer said in response to my enquiries as to what would happen were someone to graze their cattle without authorisation on his fenced land: "I would take him to court." Farmers are keenly aware of the categorical distinction between communal and commercial lands, and rationalise their fencing in terms of the "commercialisation" of their operations and their desire to achieve for these the legitimacy accredited by government to the commercial farms.

This has a significant impact on the dynamics of labour in the communal areas. The increased commercialisation of operations implies the commercialisation of labour on the communal lands where larger farmers compete with commercial farmers for the best trained of the labour force. To do so would require the offering of competitive salaries to those given in commercial areas. In this sense the initial move toward commercialisation among some farmers creates the conditions for the reproduction of this system: the commercialisation of farms requires better labourers (among other things such as land, fencing, equipment, etc.), which in turn requires competitive

work conditions, which in turn requires the increased revenue gained from the commercialisation of operations.

3.2 Forms of Labour in Communal Areas

The forms of employment in the reserve area can be broadly divided into three categories, each of which deserves further explanation.

3.2.1 Contract Labour

The recent surge in fencing in the communal areas has had a degree of impact on the labour situation, especially in terms of short-term contract labour. Most contract agreements relate to the activity of fencing or looking after cattle which are grazing away from the homestead. In general a verbal contract is made with a price agreed upon for the specific job to be done. This sort of labour will usually only be taken on by larger farmers who can afford the associated expenses. In general these are agreements made between and followed up by males.

These jobs therefore require a degree of specialisation in connection with the task at hand. In the case of Owambo employees, they will usually refuse to do work which is outside the specification of the contract. However, once under contract Ju'/hoan employees frequently engage in other household activities.

Usually such jobs are taken on by migrant Ju'/hoan workers or Owambos, the latter being generally preferred for cattle work and the former for fencing and domestic work. Pay for such work is highly variable: I have heard of contracts agreed on for what amounts to two months' work for anything from N\$40 to N\$1 800. Moreover, initial agreements frequently do not tally with final payments.

3.2.2 Salaried Labour

In most cases this will again take the form of a verbal contract where both parties agree on a monthly salary. Salaries are generally low (N\$50-N\$75 net per month for Ju'/hoansi and N\$150-N\$400 for Owambo speakers or some "farm Ju'/hoansi")¹⁸, although a degree of patronage is often expected by the labourer in return for his services. This will usually take the form of food, drink or housing. In many cases those employed in this way occupy the place of an absent householder who works outside the former reserve. Frequently the employer will deduct expenses for food from the salary, and it is not uncommon for workers to be in debt to their employers.

Normally in this relationship the labourer will be attached to the household and engage in whatever tasks are necessary. This usually involves looking after cattle and goats, and doing whatever other jobs need to be done, such as fence repairing and other domestic chores. A former employee of a high-ranking Mbanderu household explains:

Ek het al die beeste werk en die draadwerk vir hom gedoen, maar die geld kry ek nie in my hand nie - net die kos, by sy vuur ge'et. Gedurende die dag doen ek al verskillende werk en as ek klaar was het hulle vir my drink gegee. Dik gedrink, ek slaap, maar vroeg staan ek op - omtrent ses uur se kant - en maak ek die vuur. Dan staan die vrou ook op en ek maak koffie en drink ons klaar. Daarna moet ek weer gaan werk.

I did all the livestock work for him and the fencing, but I never got any money, just the food, which I ate with the family. During the day I did all sorts of different work and when I was finished they'd give me drink (tombo). Later I would be drunk and fall asleep, but I had to wake up early - around six in the morning - to make the fire. Then the wife would get up and

¹⁸ It is often the case that some labourers will take on the work simply for food. In other cases, even when a salary is agreed upon, it may not be paid, leaving the worker with no option but to remain dependent on his or her employer for food.

I would make coffee and when we were finished with the coffee, I had to go and work again.

(N/aice 16/03/95)

In terms of this sort of work different relations exist between employer and employee, depending on ethnic perceptions (see below). Owambos, who are more highly valued labourers, receive in most cases better payment and are treated with respect by employers, whereas for Ju'/hoansi conditions are generally worse.

Although made between males, the employment agreement is often administered by a female householder, especially if male householders are absent.

3.2.3 *Small Task Labour*

A great deal of labour in the communal areas takes this piecemeal form, especially in the larger settlements to which unemployed people gravitate. These jobs are generally small and involve maybe an hour's work, such as fetching water or firewood, milking or herding livestock and various household-related activities. Payment is made per job and often takes the form of food, alcohol or a small amount of money. Those who engage in these activities are generally the worst off, living and working from hand to mouth. Most people doing this sort of work claim it to be only a temporary measure while they move between other jobs. Usually such small jobs are given by women in whose sphere of responsibility these tasks geenerally fall.

*

*

*

Although I have divided labour in terms of the above three categories, these categories are by no means clear-cut. Small task jobs are frequently agreed upon in terms of a contract for a specific period or in terms of a salary, and contract labour may be taken on while the individual is still performing small tasks for another household.

Despite this, many people, especially Ju'/hoansi, have been engaged in such activities as their primary source of income for as many as 10 years, doing just enough work in some cases to stay drunk for the rest of the day.

3.3 Good Worker, Bad Worker, Ethnicity and Labour

Although almost all labourers fit into the categories of "outsider" and "worker", there are further subdivisions within these categories relating to ethnic groups and forming a hierarchy in terms of labour choice and practice.

