



The Experiences of Migrant Farmworkers in Barkly West, Northern Cape South Africa.

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STLLOR003

**A minor dissertation presented in partial requirements for the award of degree in
Master of Social Science in Industrial Sociology.**

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2025

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Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank my parents, David and Mapulane Setlhoke for their unwavering support throughout the research process. Not also forgetting my older sister Naledi Setlhoke, who has also encouraged me and reminded me to finish off what I started. This would not have been possible if it was not for your support.

A special thank you to my partner Daniel, for walking this journey with me, supporting me emotionally, holding me accountable and for believing in me in those times when I doubted my work and myself. You are very much appreciated.

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Faisal for his support throughout this journey.

I would also like to thank my friends' Dr M Nchupang and Ntebogeng Kotoane for their support. Thank you for believing in me, for your moral support and for your tough love when needed throughout this journey.

Thank you to Emma Arogundade for editing my thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank the almighty for carrying me through this research. This would not have been possible if it was not for his great love and mercy.

Abstract

Working conditions for farmworkers in South Africa have consistently been exploitative and negative from before the apartheid era. Despite the inclusion of farmworkers explicitly in the labour laws which guarantee fair, dignified and equitable treatment in the workplace, this has not always translated into improvements in working conditions. Migrant farmworkers conditions are known to be even worse due to their vulnerability of arrest and deportation. They are also not always considered to be protected by legislation, even though they should be. Issues around working conditions relate to health and safety, wages, benefits and working hours.

This study therefore investigates the working conditions of migrant farmworkers from Lesotho who have migrated to Barkly West for economic reasons. The study focused on workers who worked on small- and large-scale farms. Questions related to participants health and safety, wages and benefits of workers were investigated in this regard.

This study found that these participants were exploited in the workplace. The findings make it clear that their health and safety are not made a priority and that they are paid below the newly national minimum wage which was introduced in 2024. Furthermore, limited or no access to benefits emerged in the evidence.

Moreover, although it clearly states in the Labour Relations Act (No 66 of 1995) that farmworkers have the right to collective bargaining in the workplace, there is still an lack of union participation or representation in their workplaces. This issue has led to the intensity of their exploitation and continued negative working conditions. The Labour Relations Act (No 66 of 1995) does not exclude migrant workers in any form which means that they also have a right to be represented in the workplace. However, this study finds that participants had no access to formal representation in the workplace, and that their ability to organise or join unions is constrained. The farm owner on the large-scale farm refuses union access, and those working on small-scale farms are isolated and unable to gather to collaborate.

In places where exploitation takes place, it has been argued that there is always some form of resistance. This can either be individual or collective. The study therefore, also investigated how these workers resist/ react to their exploitative conditions in the workplace. As mentioned above, this is a vulnerable group and we would assume that overt resistance does not take place as it is suicidal for the weak. However, this study found that small scale and large scale migrant

farmworkers in Barkly West use overt and covert forms of resistance as they do not have any formal representation in the workplace.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background and focus of the study

Migration is not a new phenomenon in our society as people have moving around the world in different forms for centuries (Adey, 2017). With the creation of nation states, this has come to include people moving both within and across borders. Internal migration within a country's borders can include moving from a rural to an urban area, or from one province to another (White & Lindstrom, 2005). Cross border migration on the other hand refers to people moving across borders or state boundaries to live in another country (Faist, 2016), usually for political or economic reasons (Adamson, 2006). This study focusses on cross border migration, specifically migrants from Lesotho to South Africa who have migrated for economic reasons, and are employed on farms in Barkley West, a small town in the Northern Cape.

Migrants from neighbouring countries have been migrating to South Africa for decades to work in the agricultural sector (Jinnah, 2017). Furthermore, agriculture plays a very important role in the country which means that there is an ongoing demand for labour (Maisiri, 2020). Agriculture's importance in the economy and society is related to the export of agricultural goods to various parts of the world and local demand for food (Bahta et al., 2014). These two factors account for the ongoing demand for workers in the sector. This has especially been the case for large-scale commercial farms who have relied on migrant labour migrant farmworkers on seasonal or permanent arrangements (Maisiri, 2020).

It has been argued that the reason why farmers depend on migrant labour is because migrants are cheaper to employ (Svensson et al., 2013). Migrant labourers in different sectors have been known to be paid below the sectoral determination wage (Griffin, 2012; Ulicki & Crush, 2007), including farmworkers, and especially women (Fletcher & Kubik, 2017). The available literature also underscores the fact that the situation is worse for migrants as there are times when they are not paid at all (Maisiri, 2020). There are multiple reasons for this, the main reason being that some the migrant workers do not possess documents which makes controlling and exploiting them much easier (Perrotta & Sacchetto, 2014), often through fear of deportation (Ulicki & Crush, 2007). This is evident from research on migrant farmworkers in Limpopo and the Free State (Rutherford & Addison, 2007; Ulicki & Crush, 2007). However, the issue is not only with the salaries of these workers. Their working conditions are problematic with harsh conditions and no protective clothing (Ulicki & Crush, 2007). Furthermore, there is little or no

access to benefits in the workplace, which means that these workers' rights are being violated (Munakamwe et al., 2014). It is important to note that there are similarities of the condition of farm migrant workers in other parts of the world where research demonstrates that low wages, lack of protection and harsh conditions are common (for example Perrotta & Sacchetto, 2014 point to difficult working conditions of African farmworkers in Southern Italy). The question is does this immense vulnerability affect the farms workers sense of agency to form resistance? This is the key question that will be explored in this thesis.

This research specifically focuses on migrant farmworkers from Lesotho, given their significant presence in the farming sector in Barkly West which is a small town in the Northern Cape. Like the Northern Cape more generally, Barkly West has a large agricultural sector which includes both large-scale commercial as well as small-scale farms (Dikgatlong Local Municipality, 2022). Migrant farmworkers work for both, and from my own observations as a resident of Barkly West, I know that there are always employment opportunities in the sectors, and that this is a major attraction for economic migrants from Lesotho.

Literature has also mainly focused on migrant farmworkers who work on large commercial farms (Jinnah, 2017; Martin, 2016; Rothenberg, 2000). However as mentioned above, migrants also work on small-scale farms which is the case with Barkly West. Small-scale farms are therefore an important site for understanding farm workers' conditions not least because they have become more important in the post-apartheid era as they are more prevalent due to the redistribution of land (Tshuma, 2014). This thesis therefore studies the conditions of these workers which have been neglected in the literature as the focus tends to be large-scale farming. It is important to note that there are different categories of small-scale farmers. This research adopts Cousin's (2010) definition of small-scale farmers as those farmers that produce a significant surplus allowing profits to be reinvested and for some capital accumulation in agriculture to start.

As outlined above, exploitation of migrant farm workers is not uncommon, but may vary depending on context. This research draws from previous research, but focusses explicitly on how migrant farmworkers in Barkly West, Northern Cape have experienced exploitation in the workplace through investigating their working conditions on small and large-scale farms in the area, where both the location and the focus on small-scale farms is new. Without generalising the findings, this thesis incorporates the experiences of working conditions for both seasonal

and permanent migrant workers on large-scale farms. Key aspects of working conditions include health and safety, working hours and benefits, and wages.

As mentioned above, literature has made it evident that because of the vulnerability of these migrants, they are easily exploitable and controlled (Wood, 2017). However as argued by Burawoy (1985), wherever control and exploitation take place, workers also resist. The research has also explored the strategies that migrant farmworkers in Barkly West use to resist control and exploitation in the workplace. Moreover, following the debate on citizenship, as these workers are not recognised as ‘citizens,’ there is some assertion that South African policies and laws do not protect them as workers (Hall et al., 2013). However, in this paper I argue that the law in South Africa protects everyone that is within the borders of the country (as per the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108, 1996 which states that ‘South Africa belongs to all who live in it’). Although this is the case, these workers are still exploited due their vulnerable state, and some do not know how to navigate the system. Therefore, it becomes important to investigate how they protect themselves and how they resist their conditions in the workplace.

Reasons why migrants from Lesotho come to South Africa

Migrants from neighbouring African countries have been coming to South Africa since the mining industry required additional workers during the colonial era and into apartheid (Nshimbi & Fioramonti, 2014), and more in recent decades (Rosenberg, 2007). There are multiple reasons why migrants leave their countries, classed as push and pull factors (Moseki, 2011). Push factors can be natural disasters, political unrest and economic issues within a country, pull factors include the economy of a country, higher wages and employment opportunities in the host countries (Moseki, 2011). Since the research is exploring migrant farm workers from Lesotho, it is important to understand why these workers may migrate to South Africa.

Lesotho is a landlocked country, just under 500km from Barkly West (google, n.d.). There is a history of migrant labour from Lesotho to South Africa to work in the mines and in the agricultural sector (Rosenberg, 2007). A major push factor is the poor economic conditions, and high rates of unemployment and poverty in Lesotho (Moseki, 2011). The economy of the country is based on subsistence farming, meaning Lesotho citizens depend on agriculture to survive (Moseki, 2011). Lack of cultivatable land, low wages and lack of employment opportunities has led households in Lesotho to be dependent on migrant labour remittances as

a major source of income (Tevera, 2015). This makes migrant labour an important source of income for household members left at home.

Citizens of this Lesotho migrate to South Africa as higher wages are offered in South Africa in comparison to their home country (Moseki, 2011). They enter South Africa both legally and illegally. Tevera (2015) argues that the migrants that enter South Africa mostly work illegally on farms. These are the migrants that find themselves in the most vulnerable positions as they are unable to exercise their rights. The vulnerability to exploitation meant that immigration status was not always spoken about during the research process.

Farming - Barkly West and its context

From observation, Barkly West is a small town in the Northern Cape Province. It is surrounded by farms and mines that play an important role in the economy of town. The town is known for both large-scale dairy farming and large-scale vegetable farming (Dikgatlong Local Municipality, 2022). Furthermore, some residents of the town are also involved in small-scale farming. These small-scale farmers operate as small-scale businesses who sell their produce and employ migrant labourers.

Small and large-scale agriculture as a primary economic activity is made possible as the Vaal river passes through the town, and the Vaal Harts irrigation system provides much needed water. The first primary research site is a large-scale farm on the banks of the Vaal river (which I will not name to ensure confidentiality) in Barkly West. They mainly grow vegetables, maize, and wheat. It is important to note that this farm is a major employer in Barkly West. The other site is Debeershoogte, a township on the outskirts of Barkly West which is surrounded by small-scale farms. The small-scale farmworkers that I interviewed work and live on a number of these farms.

Problem Statement

Migrants from Lesotho work on farms all over South Africa, migrating primarily for employment purposes to support their Lesotho based households through remittances. Farm labour is considered a low-skill job which does not require any credentials, making it relatively easy work to access. Farmers depend on the cheap labour provided by migrants. Despite extensive research on migrant farm labour in South Africa (see the literature review for more details), little is available in the Northern Cape, or Barkly West that explores conditions of farm labourers, especially those in small-scale farms. Therefore, this research sets out to explore the working conditions of migrant farm workers from Lesotho who work on both large-scale

commercial farms and small-scale farms in and around Barkly West. Small-scale farmers have become increasingly dependent on migrant labour, and increasing numbers of migrant labourers are now employed on these farms. With potentially different conditions to the large-scale commercial farms, it is important to explore the conditions in both contexts. This study also investigates how these workers react to, and potentially resist poor working conditions. The aim is to contribute to the already existing literature on migrant farmworkers in South Africa with a focus on migrants from Lesotho working in and around Barkly West in order to provide additional information to policy makers to assist in improving migrant farmworkers conditions.

Research objectives

As outlined above, the aim of this research is to explore the working conditions of migrant farmworkers from Lesotho working on small-scale and large-scale farms in Barkly West. The research objectives for this study are:

- To investigate the experiences of migrants in the workplace in relation to their working conditions, specifically looking at health and safety, wages, working hours and benefits in the workplace.
- To investigate how these workers react to their working conditions, potentially resist poor working conditions, and whether or not they have representation in the workplace.

Research questions

Thus the research question posed by this thesis is: *How do migrant farmworkers in Barkly West working on small-scale and large-scale farms (respectively) experience workplace exploitation and how do they respond (and potentially resist) poor conditions?* Further questions include:

- What are the working conditions of migrant farmworkers? (Do they have protective clothing? How much do they get paid? How many hours do they work?)
- What is the state of their health and safety in the workplace?
- What, if any, forms of resistance do the migrant farmworkers exercise in the workplace, (and what agency do they exert) to protect themselves?

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 reviews literature related to migrant farm labour in South Africa, and related working conditions and evidence (or not) of resistance. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the research project, followed by the findings in Chapters 4 and 5 which explore health and safety, and workplace benefits respectively. Chapter 6 focuses on

representation and resistance strategies that migrant farmworkers utilise in the workplace. This will be followed by the conclusion of the thesis in Chapter 7.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction

Conditions of migrant farmworkers have been largely researched by academics and researchers trying to understand their conditions in the workplace (Perotta & Sacchetto, 2014; Venkatesh et al., 2023). Agriculture is an important industry globally contributing to the economy of a country by creating employment and playing an important role in trade (Sihlobo & Nel, 2016). However, the industry has drawbacks, most notably the working conditions of labourers on farms (Sihlobo & Nel, 2016). Farm owners often rely on cheap migrant labour which they exploit and take advantage of due to their vulnerability (Hadebe, 2022). This chapter explores poor working conditions of migrant labour in South Africa more generally, before focussing on the conditions of farm workers more specifically, considering literature relating to migrant labour in the Northern Cape and exploring overt and covert forms of resistance workers have deployed to navigate poor working conditions.

History of cheap and migrant labour in South Africa:

It has been outlined in literature that the reason why farm owners rely on migrant labour on farms is because they want access to cheap labour (Mather, 2000; Trimikliniotis et al., 2013). However, it is important to note that cheap labour is not a new phenomenon in South Africa. Industries in South Africa have relied on cheap labour since the colonial period, beginning with the discovery of diamonds in Kimberly, and gold in the then Transvaal (Trimikliniotis et al., 2008). It has been argued that the extraction of value in the South African economy has always depended on cheap African labour to produce surplus value, a pattern that was the basis of the apartheid economic model (Trimikliniotis et al., 2008; Wolpe, 1972).

Before this imposition of wage labour in the colonial period, South Africa had what Jeff-Guy (1982) has termed a pre-capitalist society where production and reproduction took place in the same sphere. African people produced what they needed for themselves which means that agriculture played an important role in these societies. However, this all changed as a result of colonial expansion, with deliberate evisceration of the African economy through the expropriation of land and introduction of laws which forced Africans into wage labour (Guy, 1982; Wolpe, 1972). This removed the capacity of pre-capitalist societies to support themselves, and fostered enlistment in colonial economies. With the discovery of diamonds, more Africans started working in the industries as they were now depended on wage labour (Trimikliniotis et al., 2008). This meant that more men started leaving their homesteads and

families behind to work in the industries to provide for their families. The colonial government coerced Africans into waged labour by introducing laws and taking the land away from them (Guy, 1982).