3.3.1 Labour Hierarchies

Owambo and Kavango migrants are the most highly valued of the workforce, but they are consequently more expensive than other labour and in this sense are at the top of the hierarchy. In general Owambo-speaking labourers are better treated, commanding much higher wages. Usually these labourers are male, and as such fulfil the economic role of the son or male household head in the household employing him. If the worker is young, he may address the employer in kinship terms (*Tate* or *Mama*), but frequently the relationship is on more equitable terms with employer and employee addressing one another by their names. Moreover, Owambo speakers are generally in a better bargaining position in terms of wages (I have heard of wages ranging between N\$160- and N\$400 per month) and are less likely to be exploited.

The treatment of Owambo-speaking labourers on more equitable terms stems from two perceptions on the part of the employers: firstly the perception of an Owambo work ethic in terms of which Owambos are regarded as reliable and hard working; and secondly the perception that they are not as "*dom*" (ignorant) as the Ju'/hoansi and are therefore harder to cheat or abuse. As one employer put it: "With the Owambos, it never happens. They are too clever."

Although it is often the case that the relationship between employer and employee is more equitable in this context, the employee is still seen as part of a lower tier labour force and is

treated as such. In several instances Owambo-speaking employees are young and desperate for work. In these cases, the household will take the Owambo in as a junior kinsmen - save for inheritance and political rights - thus establishing a relationship framed in a paternalist discourse, in which the employee is treated as a son.

Hierdie Owabotjie is n mooi werker. Hy het ses maande verlede hiernatoe gekom en het niks gehad nie. Nou het hy 'n huis en kos. Kyk na sy klere. Hy was amper kaalgat toe hy hienatoe gekom het. Ek het vir hom sy klere gekoop en nou is hy net soos 'n seun.

This young Owambo is a good worker. When he came here six months ago, he had nothing. Now he has got a home and food. Look at his clothes. When he came here he was practically naked. I bought him those clothes and he is now just like a son.

(Farmer 29/02/95)

This paternalism is qualitatively different to that which constitutes the relationship between Herero and the Ju'/hoan. In this case, the employee may break out of the status of a perpetual junior kinsman.

Although I came across several instances where Owambo speakers had serious complaint about their employers, conditions were comparatively good, most people saving up the bulk of their earnings and heading to their homes for a month each year, while some others have become permanent residents of the former reserve area.

The Ju'/hoan's relationship with Hereros is somewhat more complex. Although some Ju'/hoan, especially those brought up in the commercial area, are highly valued as labourers, Herero discourse concerning them is heavily paternalist making a central issue of the Ju'/hoan's apparent inability to look after him or herself and their congruent "unreliability". This

unreliability is spoken of on several levels. Firstly the general belief is that when employing a Ju'/hoan the chances are that he will run off in the next couple of days to "hunt or visit" as one Herero informant puts it, despite the fact that there is a dearth of game in the areas South of Gam and that hunting is not a major, or even highly regarded economic activity amongst the Ju'/hoan in this area. One of the wealthier farmers in the communal areas put his concerns about Ju'/hoan labour very clearly:

Kyk, die Boesmans is nie goeie mense op die werk nie. Hulle werk nie goed nie. Kyk, byvoorbeeld as 'n Boesman werk by my een dag dan die volgende dag is hy weg en daarna kom hy terug om vir kos te vra. Of miskien hy werk twee dae en dan is hy weg. Met die Owambos dit is 'n bietjie verskil. Hulle werk goed.

Look, the Bushmen are not good workers. If, for example, a Bushman works for me on one day, then the next day he leaves, but later he comes again to ask for food. Or, perhaps he works for two days and then he goes. With the Owambos it is different. They are good workers.

(Farmer, 17/03/95)

At the same time, the Ju'/hoansi are perceived to be useless with money especially as regards their apparent partiality to alcohol, *tombo* in particular, which many Ju'/hoansi appear to spend a great deal of time consuming. This is no minor problem, and it is not uncommon for some of the more desperate Ju'/hoansi to sell off their government food rations in return for cash which goes to booze, thus frequently leaving hungry children or dependants. As a result of this, many Herero employers express apparent concern for these people and will usually give them small task labour as an act of charity.

You can just say, "Hey Boesman! Get up and get me some water and I will give you porridge," and he goes 'cos what else can he do? He is hungry.

(Farmer's wife 27/02/95)

This "charitable" paternalism clearly affects labour practice when a Ju'/hoan is taken on in a more formal labour agreement. As one employer explains:

To some people - if you want to take care of those people - you say, "I'm going to pay you N\$200 each month," but the day after you have paid him he has no money left and is asking for food, so what we try do is give them less money and more food.

(Farmer 25/03/95)

In this sense the relationship is totally one-sided and Ju'/hoan employees are not credited with the capacity to make "rational" decisions. The employer is not only in control of his employee, but also in control of what the employee does with his or her money.

However, the Ju'/hoansi do not interpret their relationship with Herero employers in such terms. Rather, they view it as exploitative and one-sided and they are continuously suspicious of Herero motives. Indeed, Herero paternalism and Ju'/hoan submission make the situation ripe for abuse and it is on these abusive grounds that the Ju'/hoansi understand their socio-economic and political status in the communal areas.