Wolpe (1972) in his seminal essay demonstrates how the migrant labour system was constructed as a mechanism for providing cheap labour for white capital. This was an exploitative system to African workers as they were controlled in the workplace. Wolpe (1972) also makes it evident how capital justified cheap labour of African people and used law and policy to ensure that this source of cheap labour could continue to be produced. Despite the introduction of legislation such as the Hut Tax which forced Africans to engage in wage labour (Guy, 1982) and the Natives Land Act of 1913 which dispossessed Africans of their land, Wolpe (1972) makes the important distinction that pre-capitalist forms of economy were not completely destroyed, rather they existed alongside the colonial capitalist economy. The Natives Land Act of 1913 laid the basis for the introduction of migrant labour, as Africans were forbidden from living permanently outside of land designated for them (called Homelands) and had to migrate to urban areas for wage labour (Wolpe 1972). The introduction of these intertwined policies meant that reproductive labour was confined to the Homelands so that industries would not have to be responsible for the provision of social welfare and permanent housing around urban/industrial spaces. This process was entrenched during the apartheid era, where Africans were denied South African citizenship, and workers could come to the urban areas to work on fixed contracts but would need to 'go home' when their contracts were finished (Wolpe, 1972). This is also known as circulation. Migrant workers from the reserves had to repeat the circulation process when their labour was needed as they could not stay permanently in the urban areas (Batisai, 2022). Families in the reserves were also expected to continue with agricultural practices (Wolpe, 1972). This is how capital justified cheap labour of African workers. It depended on the space of reproduction in the reserves to justify paying low wages, as these workers were not permanent residents in the urban areas. The apartheid government argued that the standard of living of African people was considered low as they had their economy in the reserves (Wolpe, 1972).

Wolpe (1972) goes on to demonstrate how the state was not investing in the reserves in terms of agriculture, which meant that this economy started deteriorating. This resulted in conflict as Africans started demanding higher wages. In response, the apartheid government introduced more repressive laws which made resistance of Africans impossible (Wolpe, 1972). For example, the Natives Act was introduced which made it impossible for African workers to

strike. Therefore, the apartheid government did all its power to maintain cheap African labour so that capital can keep on producing surplus value (Wolpe, 1972). Migrant labour was not only drawn from the 'Homelands' during this time, it was also drawn from neighbouring southern African countries (Malan, 1985).

Batisai (2022) argues that this circulation process did not end when apartheid ended. South Africa has been receiving many temporary migrants from Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. These migrants have been largely employed on farms and mines (Batisai, 2022). Batisai (2022) argues that this is because workers' rights enshrined in post-apartheid legislation means South Africans are less desirable and more expensive than migrant labour from other southern African countries.

Labour exploitation

Labour exploitation is part of the functioning of capitalist societies (Wood, 2017). Including systems of slavery, colonisation and in South Africa, apartheid. Wood (2017) explores Marxist and Kantian notions of labour exploitation, including the concept of vulnerability – relevant to vulnerable migrant farm labourers in Barkly West.

Exploitation can be defined as someone being taken advantage of in a way that is unfair and degrading (Zwolinski, 2011). The exploiter in this case always benefits from the one they are exploiting. In contrast the one that is exploited does not completely benefit from the one that is exploiting them (Zwolinski, 2011). One might argue, for example, that a domestic worker benefits from their employer, by having a job. However, although the domestic worker does partially benefit from having a job, we should not overlook the fact that they are in a vulnerable position and can be taken advantage of (Mantouvalou, 2015). Mantouvalou (2015) uses the example of migrant labourers doing domestic work in the United Kingdom who are confined to domestic work by their visa. Workers are paid low wages and do not have conducive working or living conditions. Although they have to work in these conditions, they still need to satisfy their employer by doing their job. Therefore, we can argue that the employer benefits more than the employee in this case.

Exploitation is a feature of capitalism, defined as an economic system where one group owns the means of production and the other group does not (Zwolinski, 2011). The group that does not own the means of production are known as the proletariat. These are labourers that need to work for the capitalists in order to make a living or earn a wage as they do not have access to private property (Zwolinski, 2011). Therefore, we can argue that these workers are dependent

on the capitalist/s which makes them vulnerable as they require wages in order to survive, and capitalists take advantage of this (Wood, 2017).

This means that the employer in this case has more power over the workers because of this dependency. However, Wood (2017) argues that the employer can also be in a vulnerable state as employees can take advantage of them. It is important to note that this only takes place when the skills that are needed in a specific sector are scarce. For example, an employee can manipulate their employer by constantly asking for a raise as they know that their skill is scarce. Collective bargaining and labour regulation also reduce the vulnerability of labour to capital (Wood, 2017). However, it is important to note that capitalists minimise these factors by employing unskilled workers, which makes labour vulnerable to capital and easier to exploit. Therefore, these workers are forced to accept their conditions as they are in a vulnerable state (Wood, 2017). Capital also creates what is called a reserve army of the unemployed. The moment a worker does not want to do a job at the conditions or wages offered to them, someone else in the reserve army will do it (Ritzer, 2011). In the South African context, most work that is done on farms does not require much skill. Therefore, we can argue that they are easily exploited and controlled because they are vulnerable to their employer. If they do not want to do the job or accept the terms of their jobs, there is a reserve army that is willing to accept these terms.

Farmworkers in South Africa work could be considered as proletariat, or unskilled labour under these definitions. They also work under harsh conditions and with some level of exploitation and control (Devereux & Tavener-Smith, 2019). This is inclusive of migrant farmworkers as well who are dependent on their employers for wages in order to make a living (Johnston, 2007). Therefore because of this dependency, they are easily exploited. In this study it will also be made evident how paternalism still takes place.

These harsh, controlling and difficult conditions limit justice and freedom. With capitalists controlling working hours, wages, voice in the workplace and labour conditions, workers can't be considered free, they would be considered restrictive (Wood, 2017). Kant (in Wood, 2017) calls for a just society where everyone has a right and their freedom is protected. Moreover, there need to be limits to freedoms (e.g. freedom of speech needs to be limited to make hate speech illegal) in order to ensure freedoms are available for everyone (Wood, 2017). Wood (2017) argues that the state should be responsible for creating the conditions for everyone's freedom to be protected through the creation of universal laws. Through these universal laws,

everyone is free. No person is controlled or constrained by the other which means that people are free. Universal laws that are put in place by the state prevents capitalists from constraining the vulnerable (Wood, 2017). Therefore, the freedom of everyone most importantly depends on the coercive power which everyone is supposed to follow. It does not matter whether you own the means of production or not. When we look at the history of South Africa, during the apartheid context, black people were constrained by those who own the means of production. This was both in terms of working conditions but also supported by laws which fostered the possibility of exploiting black people and fostering conditions for black people to be unskilled and exploitable labour (Wolpe, 1972). Despite the imposition of unfair laws and working conditions, many people organised to resist in various ways. This included migrant labourers from neighbouring countries who came to South Africa to work in the mining and agricultural sectors. They were fighting so that universal laws can be put in place to protect them.

The long history of using foreign migrant labour in the agricultural sector dates to when settler colonialists started recruiting labour from the Southern African region in the year 1840 (Fine, 2014). Developing during colonialism, and further entrenched during apartheid, exploitative and repressive legislation and conditions applied both to black workers and migrant labourers from the SADC countries (Wolpe, 1972). Labour laws guaranteeing labour rights did not apply to black or migrant workers, therefore, they were exploited, controlled and vulnerable in the workplace (Webb, 2017). However, post 1994, labour laws were universalised to people of colour by the state and government so that workers can be protected in the workplace. Laws like the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998), the Labour Relations Act (No. 66, 1995) and the Occupational Health and Safety Act (No. 85 of 1993) were put in place to make sure all people were under the same law that ensured everyone's rights, with acknowledgement that there needed to be redress for past oppression. Labour laws included domestic and farm labourers as sectors that required special legislation around minimum wage and working conditions (Webb, 2017). However, although these universal laws have been put in place since 1994 by the state, farmworkers are still constrained in the workplace. This is inclusive of migrant farmworkers as well.

In the case of migrant workers in South Africa, there has been some debate around citizenship, and whether the rights enshrined in this legislation apply to foreign migrant labourers. With migrant groups being more visible, South Africa has constantly defined and redefined what it means to be a citizen and who deserves citizen rights (Fine, 2014; Nyamnjoh, 2006). It is important to note that there are undocumented migrants that work in South Africa. These

workers are not protected by labour law in South Africa because of their citizenship status (Fine, 2014). They are prevented from accessing rights which majority of the time means that they have limited options.