By its very nature, this paternalism benefits employers who are in a position to dictate the terms of the relationship. Such paternalism, which implies superior knowledge on the part of the employer, means that communication between employer and employee is minimal in terms of the economics of the relationship (see below). The fact that Ju'/hoansi do not understand the rationale

behind Herero payment practice exacerbates their understanding of the relationship as exploitative.

Beyond the apparent charitable paternalism there is a second discourse relating to the payment of Ju'/hoansi and this is framed in commercial terms. The apparent unreliability of Ju'/hoan labour and lack of skill serve as rationalisations for what frequently amounts to the non-payment of employees and this in turn also works on two levels: on the first level this relates to the amount of work apparently done by the employee and is usually concerned with salaried labour. One Herero informant whom I tackled on the issue of non-payment of his staff rationalised this eloquently:

Kyk, jy betaal die mense elke maand maar die mense doen hulle werk nie. Kyk soos onse werk met die werkers. Jy kan vir hom sê jy werk net drie ure per dag, jy moet net die bokke uitjag, net so middagtyd kom, water vir die bokke gee ons. As jy dit optel, die man werk 24 ure per maand. As jy dit uitwerk, dis net so 'n dag se werk. Maar hulle klag.

Look, you pay the people every month, but they don't do their work. When they work, you can say that they only work three hours a day. They've got to put the goats out to pasture, and come midday water them, etc. If you add this up, the man works for only 24 hours per month. This is only a day's work. But they complain.

Notwithstanding the evident inability of this informant to add, this is not an uncommon story. A price will be agreed upon by the employer and the employee, but the employer may well, through such rationalisations, take advantage of the employee's marginal status and quite simply renege on the initial verbal contract.

The second way that non-payment is rationalised is in terms of food rations. It is fairly standard practice for employers to provide food for an employee although the amount of food given differs from person to person. What is equally standard practice is for employers to subtract the cost of

food from the agreed salary. This again leaves a lot of scope for abuse. I came across many cases where after a period of labour the worker ends up with nothing at all or even in debt to his employer. Labourers who are illiterate cannot and do not keep track of what they have consumed, especially as they often eat with their employer's household. From what I can gather, it seems to be common practice for employers to quite simply write off an employee's salary at the end of the month without keeping any records of what the employee may have consumed. In some cases this establishes a relationship in which the employee is in no position to leave because he is indebted to the employer while simultaneously being dependent on him for food. I came across one Tswana (Kgadijadi) man who'd been working for one family for three years as a result of such debts. When I asked him what the debt was for he replied, "*Ek weet nie maar ek skuld hulle nog, hulle sê so.*" ("I don't know why I'm indebted to them, but they tell me this is so.")

Although only few relationships are so blatantly exploitative, there seems to be a fair amount of this sort of thing going on, especially with contract and salaried labourers.

The Ju'/hoansi claim that there is nothing they can do to break the bonds of their underclass status. Most are convinced that there are sinister goings on and that others are continually trying to "keep them down" through trickery, exploitation and magic.¹⁹ Although I have no means of working out whether the latter is practiced or not, there does seem to be a fair amount of the former two practices imposed on Ju'/hoansi and other workers. The amount of complaints made to police at Post 3 in connection with non-payment are numerous, and many more are not reported. Moreover, the police usually refer such cases to the Chief Labour Officer in Gobabis, and with most complainants unwilling or unable to make the arduous journey to Gobabis and navigate their way through "*Die Kantore*" ("The Offices") (c.f. Sect. 4.1), these are not tallied into the labour complaint statistics. Unfair treatment by employers is central to Ju'/hoan discourse on Hereros, as one Ju'/hoan explaining a *typical* labour scenario explained:

¹⁹ One common belief among the Ju'/hoansi at Post 3 and Post 10 is that the Hereros "*toer*" (doctor) the tombo. As one Ju'/hoan put it to me, "*Hulle toer ons te veel ... hulle sit gif in die tombo en as ons slaap hulle kan alles van ons steel. Hulle is jaloers.*" ("They magic us. they put poison in the tombo and when we sleep [after drinking] they can steal everything from us. They are jealous people.")

Hierdie reservaat se mense is swak, hulle verneuk jou te veel. Kyk, as hulle eers jou vat, julle stem op n 'prys vir die werk en julle gaan werk en daarna, terwyl dat jy klaar met die werk is, is daar groot stryery dan kry jy nie die prys wat jy gevra het.

The people in this reserve are bad. Look, when they [the Hereros] get you, you first agree on pay for the work. You go and work and after that, when you are finished, there is a lot of hassle and you don't get the money you initially agreed on.

(Worker 21/02/95)

A similar view to this was expressed by *every* Ju'/hoan whom I interviewed and this clearly has a significant impact on the perpetuation of the exploitative nature of this relationship. In the first instance, labourers treated in such a way work under duress or out of necessity for material survival rather than to "make a living". This means that workers are not prepared to work hard for lack of incentive and thus perpetuate the image that the communal employers have of them as "bad workers", thus ensuring the workers' continued marginalisation through the further perpetuation of this stereotype. In the second instance this breeds feelings of helplessness on the part of these labourers who describe the relationship as exploitative but feel that there is no way to break out of its limitations.

The perpetuation of these images through practice is not done in straightforward economic terms. Ju'/hoansi in particular are highly suspicious of Hereros, who they consider to be "*baie jaloers*" (very jealous) and people who are even capable of "*toor mekaar*" (magic one another) without much provocation. Indeed, the image that Ju'/hoansi have of Herero employers is such that it goes some way to explain their apparent unreliability, irresponsibility and penchant for leaving the minute a better option shows itself. This ability or desire to leave, however, merely serves to reinforce the employer's image of the worker as unreliable and reproduces the system through which they remain economically and socially marginalised.

3.3.2 Conflicts Among Workers

The problems experienced by "ovangure" frequently lead to tensions between them. The fluidity of the labour scene in communal areas means that such tensions cannot find their locus in figures such as the "witvoet". Rather they are articulated through an insider/outsider dichotomy built around the idea of the "inkomer". The "inkomer" emerges as the locus of tensions among "ovangure" and the term is utilised differently in different contexts. In some instances an "inkomer" will be an Owambo or a Kavango, designated so because of having no "indigenous" ties to the area, and in other instances the "inkomer" may be a Ju'/hoan coming from a commercial farm.

Nevertheless, among the crowd at the *ozorondanda*, the "inkomers" remain an issue:

Dis van independies af dat hierdie inkomers het begin om ons se werk te vat en nou het ons niks. Ons moet net sukkel-sukkel van plek tot plek.

It's since independence that all these "inkomers" started taking our work and now we have nothing. We just struggle-struggle from place to place.

(Worker 17/02/95)

Despite the contextuality of the boundary between "inkomer" and legitimate resident/worker, the *inkomer* boundary is most consciously and frequently articulated by Ju'/hoansi who construct it around ties to land which precede both Herero and Mbanderu occupation, and they see these ties as legitimising a prior claim to whatever work is on offer in the reserve, thus making the usually Owambo-speaking "inkomer" a focus of Ju'/hoan ill-feeling.

3.4 Working Conditions

3.4.1 Housing

The fact that communal areas were considered to be a different economic space to commercial areas meant that legislation designed for the agricultural sector did not apply in any practical sense to the communal areas. Moreover, the relationships between the two areas, with one being peripheral in terms of state processes and the other central, led to the evolution of two qualitatively distinct but interrelated sets of labour practices.

Despite the liminal status of communal areas as "communal", labour practice remains distinct from those of commercial lands. The fact that these areas are "communal", even if by name only, means that people do not expect that labour legislation which is seen as designed for commercial areas could be applicable. This means that very little attention is paid to "basic" issues such as housing and water, and more complex issues such as "overtime" and "holiday work". This is further exacerbated by the fact that labour in the communal areas was constituted by a lower tier labour force working for people whose own living conditions do not conform to those stipulated for workers in the Labour Act.

Housing depends on the nature of the relationship between employer and employee as well as the nature of the work. Those people working away from the household at a cattle post often receive no housing and sleep "*in die bos, net soos diere*" ("in the bush, just like animals"). Usually workers are given or asked to construct their own housing. Often a worker and his dependants - in the case of Herero employers - are given the empty house of a junior kinsman, depending on how the relationship is articulated. Frequently though, the employee, especially if he has dependants with him, will live apart from his employers on the periphery of the main houses in a shack built by himself or his family. This is usual for Ju/'hoan labourers who are not as a rule admitted to the inner sanctums of the household.

3.4.2 *Additional Payments*

As a general rule there are no payments made beyond those suggested in the initial agreement. No overtime is paid or calculated and workers do not expect it. Moreover, there are no special considerations for weekends or time off except in the case of larger employers who, like their commercial block counterparts, give time off from Saturday lunch time till Monday morning.

Concerning such issues as maternity leave or holidays, there are clearly no formal procedures. In a few cases I came across, workers were taken back by employers whom they may have left for a while, but in general it appears that once a worker leaves, it is for good, and another employee may be taken on. Some farmers said that if labourers wanted leave, it would be given after a reasonable length of time. The reason for this is usually phrased in terms of the unreliability of workers who are prone to disappear at any time:

Bushmen maybe leave after one month to visit or to hunt and they are going to leave your cattle, so you say "No, you can't visit after two months. You can perhaps do it after 11 or 12 months. Then you can get some leave."

(Employer 03/03/95)

Albeit that this statement was made regarding Ju'/hoan labourers, several Owambos whom I met had similar problems with leave and found that they would lose their jobs after they had returned having visited family.

Chapter 4

OTHER ISSUES

4.1 Labour Complaints

It is clear that since independence workers have become aware that, to a degree, the state is in a position to offer some sort of security and minimum conditions of employment, but beyond this people are unsure as to what rights they may have and what the necessary procedures might be to implement and administer these rights. Also, despite government efforts, the processes of making a labour complaint are for many of the workforce difficult.

The labour complaint statistics at the Gobabis Government Offices suggest that there has been no marked change in the number of complaints filed on a yearly basis, but these figures are ultimately misleading if taken at face value, for several reasons.²⁰ On the surface, these figures appear to suggest that labour complaints have maintained a steady average from the opening of the Labour Office in Gobabis - a point which might indicate that since independence workers have developed no greater awareness of their rights and that employers have not changed their practices.

Although all workers I interviewed were aware that channels did exist through which they could file complaints, few were aware of what this involved, or on what basis they could make a complaint.

²⁰ The figures for agricultural sector labour complaints in the Omaheke office were 98 in 1991, 92 in 1992, 110 in 1993 and 84 in 1994. These figures are not completely accurate given the fact that formats for compiling the statistics have changed over the period 1990-1994.