However, in this research I argue against this as the Human Right Commission clearly states that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) protects everyone that is in South Africa including non-nationals. It further goes on to state that undocumented migrants “must still be treated with the dignity and respect, in a fair and humane manner in keeping with the constitution” (South African Human Rights Commission, n.d.). This assumption that all migrant labourers need to be treated in accordance with the constitution formed the basis for not asking participants whether they were documented or not. The point here is that whether they are documented or undocumented migrants they are still protected by the constitution as they are in South Africa.

The same applies with the application of labour law. Legislation does not specify that it only protects South African citizens. It states that it protects all workers. However, it is clear that migrants whether documented or undocumented, are not treated with the dignity and respect in line with the constitution as they are exploited and taken advantage of because of their status. The reason why migrants might allow unfair treatment towards them is because they are not aware that they are protected by the constitution.

It is important to note that migrants that have citizenship face similar problems in terms of protection. Therefore, we can argue that these workers are also in a precarious state. As defined by Wood (2017) the precariat is a specific section of labourers who do not have access labour market security, employment security, job security, work security, skill reproduction, income security and representation security. I argue that migrant workers do not have any of these forms of security hence they are in a precarious and vulnerable state.

Rather than focussing on guaranteeing workers’ rights, there has been a focus on how to tighten migration policies. However, Machinya (2022) argues that we cannot completely blame structures when it comes to the exploitation of migrant workers in general. They argue that as much as the structures abuse migrant workers, we should not forget that these workers have agency and could potentially resist. Machinya (2022) argues that migrant workers, especially undocumented migrants reinforce and reproduce their exploitation. Undocumented migrants are more likely to accept any work that is offered to them as they have this notion of getting money to ‘survive’ or ‘to just get by.’ This makes them attractive to employers as they pay

these workers low wages and can exploit them. While this may be true, Machinya (2022) does not consider how the employers (capitalists) use threats and fear to suppress any resistance.

Migrant farmworkers conditions

What exactly are the poor working conditions associated with the exploitation of precarious labourers? This section aims to outline these conditions from various contexts and how migrant farmworkers in different contexts react to their conditions. Furthermore, I argue the importance of this research study in this section in contributing to the already existing literature.

Literature in South Africa that explores migrant farmworkers experiences focusses on provinces like the Free State, Limpopo and Mpumalanga (Mather, 2000; Rutherford, 2008; Ulicki & Crush, 2007). These provinces are near the borders of South Africa's neighbouring countries and host the majority of migrant farmworkers. Migrants enter the country, legally or illegally and settle in these provinces, often because they are near their home countries and they can travel back home when they want to (Rutherford, 2008). However, it is important to note here that, this does not mean that migrants do not settle in other provinces in South Africa. Therefore, my research looks at migrant farmworkers in the Northern Cape which is a province that has not been investigated in relation to migrant farmworkers in South Africa.

Research that has been conducted on Zimbabwean farmworkers in Limpopo, makes it evident that these workers are exploited and subject to human rights violations on the farms (Jinnah, 2017). These workers did not receive any benefits and were not protected in the workplace (Jinnah, 2017). Therefore, workers had to find survival strategies. Jinnah's (2017) research shows that the survival strategies were largely geared toward economic survival, and workers chose strategies of silence and invisibility to ensure they would be paid. Jinnah (2017) goes on to raise the argument that this may be a function of their immigration status, the numbers of workers, the strength of the level of their self-organising, but also the specific realities of their place of work. These workers feared collective mobilisation as they feared being detained by the police (Jinnah, 2017).

Working and living conditions of migrant farmworkers from Lesotho in the Free State are not much different from Zimbabwean farmworkers in Limpopo. Although Ulicki & Crush's (2007) research is dated, it is useful in showing the conditions of migrant farmworkers from Lesotho, the same as the criteria for participants in this study. The study demonstrates that workers movements were controlled, and their passports taken away from them (Ulicki & Crush, 2007). This essentially means that the workers were held hostage. In addition, the study showed that

living conditions were undignified. For example, they slept in beds that had lice, and they had no privacy. Moreover, they did not have access to protective clothing and their working hours were not regulated (Ulicki & Crush, 2007). Once again it is made evident that the basic human rights of migrant workers are being violated by their employers.

Exploitation of migrant farmworkers is not unique to South Africa, a study by Stallones et al. (2009) looked at the health and safety of migrant farmworkers in the United States and Mexico. The study focussed on working, not living conditions and raised issues around health and safety. For example, study participants stated that they do not have protective clothing, had to use sharp tools in the field which could injure them. They also complained of suffering back pain from bending to do labour (Stallones et al., 2009). The researchers concluded that workers health and safety was not a priority in the workplace (Stallones et al., 2009).

Perrotta and Sacchetto (2014) explored the experiences of African migrant farmworkers in who lived in the ghettos of Southern Italy. The study mainly focused on gang masters in the ghettos who organise for immigrants to work under exploitative conditions in local farms. The study pointed out the exploitative conditions, but also looked at how these farmworkers took collective action to resist their exploitation (Perrotta & Sacchetto, 2014). The study linked resistance to the fact that migrant farmworkers lived together in the ghettos, making collective resistance much easier (Perrotta & Sacchetto, 2014). Thus, as argued by Perrotta and Sacchetto (2014) having many workers living closely together provides both the numbers, and the connections to foster collective resistance.

In 2020, the whole world was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. During this time, farmworkers were considered as essential workers which meant that they had to continue to work (Visser, 2023). Venkatash et al. (2023) exposed how migrant farmworkers conditions worsened during the pandemic as well as the forms of resistance exercised by migrant farm workers. They argue that the pandemic strengthened the consciousness of migrant farm workers, their forms of organisation and resistance (Venkatash et al., 2023).

Many of the studies above explore migrant labour work on large-scale farms. Tshuma (2014) focusses on small-scale farms, but from the perspective of the potential to foster rural development in South Africa. This focus on the owners of small-scale farms outlined the challenges small-scale farmers face and how the sector plays an important role when it comes to employment in the rural areas. Moreover Tshuma (2014) noted that not much attention is paid to small-scale farming and employment because those farmers depend on family for

labour. Hull (2014) explored labour on small-scale farms in Kwa-Zulu Natal from the perspective of labour shortages. Hull's (2014) study asserts that family members do not want to work on these farms as they do not get paid for their labour. Therefore, small-scale farmers have had to rely on labour outside of their family and turned to cheap migrant labour as an alternative. These studies don't speak to the working conditions of these labourers on small-scale farms, a gap this thesis aims to fill.

The literature outlined above makes it evident that there is a gap in understanding the range of migrant formwork in the Northern Cape specifically. In addition, research on small-scale farms has not focussed on workers conditions of employment, or forms of resistance. This study seeks to fill these gaps, exploring not only the experiences of migrant labourers from Lesotho in the Northern Cape, but also both large and small-scale farming contexts. The research in this thesis contributes to a broader understanding of the conditions of farm workers as it has looked at an under researched location, as well as issues of scale.

Representation of migrant farmworkers

As explored above, it has been argued that the only way that vulnerable group will not be exploited is through labour regulation and collective bargaining (Wood, 2017). Questions remain if this is the case for farmworkers. Collective bargaining for farmworkers in general both migrant and local, through trade unions has been difficult in South Africa (Webb, 2017). One major reason is that most farm owners do not allow any trade unions on their farms (Webb, 2017). In addition, with unions providing the foundation for collective bargaining, conditions on farms which include fear amongst workers, precarity amongst labourers, and the migration status of workers limit the possibility of unionisation and/or collective bargaining (Munakamwe et al., 2014).

Where unions do operate, they may not have models that work in the agricultural sector. Webb (2017) outlines how COSATU even admits that unions are utilising a model that is not appropriate for the agricultural sector. Unions are using a model derived from urban organising and trying to implement it on farms which are in rural areas. These are two different spaces, and issues of mobility and spatial fragmentation make it difficult to gather in enough numbers to rely on this model (Webb, 2017). Since much farm work is seasonal, it also limits the possibilities for union organising, as people do not stay in steady jobs (Webb, 2017).