4.1.1 "Domness"

Hulle dink ek is net 'n Boesmans; 'n ding van die bos. Hulle dink ek is dom."

They think I am just a Bushman; a thing of the Bush. They think I am stupid.

(Worker 21/02/95)

Although the term "*dom*" can be straightforwardly translated as "stupid", its connotations and implications in this context extend far beyond straightforward "stupidity". To be "*dom*" is to be "uneducated" and in the context of labour discourse, to be unaware of one's rights or unable to utilise or manipulate the protection of the state to one's own benefit. In other words to be "*dom*" is to be ignorant and hence exploitable. Although the term is used to describe different people in different contexts it is most evidently central to discourses concerning the Ju'/hoansi, among whom "*domness*" is considered to be a key defining symbol. This "*domness*" is openly articulated by some workers who see it as significant to their marginal status. One Ju'/hoan, talking about a farm I wasn't able to access where according to rumour people were working without pay, explained:

Hulle is Boesmans en hulle is bietjie dom. Jy kan 'n Boesman laag betaal omdat hy is dom.

They are Buhmen and they are a little "*dom*". You can pay a Bushman low wages because he is *dom*.

(Worker 25/02/95)

A further angle to this is that since workers consider themselves "*dom*", this builds up a clear belief that they are being ripped off the whole time, even when this is clearly not the case - a factor exacerbated since the advent of independence and the legal insistence on pay ledgers. Workers are keenly aware of the implications of putting their mark on the ledger in terms of

the legal ratification of the payment transaction: once your mark has been made, the transaction is legal and proper, according to how it is noted in the book.

Despite the fact that the asserted aims of this procedure are to *clarify* and make accountable the payment procedure, from the point of view of the worker it simply confuses issues. With illiteracy as widespread as it is among agricultural labour, the use of ledgers means that the transaction takes place through a medium foreign to the bulk of the labourers, thus even further alienating them from the process. As a result of this, many workers feel that they are being cheated and that because they have put their mark in the ledger, they have no further legal recourse. As one man explained:

Jy het klaar dai geld gekry en ondergeteken en jy ken dat jy het nie die regte geld gekry nie maar die boek lieg nie; daar is niks wat jy kan doen.

You've already put your mark in the ledger and received the cash and you know that you haven't got the right money, but the book doesn't lie; there is nothing that you can do.

(Worker 21/11/94)

For the most part, these beliefs appear to be unwarranted. What is significant though is what they represent. Such suspicions clearly demonstrate the lack of clarity in communication between farmer and worker, as well as the fact that for these measures to work it is necessary to make and enforce procedural provisions for illiterates.

Tied to this, the process of making a complaint is daunting to many labourers, who have problems with matters as small as finding the Labour Office, because they are unable to read signs. This, coupled with the practical difficulties involved in making the frequently arduous journey to the Government Offices in Gobabis, makes the prospect of laying a complaint an unpleasant and frequently unrewarding one at best. As one informant put it, "*Ons is bang vir*

Die Kantore." ("We are scared of The [Government] Offices.") Moreover, since most complainants are unaware of their legal status in such matters, and of the legal issues associated with their complaint, the complaint filed is frequently not connected to the issue originally brought to the office's attention, with most complaints being followed up in relation to non-payment of severance pay.

In terms of employers' discourse, "*domness*" operates most significantly on two levels: in the first instance it serves to legitimate the paternalism which characterises the relationship between employer and employee in both the communal and commercial areas, albeit that it is differently articulated in the two areas; and on the second level the "*domness*" of the employee creates the conditions which allow for the exploitation of the employee on the assumption that the employee is not only unaware of his or her rights, but even if he or she were aware, they are unaware of the means of implementing their rights.

Domness therefore works in two ways: firstly, it contributes to the feeling of helplessness and ineffectuality on the part of many labourers, as well as their feeling of being excluded or marginalised from the protection of the state; and secondly, it creates scope for abusing workers, a fact which is clearly taken advantage of by certain employers. At the same time this also implies that a great deal of labour abuses do not reach the Labour Office at all.²¹

4.1.2 *What the Figures Might Indicate*

Despite the fact that the figures are incomplete as regards actual situations which merit complaint, they can be seen - when coupled with qualitative data - to suggest that certain changes have taken place in the agricultural labour situation.

The fact that the figures have not fluctuated wildly since 1991 indicates two things: most farmers and labourers that I interviewed made it clear that many areas of farm life have

²¹ Practically all people I interviewed had reason to make a complaint against their employers at some point. The police at Post 3, for example, frequently refer complainants to the Labour Office in Gobabis - a procedure which, in many cases, ends the process of complaint there and then.

changed since independence; and on the whole, farmers are following the terms of the Labour Act in connection with payment practices and previously serious problems such as assault on workers by farmers have declined so much as to no longer be a topical issue in farm workers' chat.²² Furthermore, it is also clear from the fact that farmers themselves have requested clarification of the new laws, that there has been significant change in their working practice.²³

If this is the case, as it appears to be, then a corollary of this must be that workers are considerably more willing to complain of what they feel to be unjust treatment than they were in the past. On the part of the workers this represents a shift in people's understandings regarding what the rights and obligations are between state and citizen. There is a widespread belief that independence changed these rights and obligations and consequently that the state's role should be that of protector and provider and it is according to this rationale that labour complaints are made.

What emerges from this is the clear need for complaint procedures to be clarified to both farmers and workers in tandem with education as to what exactly are the rights and obligations between worker and farmers.