This is not only true in the South African context. Hanley et al. (2020) explore the struggle to unionise for Canadian farm workers, especially seasonal ones. The study shows that this can

be successful. The United Food and Commercial won for the fight to have seasonal farmworkers to be represented in the workplace in the year 2013 when the Superior court stated that it is illegal and unconstitutional for these workers not to have a right to unionisation (Hanley et al., 2020). However, when the Liberal Party got into power in the year 2014, seasonal workers were denied the right to be part of unions (Hanley et al., 2020). It has been argued that the reason why legislators in Quebec exclude farmworkers or treat them differently is because many of the seasonal farm workers come from Mexico or Guatemala, and so racial discrimination plays a role in justifying their exclusion from unions (Hanley et al., 2020).

Hanley et al. (2020) also argue that there are multiple actors who have also played a role in the struggle to unionise seasonal workers in Quebec. These include consulates, employers and the government. Hanley et al. (2020) argue that these parties have more power and control, as employees' contracts are negotiated between the governments in their country of origin with the Canadian government before they migrate. Therefore, it is very difficult for these contracts to be changed once the workers have moved and started working. Even so, migrant farmworkers claim that these contracts are not respected by their employers (Hanley et al., 2020). For example, one farmworker stated that they do not receive the benefits that are on their contract.

In the South African context, the focus has been on organising permanent workers and not seasonal farmworkers. Unions claim that it is easier to organise permanent workers because they are in the same location over a long period, and this makes it easier for unions to negotiate their conditions (Webb, 2017). Moreover, permanent workers' wages are higher than those of seasonal workers which means there is financial stability for the union (Webb, 2017). This is a challenge because these seasonal farmworkers are the ones that are mostly exploited in the workplace (Munakamwe et al., 2014). Migrant farmworkers form part of the seasonal farmworkers. Their status as migrants already puts them in a more vulnerable position for multiple reasons. They are desperate most times as most of them migrate due to economic conditions in their countries (Moseki, 2011). Therefore, they accept what employers offer them when they do get employed in these low skilled jobs. Employers take advantage of this vulnerability. This is evident in the case of migrant farmworkers who are exploited and taken advantage of in the workplace (Johnston, 2007). Therefore, it is important to find strategies to protect these workers who are contributing to the economy.

Theoretical framework: Resistance explained

Resistance has often been defined as overt visible action that is taken by a group of people or by an individual in a specific space that challenges those in power (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). In the South African context during apartheid, worker's resistance has largely been noted as workers using their collective agency to fight abusive conditions not only in the workplace but in society as well. These were mainly black people who worked in mines and agriculture. Migrant labourers joined with black South Africans in resisting exploitative working conditions as they were treated the same under the apartheid regime (Trimikliniotis et al., 2008). After 1994, tensions with foreign African migrants have risen, and there have been debates around who is classed as a citizen and protected by the new equal rights-based legislation. Migrant labourers have become subject to the rising xenophobia or Afrophobia, meaning isolation and increased vulnerability, making it difficult to join any collective visible resistance (Nyamnjoh, 2006).

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) argue that social scientists have mainly focused on resistance in terms of material and physical aspects. In this case those who are resisting use their bodies and material objects. However, when resistance is only defined as visible action, we are ignoring the other types of resistance that are present in our society (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). Scott (1990) introduced the idea of everyday forms of resistance which refers to disguised forms of autonomous resistance that are utilised by lower classes. These disguised forms of resistance are also known as covert forms of resistance (Colburn, 2016). They range from foot dragging, desertion, smuggling, poaching, sabotage and ignorance, and are often individual rather than collectively organised acts (Scott, 1990). The reason why such techniques are used by the lower class or what Scott (1990) refers to the peasant, is to avoid any form of detection. Those who use this type of resistance want to avoid attention to themselves (Colburn, 2016).

Colburn (2016) argues that those who use these methods are usually vulnerable or sub-ordinate groups in society who are subject to social power and control from superiors. They use covert or everyday resistance to avoid being caught by those who are superior as they will face consequences if they are caught by their superiors. The techniques that they use are safe and do not require any formal coordination and organisation (Colburn, 2016). Collective organisation for these groups is also difficult as they also lack organisational skills.

The work of Scott (1990) looked at the peasant society and the weapons they used for everyday forms of resistance. In this society, class formation played an important role, and it still does

in the present context (Tjitombo, 2020). There were the dominant class, which in South Africa could be defined as white, owners of land or owners of the means of production. There were also the subordinate (peasants) who did not own land and had to work on the land of the dominant (Scott, 1990). Scott (1990) makes extensive use of race in his work as the main reason why peasants were ill-treated and exploited in society and the workplace. As stated by Burawoy (1985) wherever exploitation takes place resistance will also take place. However, as argued by Scott (1990), the subordinate did not have power due to political and racial reasons, this meant that they could not visibly retaliate in the public transcript to the treatment they were getting from the dominant class.

Scott (1990) also introduces the concept of the public transcript, which he defines as where the peasant had to face the dominant class member directly. This could be in the fields, or any public space where they had to interact with each other (Scott, 1990). He argues that fear would force the peasant or subordinate to put on a face or an act for the dominant class member. Scott (1990) goes on to argue that this is done through the suppression of their real feelings, and impression management as a survival skill. The reason for this is that if they would visibly retaliate, they would get punished for it. For example, they could get beaten up or even killed (Scott, 1990). Therefore, the weak would have to find strategies to resist the treatment that they were getting from the dominant classes, which Scott (1990) has argued have to be discreet to ensure they are not caught.

In this case it can be argued that migrant farmworkers are a vulnerable group in society due to their conditions of exploitation, and limited representation and protection in the workplace. This does not preclude resistance, but visible action and forms of resistance are often difficult for these groups. Therefore, they need to find alternative ways to resist. This is where covert forms of resistance come into play (Colburn, 2016).

Tjitombo (2021) shows how migrant farm and local farm workers use everyday forms of resistance. This ranged from name calling, farmworkers speaking in their native language, sabotage, strikes, gossiping and not responding to instructions. These techniques mean that resistance is happening, even if it is considered invisible. They are alternatives to the potentially dangerous overt resistance, as farmworkers (as argued above) are considered vulnerable and precarious (Ulicki & Crush, 2007; Venkatash, 2023).

Scott's (1990) theory of everyday resistance therefore provides a suitable theoretical framework to examine the relationship between migrant farmworkers in Barkly West, as they

are dominated by those who own the means of production which are their employers. These employers rely on these migrant farmworkers in order for production to take place. Conditions of vulnerability make collective resistance difficult in South Africa (Wood, 2017). However, this does not mean that resistance does not take place in what Scott (1990) has defined as everyday forms. Farmworkers need to find undetectable strategies to resist their conditions in the public transcript in order to survive.

Tjitombo (2021) has explored this in the South African context, but these everyday forms of resistance cannot be generalised as context plays an important role. Culture and language are cited as weapons the weak use to resist (Tjitombo, 2021), but these vary amongst different populations. This thesis seeks to explore the particular forms of everyday resistance that may be similar, and different to what Tjitombo (2021) has found within the particular context of migrant labourers from Lesotho working in Barkly West. Methods of everyday resistance may also shift depending on the scale of the farm, hence the focus on large and small-scale farms in the area. These forms of resistance may be difficult to detect, but it does not mean that they are not present.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

Introduction:

This study took place in Barkly West which is a small town located in the Northern Cape. Small-scale and large-scale migrant farmworkers were interviewed. The farms that these workers are employed at, are mainly located in the outskirts of Barkly West. Eight participants in total were interviewed for this study. These were four male workers from the small-scale farms and four female workers from the large-scale farm. It is important to note that the agriculture provides most of the employment in Barkly West as there are multiple surrounding farms in the town, hence most migrants settle in this town (Dikgatlong Local Municipality, 2022). This chapter will outline the methodologies that were used to answer the research question.