4.2 Grazing on Farms

Die grootste probleem is, as jy diere het, sal die eienaar jou bees of jou bok self verkoop en as hy dit self verkoop, weet jy nie waar die geld gegaan het nie, maar jy mag nie vra nie want jy weet dat as jy dit vra hy kan sê, "Dit is my plaas en water en gras."

The biggest problem is that if you have livestock, the farmer will sell them himself and if he does this, you don't know where the money has gone, but

²² I have heard of several instances of farmers physically assaulting workers since independence. All are agreed though that such assaults are a thing of the past.

²³ Farmers in Summerdown, for example, asked the former Chief Labour Officer to give a seminar on payment procedures during 1994.

you musn't ask because you know that if you do the farmer can say, "This is my farm and my water and my grass."

(Worker 06/03/95)

Generational workers will usually speak about a specific farm or area in which they have spent a lot of time or were born in as their true "home". However, because of the exigencies and mobility of farm life, most will not live in their true home area and in some cases will not even be able to visit it. For these people, the farm on which they work emerges in every practical sense as their home.

Among most farm workers in the study area, livestock are understood to be the dominant symbol of wealth and prestige, hence relegating those without cattle to an economic underclass. This emerges as a key issue among landless labourers, whose marginalisation is perpetuated by the fact that they do not have access to resources by which they could sustain stock if they had it. Indeed, the reason that many of these labourers do not have stock is because they have no means of sustaining it.

On many commercial farms, where stock may have been given to workers or where they may have accumulated some stock of their own, limited grazing rights may be given, usually allowing a maximum of eight head of cattle and unlimited goats, the latter being browsers and not competing with cattle for grazing. This is highly variable and I have heard of many farmers who allow no stock at all. What is crucial though, is that grazing for labourer's stock is dependent solely on the good will of the farmer - a factor well-illustrated by the opening quote.

At present this is legitimated by the Labour Act which is particularly hazy in this regard, addressing grazing rights in an extremely ambiguous manner. It states that:

... permit, in the case of an employee who is required to live in or reside on agricultural land, such employee ... to keep such livestock and to carry out

such cultivation on such land as may be necessary for such employee to *provide for the reasonable needs of himself or herself* and of his or her dependants.

(Labour Act 1992, Sect.38(1)(b) (*my italics*))

This is problematic in two ways: firstly, "reasonable needs" is a highly ambiguous term, especially since most farmers could reasonably argue that the wages and rations that they provide for staff satisfy such requirements in subsistence terms, thus implying that any grazing or farming rights for the worker depend on the farmer's good will, thereby making the clause practically redundant; and secondly, such legislation marginalises even further those workers for whom the farm is their home, as it limits for them the possibility or the right to accumulate wealth (in cattle terms), thereby contributing even further to the mobility and insecurity which characterises the status of farm workers in the study area. This in turn serves to perpetuate the image of Ju'/hoan and Damara as a "cattleless underclass".

In the communal areas, similar problems exist for generational or other functionally landless workers, although this has been partially alleviated by resettlement schemes. For those "landless labourers", the former reserve areas offer little in terms of grazing. If Ju'/hoansi or Damaras move stock to the former Hereroland East reserve, it is unlikely that the stock will remain long in their hands, as in terms of Herero tenure politics, they will have nowhere to graze and in many cases such stock may well be stolen - a thing easily done given the relative powerlessness of marginalised groups in the area.²⁴ At the same time this prevents any of these workers from gaining any independence, thereby reinforcing their status as an underclass with many dependent on small task labour for any form of sustenance.

A corollary of this which applies to the Ju'/hoansi lies in the mythology concerning their apparent ineptitude with cattle. In the former reserve area, many informants suggested that the reason for the Ju'/hoansi's status lies in their "culturally inherited" lack of affinity for cattle work, combined with their unreliability and live-for-the-day attitude: "If they are given cattle,

²⁴ I have heard of several cases of stock theft from Ju'/hoansi in the former reserve area.

they will just eat them, because they don't know about cattle. That is why they are poor." (Farmer 29/02/95) This statement was echoed repeatedly in answer to my questions about the status of the Ju'/hoansi. The fact that the Ju'/hoansi aspire - as does most everyone else in the area - to owning stock, seems not to be noticed. Indeed, it would appear that the Ju'/hoansi would own stock (as a few in resettlement camps have proven) had they the means to do so. However, the fact that they do not have the resources necessary to engage in stock farming means the perpetuation of their status as a cattleless underclass as well as the cultural stereotyping which legitimates their status in the eyes of Herero speakers. At the same time this generates beliefs among Ju'/hoansi that the Hereros conspire to "*mors*" (waste or kill) the Ju'/hoansi (c.f. Sect. 3.3).

The issue of grazing therefore emerges as a crucial one for many landless farmworkers. Their lack of access to land precludes them from generating wealth in the manner of others in the area while simultaneously fostering the image of them as incapable of engaging successfully in livestock farming. All this serves to maintain both the social and economic conditions out of which their marginal status evolved while effectively denying them the *right* to accumulate or expand their wealth.

4.3 Gender

The issue of gender among agricultural sector workers is in itself marginal due to the fact that both farmer and worker discourse are male-dominated, thus sidelining women's issues to the periphery. It is one failing of my research that I have not adequately been able to cover the status of women on the agricultural labour scene. The reasons for this are telling as regards their status.

The initial problem area lies in the "gendered" nature of farm labour discourse, which is clearly male-dominated and thus in the context of doing research, women were less forthcoming about their experiences. Generally speaking, it is males who hire other males, although it might be the

case that an employee's wife is taken on in the household while her husband remains in the employ of the farm.

In terms of the processes of looking for work, for those with families in the area (as opposed to migrant labourers whose dependants live elsewhere) it is almost always the male who looks for work on the farms. If the male is employed, his wife may be *asked* if she wishes to work in the household itself. Frequently, it is expected that a labourer's wife will work on the farm, as many employers still feel loathe to have "idlers loafing" on their land.

In the past it was common for female dependants to work without remuneration, while depending on her spouse's income and whatever rations they may receive. Recently though, women have been more likely to receive payment for their work, albeit that this payment is a fraction of what their husbands receive despite the fact that in some cases similar hours will have been worked.²⁵

Women then emerge as peripheral in farm discourse for two reasons: firstly, they are frequently hired not in their own right as workers, but as "workers' dependants" - a sort of appendage whose status and employment is dependent on her spouse's standing; and secondly, because of the even lower pay that is received, women rarely emerge as independent breadwinners, even if they have been employed in their own right. The consequences of this are marked, and well-illustrated by the changes which have occurred in Ju'/hoan families since their absorption into the political economy.

Although a topic for debate, gender relations among foraging Ju'/hoansi appeared to be equitable, especially in decision-making processes. However, having become totally dependent on the centralised political economy, significant changes have occurred, most notably the emergence of patrilineal naming structures and the diminishing role of women in decision-making processes, due partly to their diminishing role as "providers". Such transition indicates

²⁵ Although variable, from what I can make out, a female worker will generally receive between 25-50% of what her husband receives. One worker, for example, received N\$75 per month while his wife received N\$25 for the same period.

not only the dominance of the political economy in shaping the "cultural" lives of those who participate in it, but also the dominance of the male voice in farm labour discourse.

Having said this, the role of women in worker discourse cannot be completely ruled out. Although not part of negotiation procedures between farmer and worker, their role in the process should not be ignored. Frequently a woman may find circumstances in some places unbearable and insist on going elsewhere. On the other hand, the farmer's wife might influence the retention (or dismissal) of a worker, who might be dismissed (or retained) because his spouse is "good" (or bad) at her job.²⁶ Similarly in communal areas, although employment is generally given by a male householder, workers frequently work under the supervision and instruction of female householders (c.f. Sect. 3.2).

Nevertheless, it is clear that in the agricultural sector a woman's status as a worker is devalued in financial and cultural terms and is largely determined by and dependent on the status of her spouse.

²⁶ I did come across one instance where a wife worked on a farm from which her husband was "banned". This stands in contravention of the Labour Act which allows dependants access to farms.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

The current status of farm workers in Namibia can be seen to have emerged from the political and economic processes which have taken place on the Southern African sub-continent over the past centuries. Although now the once protected status of the settler farmer has all but dissolved, many of the features which were characteristic of farm life in both communal and commercial areas still remain.

5.1 Commercial Farms

Prior to independence, white-owned farms whose status was otherwise marginal were protected and bulwarked by the state during the South African administration of Namibia. During this period the Administration assisted farmers not only materially through loans and government support, but also in terms of manpower through the Homelands Policies and labour legislation which favoured the farmer. As a result of this, farms evolved into authoritarian and paternalistic institutions in which the *baas* stood as the locus of all authority.

Following independence in 1990 and the passing of the Labour Act in 1992, things began to change: farmers began, albeit slowly, to alter their working practices and workers have become more conscious of their marginal status. Nevertheless, certain institutional features of farm life remain today: the farm is still centred around authoritarian symbols such as *baaskap* and its companion paternalistic discourse, and the status of farm workers remains marginal.

Although farmers' discourse on the farm is incorporative, workers articulate themselves as a group which transects the boundaries of individual farms. Indeed, despite having no unified discourse enunciating their aspirations, farm workers are keenly conscious of their status in class terms. Despite this consciousness, squabbles between workers, dependency on

employment for material survival, high mobility and low resources mitigate against workers organising themselves to address their needs.

5.2 Communal Farms

In communal areas exactly the same political and economic forces which served to draw labour into commercial areas had a drastic effect on the socio-economic viability of the household. In Hereroland East, this resulted in the creation of a lower tier labour pool constituted by ethnic minorities, which served to take the place of absent householders. With the continuing exodus of economically active Hereros to urban areas, the former reserve residents have become highly dependent on outside labour to maintain their households at present levels. These workers are the most marginal of the farm-working groups, a fact well-illustrated by the baseline socio-economic survey of eastern communal areas carried out by the Social Science Division (SSD) of the University of Namibia (Iken et al, 1994), which conspicuously fails to even mention the existence of these labourers, thus relegating them further into the margins of the dominant political and economic processes. Indeed, their marginalisation is as much conceptual as political and economic in the sense that people (even, it appears, professional researchers) frequently fail to acknowledge their existence.

Although certain communal farmers have begun to "commercialise" their operations and offer better conditions for workers, most farm workers in communal areas are extremely low-paid, frequently receiving beer or food in lieu of cash for work. The current confusion as to the future status of communal areas has meant that these areas remain, in a practical sense, outside the scope of commercial law: labour agreements are informal and contracts are verbal. Working conditions are generally very poor: many employers do not offer sufficient housing for workers (especially Ju'/hoansi) and payment is generally very low, frequently not tallying with the initial agreement made.