Research approach

This research used qualitative research methodology and phenomenological research design in order to examine the lived experiences of migrant farmworkers. This approach considers the farm workers as the experts in their own lived experiences and allowed for the exploration of their subjective experiences (Creswell, 2018). Interviews were the most appropriate methodology to achieve this exploration (Creswell, 2018). In addition, this approach is particularly useful to study areas in which there is little knowledge (Creswell, 2018). Since there was very little evidence of literature examining the experiences of migrant farm workers in the Northern Cape, or on small-scale farms, this made the approach more appropriate, especially for migrant farmworkers to describe their own experiences in the workplace.

The phenomenological approach also fit well with an interpretivist paradigm where participants actions are analysed in relation to the context in which they occur (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It also enables the researcher to interact with the participants and understand their viewpoint (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Interviews were thus used to enable the researcher to ask questions about participants experiences, as well as understand their viewpoints within their own context.

Population and sampling

The population is known as the people that the researcher is interested in studying (Babbie, 2015). The population for this study focused was migrant farmworkers from Lesotho working in large and small-scale farms in and around Barkly West in the Northern Cape. The sample was purposive to find farm workers who fit the criteria. Gill (2020) asserts that purposive sampling which is also known as selective sampling refers to when the researcher intentionally

selects their participants who have knowledge about the phenomenon being studied. In this case the researcher is able to select participants that will benefit the study (Gill, 2020). Therefore, this study selected migrant farmworkers who work on small and large-scale farms in Barkly West who had migrated from Lesotho. It is important to note that the study looked at both male and female migrant farmworkers. Four male participants worked on different small scale farms and four female participants were employed on the large scale commercial farm. It is important to mention that, only men work and live on small scale farms. The reason why only men are employed on these farms is due to safety reasons. It is not safe for females to work and live on these farms as they are secluded. There are also high rates of stock theft on small scale farms. As a result, only male small scale farmworkers were interviewed in this study. Both males and females work on the large scale commercial farms. However, no large scale male farm workers were interviewed. This was mainly to allow the study to have an equal gender split. The reason why eight participants were interviewed, is because the scope of the research only allowed for this number. The eight participants from small scale and large scale farms helped me answer my research question as they are knowledgeable about the phenomenon that was studied.

In terms of gaining access to participants, I relied on fellow community members who have a relationship with the migrant farmworkers, especially community leaders to recruit small-scale farmworkers through their own relationships. Community leaders were initially hesitant to help me as they did not want to put the migrants in an uncomfortable position. I had to therefore explain and emphasise to the community leaders that this research is strictly for academic purposes. Furthermore, I explained to them that I will make sure that participants are protected as I have implemented ethical measures to make sure that they are not in danger. In the ethics section, I clearly outline that I attempt anonymity and explain how this was done. One of the community leaders agreed on a specific week where we are both free to drive out to the different farms to speak to the farmworkers for recruitment purposes. We did this after 17:00 as this was the time farm workers stopped working for the day. We drove out to the different small-scale farms and I explained to the farmworkers in detail what the research was about. Some agreed to take part and some did not agree as they did not feel comfortable.

In the case of recruiting large-scale farmworkers, I had to drive to areas in the township where they resided. I followed the same process as explaining what my research is about to these farmworkers. Some were not interested. However, I found one farmworker who stated that they do not mind participating in the research. They then directed me to their fellow colleagues who they knew would be interested in being part of the study, thus I ended up using a combination

of purposive and snowball sampling (Babbie, 2015; Gill, 2020). According to Babbie (2015) snowball sampling refers to a researcher getting access to participants through other participants that they have interviewed. The recruitment process was done in December of 2023.

I aimed to interview at least four farm workers who worked on large-scale farms, and four who worked on small-scale farms. With interviews focussing on lived experiences and meaning making, the findings can't be considered generalizable to either the context of farms in Barkly West, or the wider South African sphere of migrant farm workers. However, their stories give important insight that can add to the wider body of knowledge about migrant farm labourers' conditions, and how they resist their oppressive working conditions as vulnerable workers.

It is important to note that all participation was voluntary as participants were not forced to take part of this research. This was especially important due to the potentially vulnerable status of participants as migrant farm labourers. Anonymity had to be guaranteed, and one participant pulled out as they were scared about deportation, arrest or being fired.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were the chosen method for the research. They align with the phenomenological and interpretive approach outlined above (Cresswell, 2018; Kuvinja & Kuyini, 2017), and allowed participants to speak for themselves (Stofer, 2019). This meant that there were no predetermined responses that participants were forced to select. The questions posed were open ended questions which allowed me to gather in-depth information related to the research question.

It is important to note that this type of interviewing technique allowed migrant farmworkers to outline their experiences and not limit them while responding to questions (Stofer, 2019). A list of questions was created that guided and structured the interviews. This allowed participants to share their experiences in detail but also allowed for participants to add information that was not asked for.

Farmworkers were not available at the same time due to their working hours. Interviews with small-scale farmworkers took place when they finished working for the day. These interviews took place around 17:00. Interviews with large-scale farmworkers took place during the weekend as this time suited them the most. These interviews were conducted in the morning.

The semi-structured interviews for this research took place online using Microsoft Teams (Teams). Financial constraints made it not possible to travel back to Barkly West for the interviews, only the recruitment phase. An alternative solution needed to be found, and I chose online interviews. As argued by Al Balushi (2016) one of the advantages of online interviews is geographical access. What this means is that researchers can conduct interviews with people all over the world specifically those who have access to a computer or cell phone. I therefore organised a venue that had access to Wi-Fi and a laptop where the interviews could take place. It is important to mention here that I asked participants if they were comfortable with this method. They all stated that they do not mind conducting interviews online.

In addition to providing a safe and confidential venue with accessible laptop and Wi-Fi, transport was also provided to ensure that participants were not inconvenienced throughout this whole process. There were no complications during the interviews as the venue was already set up when participants arrived to ensure that interviews ran smoothly. I also had someone on site to assist with logging into Teams and to help if technical difficulties were to occur. The interviews were recorded using the recording option on Teams and as back up, the voice recording function on a smartphone. Recording the interviews ensured that I could accurately represent what the participants said.

Online interviews have been criticised as there are those that argue that one cannot achieve the interactive communication that can be achieved through face-to-face interviews. This is mainly due the fact that it is difficult read the body language of the participant and this can give you extra information which you can add to their responses (Balushi, 2018). However, I had a different experience with my online interviews. I was able to read my participants body language as both our cameras were on. Therefore, I did not miss the extra information through the body language or non-verbal actions that were portrayed by participants as I could see them.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews conducted, I also visited the small-scale farms in December 2023, when I was recruiting participants to be part of the study. While I was visiting the farms, I could see where the participants lived and which type of environment they worked in. In July 2024, I also visited the large-scale farms in the area just to get a sense and observe the workers that work in the field. I was able to get access to the farm through a lady that I attend church with and is a foreman on the farm.

In October 2024 when I was home, I was able to take pictures of where participants get their drinking water from. This was on my drive on way to my farmhouse which is located on the

outskirts of Barkly West. There was no need for me to get permission in terms of access as the water passes through along the gravel road as you drive to the farms.

Above I have outlined one of the challenges that I faced when conducting this research which was fear from participants. Another challenge which I had planned for was the language barrier. The only common language of fluency for the migrant labourers and myself as the researcher is Sesotho. Therefore, interviews were conducted in Sesotho. This made it easier for the workers and me to understand each other clearly. I did not need a translator as I am fluent in Sesotho. Interviews were translated to English when the data analysis was conducted as thesis is written in English.

Data analysis

After the interviews were conducted with migrant farmworkers, the next step was data analysis. As mentioned above, the interviews were conducted in Sesotho as this is the participants home language. However, because this research paper is written in English, I had to translate the interviews from Sesotho to English while transcribing. The translation and transcription process allowed me to listen carefully for the emerging themes, as thematic analysis was the primary analysis method (Spencer, 2014).

Thematic analysis can be defined as a method that identifies, organises and offers insight into patterns of meaning in a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This method of analysis focuses on meaning in the data set, this allows the research to be able to detect shared experiences. However, it is important that the research identify the patterns that are relevant to their research (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This approach allowed for the emergence of themes from the experiences shared by participants throughout the data set (Terry et al., 2017). In this case the themes followed the research question around migrant farmworkers from Lesotho's experiences of workplace conditions, experiences of exploitation, as well as their forms of resistance.

I followed a six-phase approach as outlined in the works of Braun and Clarke (2012) guide to thematic analysis after the transcription process was completed. The first step was to familiarise myself with the data. This started with the translation and transcription process, and continued with a review of transcripts, and listening to the recordings more than once. The second step was generating my codes from the data set in relation to main points that were made by participants. These were mainly descriptive codes (Braun & Clark, 2012). Furthermore, after generating the codes, the next step was to search for potential themes. The themes were

developed from identifying a pattern in the responses of the participants. For example, all participants mentioned issues with representation in the workplace. Therefore, a theme in relation to representation was developed (Braun & Clark, 2012). This was all done by reviewing the data and codes in conjunction. The themes that emerged were closely related to the research question.

The fourth step was to review potential themes that I previously identified. This was a very important step as I could not use all the themes that I had developed. Questions around the meaning and relevance of themes to the research question were posed, as well as the extent of data to support each theme. These critical questions helped me group my themes from the most important to the least important (Braun & Clark, 2012). Defining and naming the themes was also part of the analysis. This was a very important process as it helped make sure that the themes made sense and that they were closely related to the research questions. Furthermore, it also helped to identify the relatedness between themes and ensure that they did not overlap. The final step was writing up the data, which is presented in the findings chapters (Braun & Clark, 2012).

Ethical considerations

Ethics play an important role when it comes to research. Participants need to be protected at all times, and harm needs to be minimised. Ethical considerations form part of the proposal and implementation and need to be considered throughout the research process. This was especially important for this thesis as participants were drawn from a vulnerable group. In this section, the details of ethics and protection measures are presented.

Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality were a vital part of the ethical considerations of this research (Macloed & Mnyaka, 2018). Anonymity means that participants' personal information was not revealed in this paper. Confidentiality means that none of their identifying information will be shared with others (Macloed & Mnyaka, 2018). This was important for this research as migrant farm labourers face stigma and discrimination. Moreover, Barkly West is a small town and people know each other very well. Therefore, anonymity was important to ensure that participants are safe during and after the research has been conducted (Macloed & Mnyaka, 2018). I asked participants if they wanted to remain anonymous or not. All participants opted to remain anonymous. Therefore, I attempt to keep their anonymity in the study. I did this by using labels in the writing instead of their real names. Participant A,B,C,D are employed on small-scale farms and participant E,F,G,H are employed on large-scale farms. Participants

feared being arrested during the interviews and were scared to answer certain questions. I had to constantly reassure them that I will be the only one that has access to interview recordings and transcripts to ensure that they do not get identified as they feared losing their jobs. This was also mentioned to the participants before the interview process started. The data was stored on my computer which is protected with a password that I only have access to. Furthermore, I have stored the consent forms in my personal file where I keep all my important and confidential documents.

As mentioned above, a trusted community leader assisted me with the recruitment of small-scale farmworkers. This was a risky as participants' identities could be revealed to the rest of the community by this leader. However, it is important to note here that during the recruitment process more than four small-scale farmworkers agreed to be part of the study. This means that I had to cut down the numbers before conducting the interviews. Therefore, the community leader did not know who specifically from the those who agreed to be part of study were selected at the end.

As the interviews were conducted online and I had someone transport the participants to the interview venue, this also put participants at risk. However, I communicated with the person transporting the participants instructing them not to ask participants questions that would reveal their identity, for example their name, age or who they worked for. This was also communicated to the person who was onsite at the venue to assist if technical difficulties were to occur. Furthermore, at the start of each interview, I asked the assistant to leave the room so that they are not present throughout the interviews. These measures were all put in place to make sure that participants confidentiality and safety were accounted for.

Informed consent

Lastly informed consent was also taken into consideration for this research (Posel & Ross, 2015). Participation in the research was voluntary, and there was no force or coercion used to recruit or interview participants. Moreover, participants were well informed about the research and the purpose of the research as in addition to presenting them information about the research verbally, an informed consent form was also provided. This was very important to ensure participants were fully aware of the scope and outcomes of the research project. At the start of each interview, participants were provided with an informed consent form. As outlined above most participants are fluent in their home language. This means that I had to translate the form to ensure that participants understand the purpose of the forms. However, some participants did not know how to read their own home language. Therefore, I had to read out the consent

form in Sesotho to make sure that participants understand what the research was about. Within the consent form I gave participants the option to withdraw from participating in the research at any time. Furthermore, I also asked for their consent to record the interviews. This was all done before the start of each interview.

Challenges during data collection

Every research comes with its challenges and this one was no different. There are multiple challenges that I faced while collecting data. The first challenge that I outlined above was language as participants only speak Sesotho. I was able to overcome this challenge as I am fluent in the language. However, the main challenge was during the transcription process. Language is a very complex phenomenon. There are certain words that do not have the same meaning in Sesotho as they do in English. Furthermore, direct translation is often difficult as at times it does not make sense if it is directly translated. This is a challenge I came across when translating and transcribing as I felt like there was some meaning lost in translating the interviews from Sesotho to English. As argued by Larson (1997) when translation takes place, meaning needs to be transferred and must be held constant. This is a difficult task when there are no direct words that translates to the English language. This means that the translator has to look for words which may have similar meaning. This in turn means that the exact phrasing can't always be captured, but the translator has to ensure that the meaning is congruent with the original in order to ensure the validity of the data. I approached this challenge by sometimes not changing some of the words to English. Furthermore, this also meant that the transcribing process took much longer as I had to listen to the recordings carefully more than once to make sure that the meaning did not change significantly when translated to English.

While conducting interviews, there were times when participants could not understand the questions that I was asking them. For example, there were some participants that did not understand what benefits are. I had to in this case explain what benefits are in order for participants to be able to answer the question. This might have had a negative impact on the data as it could have led to bias in the research in terms of how participants understood what benefits meant. However, I defined it in a very general manner that was also easy for the participants to understand and to avoid any form of bias so that they could respond to the research question.

There was also an issue of literacy as most participants could not read. Most of them stated that they did not have any formal education. This was a challenge as this meant that they could not read consent forms which I had printed out for them. However, I overcame this by reading it

out and explaining it to the participants so that they could fully understand what the research was about and to gain their consent for participation in the research.

Another challenge which I have touched on in the previous section was participants wanting to withdraw. I recruited replacements through snowball sampling. It was also a challenge scheduling interviews. This was especially the case with large-scale farmworkers as they were only available during the weekend. When I did find them during the weekend they would be intoxicated. This meant that I would have to wait until the participants were available and sober to ensure that informed consent was completed with full comprehension, and all inhibitions intact.

Some of the participants were reluctant to respond in detail to some of the questions that were asked during the interviews. For example, one participant was afraid of getting arrested. Another example was that during the interviews participants did not want to name the farm they were working at. Furthermore, participants also asked whether there would be changes in their conditions as they were taking part in this research. However, I constantly had to remind them that this is purely for academic purposes as I do not have the resources to make the changes in the workplace. This was very important as I did not want to make any unrealistic promises to them as they are a vulnerable group.

Research findings:

This research investigated the experiences of migrant farmworkers in Barkly West, Northern Cape. The aim of the study was to explore the working conditions of these workers. It focused on workers' health and safety, working hours, wages, benefits and representation in the workplace. Lastly the study also focused on how workers resist intolerable working conditions. Eight participants were interviewed in total. These were four males that worked on small scale farms and four females that worked on a large scale farm. The four small scale farmworkers live on the farm they work on and the commercial farmworkers live in the townships in Barkly West.