5.3 Generational Farm Workers

Among farm working groups, two divisions can be made: firstly, there are migrant workers who comprise the smaller portion of the workforce, and secondly there are the generational farm workers who comprise the bulk of the labour force. The former group, consisting mainly of Owambo and Kavango labourers, are generally better off than the latter. They generally secure better wages and conditions of employment in both communal and commercial areas, with much money being forwarded onto family in the north. The latter group - the generational farm workers - have a unique status in that in all practical senses these people are landless, and as a result do not have the means of accumulating or generating wealth in the form of livestock. They are almost entirely dependent on their employers, and they have very little opportunity for independently improving their socio-economic status.

A further factor which mitigates against the improvement of workers' status is the discursive underpinning of political and economic hierarchies of which the generational workers occupy the lowest position. As has emerged clearly from the foregoing, ideas of ethnicity and race permeate labour discourse in both commercial and communal areas. Employment, payment and the standing of the employee are all spoken of in ethnic terms, with the status of poorer workers being legitimated in terms of discourses which accredit their status to cultural inferiority, "*domness*", irresponsibility and primitivism. In conjunction with this, groups of farm workers who feel themselves powerless to change things have developed a very low self-esteem and concomitant social problems such as high levels of in-group violence and alcoholism.

As such these workers are caught in a vicious cycle, which is most clearly evident for the Ju'/hoansi. Farmers claim that the reason Ju'/hoansi are poorly paid (at least in cash), is that they are too "primitive" and too "irresponsible" to deal with such payment. This view, combined with factors such as lack of access to grazing, means that it is very difficult for Ju'/hoansi to accumulate any wealth and social status. As a result, Ju'/hoansi do not generally attempt to accumulate wealth, not because they have no desire to do so or are too

“irresponsible” to do so, but because they have no means of doing so. Defeatism thus pervades their discourse and their lifestyle, and many squander their earnings on alcohol because there is little else they feel they can do with it. Added to this, many workers have a very low self-esteem, convinced that perhaps the reason behind their plight is indeed that they are in some way incapable of reaching the status of others, thereby perpetuating the stereotype others have conceived of them and reproducing the conditions for their own marginalisation.

For this issue to be addressed in any useful way, these workers would need to be given the means to accumulate wealth. Whether this is done through the expansion of state resettlement schemes (where some workers have proved their abilities with establishing herds) or through clarifying the rights of workers with regard to grazing on their employer’s or other communal lands.

5.4 Administration and Implementation of Labour Law

At present, the economy of the study area is sustained by current labour practice which relies on only the partial implementation and administration of the Labour Act. If the stipulations of the Labour Act were to be strictly enforced, or a minimum wage introduced, the system as it stands would surely shift, but not necessarily in a positive direction: many farmers - especially the poorer ones in communal areas - might no longer be able to afford outside labour, hence forcing another into living from piecemeal work. Indeed, a possible consequence of enforcing such law might well be the further disenfranchisement and marginalisation of the poorest of the farm workers who would be forced out of work.

5.5 Education and Awareness

The low level of education, particularly among generational groups of farm labourers, emerges as a key issue. Workers feel that their status can be partially accredited to their lack of schooling and they believe that literacy and numeracy will go some way to improving their status. What is clear is that improved education will help to clarify the terms of employment

CONCLUSION

and payment practices for workers who at present feel alienated and unsure of the processes involved. Secondly, it will make dealing with bureaucracies easier, especially in matters such as labour complaints procedure.

Correlated with this is the issue of legal education. It is apparent that farmers and workers in particular are not aware of their rights and obligations as employers and employees in terms of current labour legislation. Although it may well be the case that some farmers take advantage of their employees' ignorance of such matters, it seems that in many cases farmers are breaking the law without realising it. This problem can only be addressed if both workers and farmers are aware of their legal rights and obligations with regard to one another. This will also serve to diffuse some of the mythologies which act as a hindrance to farmer and worker relations through removing the possibility of farmer cheating worker.

REFERENCES

Adams, F. and Werner, W. (1990): The Land Issue in Namibia: An Inquiry, University of Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia.

Du Toit, A. (1992): The Farm as Family, a fieldwork report conducted for the Centre for Rural Legal Studies, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Gebhardt, F.: "The Socio-Economic Status of Farm Labourers in Namibia", SALB, Vol. 4 (1 & 2).

Gordon, R. (1992): The Bushman Myth, Westview Press, Oxford.

Gordon, R. (1994): "Vagrancy and Internal Pacification in Namibia: 1919-1939", paper delivered at "Trees Never Meet" Conference, University of Namibia.

Hishongwa, N. (1992): The Contract Labour System and its Effects on Family and Social Life in Namibia, Gamsberg Macmillan, Windhoek.

Iken, LeBeau, Menjengua and Pendleton (1994) Socio-Economic Survey of Eastern Communal Areas, Social Science Division (SSD), University of Namibia.

Kohler, O. (1959): A study of the Gobabis District, Government Printer, Pretoria.

Wilmsen, E. and Vossen, R. (1990): "Labour Language and Power in the Construction of Ethnicity", in Botswana Critique of Anthropology (10:7).

Wilmsen, E. (1988): Land Filled with Flies, University of Chicago Press.