The study found that health and safety was an issue on both small scale farms and on large scale commercial farms. Participants said that their health and safety was not taken into consideration on the farms. Of the four small scale farmworkers that were interviewed, only one participant said that they received protective clothing from their employer. The other three mentioned that they were responsible for providing themselves with protective clothing. Similar to small scale workers, from the four large scale farmworkers that were interviewed, only one worker said they received protective clothing. This was a storeroom worker. However, field workers in this study from commercial farms, said that they were responsible for their own protective clothing.

Small scale farmworkers complained that because of high stock theft in the area, their lives were at risk. Water and sanitation was also an issues on small scale farms. The workers do not have access to clean water and they also do not have access to proper toilet facilities.

As mentioned above, this study also focused on the working hours of migrant farmworkers. This study found that working hours of small scale farmworkers are not regulated. It is important to mention that these workers are employed on different farms. All of these farms have different working hours. Furthermore, workers on small scale farms said they work seven days a week. They also said they do not have a lunch break as they are in the field the whole day.

On the other hand, when asked about their working hours, large scale farmworkers said that it all depended on their workload on the farm. If they have a lot of work to do, they work from 06:30 to 18:00. When they do not have a lot of work to do, they work from 06:30 to 16:00. Furthermore, they only work five days a week. In contrast to small scale farmworkers, large scale farmworkers had an option of having a lunch break.

This study found that employee benefits are an issue for farmworkers. Small scale farmworkers said that they do not receive any benefits. This is inclusive of leave days. They also said they did not sign any formal employment contracts. Rather, they had verbal agreements with their employers. All large scale commercial workers, except one, said that they do not receive benefits. The worker that receives benefits is a storeroom worker and she gets UIF. Although they do not have formal leave days, they are allowed to stay home when they are sick. However, they need to submit a doctor's letter when they resume.

I also found a significant difference between the wages of small scale workers and those of large scale farmworkers.. Small scale farmworkers salaries ranged from R1500.00 to R3000.00 per month. Large scale farmworkers' salaries ranged from R3000.00 to R6000.00 per month. It is important to mention here that large scale commercial farm workers said that their salaries are calculated according to how much they produce on the farm. They are also paid on a monthly basis.

As mentioned in chapter 2, formal representation of farmworkers is still an issue in South Africa. I thus looked at whether migrant farmworkers in Barkly West have any form of formal representation in the workplace. On both small scale and large scale farms, the workers do not have any form of formal representation. All of the workers in the study stated that they are not part of unions. Large scale farmworkers said that unions are not allowed on the farm. When they have an issue in the workplace, they report it to their foreman who is supposed to report it to the human resource department. Small scale farmworkers on the other hand report their issues directly to their employer. However, they barely do this as this could put their job at risk.

The study also investigated how the workers resist their intolerable conditions. I investigated whether farmworkers in this study make use of covert or overt forms of resistance. As mentioned in Chapter 2, because these workers are vulnerable, they ought to use covert forms of resistance. It was clear from the data that workers use both covert and overt forms of resistance. One participant in the study that works on a large scale commercial farm stated that they reported to their foreman that they were unhappy about their salaries in the workplace. Their foreman did not report this and this led to a strike on the farm. Participants working on large scale farm also mentioned covert forms of resistance like gossiping on the farm.

Majority of the small scale farmworkers resorted to covert forms of resistance. This included name calling, silence and feigned ignorance. One participant stated that they tried to complain

about their conditions to their employer. This is a form of overt resistance. However, this ended up putting their job at risk.

The findings above make it clear that workers are exploited in the workplace and that the workers' health and safety, benefits, wages, working hours and representation are an issue in the workplace. The next chapters will go into detail by discussing these findings. This will be followed by the concluding chapter.

Participant socio-demographic information:

The table below provides information about the demographics of the participants in the study. It outlines their age, gender, race, marital status, occupation, number of years employed on the farm where they are currently employed, and their country of origin. Four males and four females were interviewed. All participants migrated from Lesotho to South Africa.

Table 1:

Name	Age	Gender	Race	Marital Status	Occupation	Number of years employed on the farm	Country of Origin
Participant A	Not disclosed.	Male	Black	Not Disclosed	Small Scale farmworker	Not disclosed.	Lesotho
Participant B	30	Male	Black	Married	Small Scale farmworker	1	Lesotho
Participant C	32	Male	Black	Married	Small Scale farmworker.	13	Lesotho
Participant D	Not disclosed.	Male	Black	Not disclosed.	Small Scale farmworker.	1	Lesotho
Participant E	44	Female	Black	Not disclosed	Large scale farmworker(Field worker)	12	Lesotho
Participant F	41	Female	Black	Not disclosed.	Large scale farmworkers(Field worker)	5	Lesotho
Participant G	62	Female	Black	Not disclosed.	Large scale farmworker (Field worker)	23	Lesotho
Participant H	58	Female	Black	Not disclosed.	Large scale farmworker (Storeroom worker)	19	Lesotho

Chapter Four: Participants working and living conditions in relation to health and safety

Introduction

The existing literature has made it evident that migrant farmworkers do not have a conducive working environment (Hanley et al., 2020; Ulicki & Crush, 2007). This is also the case in the context of Barkly West as workers are exploited and taken advantage of in the workplace. It is important to note here that most participants that were interviewed in this study migrated to South Africa post 1994. Furthermore, most of them have been in the country for a long time. Many stated that they had moved from Lesotho to find work to support their families back home.

Migrant farmworkers on the large-scale farm mentioned that they have applied for citizenship which they were granted. This means that they have the same citizenship rights as any other South African. However, they are still exploited in the workplace. The issue of citizenship was not mentioned by farmworkers on the small-scale farms (Fine, 2014). However, this does not mean that they are not protected by the law (South African Human Rights Commission, n.d.a; Nyamnjoh, 2006).

This, and the following chapter present the research findings from the interviews that were conducted in December 2023. Participants explained in detail their experiences in the workplace, and throughout the interviews it was made evident how migrant farmworkers from Barkly West are exploited. It was also clear that migrant farmworkers on small-scale farms have different experiences in the workplace in comparison to the farmworkers on the large-scale commercial farm. The conditions of the farmworkers on small-scale farms tend to be worse as they live and work on isolated farms which means they have no access to basic services. These participants were also concerned about their safety due to the stock theft that was taking place on the farms.

Type of work that is done by participants

It is important to give a brief background on the type of work that is done by farmworkers on both the small- and large-scale farms. In total eight participants were interviewed for this study. Of the four farmworkers on the large-scale farm, three were seasonal farmworkers that work in the fields. Their work consists of cutting the vegetable tops and putting them into the crates so that they can be sorted. The vegetable tops are cut using a knife. Some of these participants also cultivate the land so that the crops can be planted. The fourth participant works in the storeroom where they work with machinery that helps with sorting out the vegetables.

Four migrant farmworkers on small-scale farms were interviewed for this study. They all do different work on the farms where they are employed. Two of the participants' herd animals in the open fields, they have to walk behind the animals while they graze on the farm. The other two participants plant and water crops and take care of chickens on the farm where they work. Lastly, all participants do general work on the farm for their boss. For example, this can include fixing the fence to make sure that animals are not stolen.

The health and safety of participants

Health and safety has always been an issue for farmworkers across the world (Chirima, 2022; Jinnah, 2017; Stallones et al., 2009). When we look at the South African context, this is no different (Munakamwe et al., 2014; Ulicki & Crush, 2007). Looking at these studies the question should then be, have conditions regarding health and safety changed for migrant farmworkers? Amongst the participants in this study, the answer to this question is no. The migrant farmworkers interviewed for this thesis stated their health and safety is not taken into consideration on the farms, whether they worked on large- or small-scale farms. From the eight participants that took part in this study, only two stated that they receive protective clothing from their employer, one from the small-scale farm and the other from the large-scale farm. As mentioned above, small-scale farmers stay on the farms where they work and they made it clear that they are concerned about their safety due to high rates of stock theft in the area. Participants noted that some farmworkers have been attacked by thieves on the farm.

Protective clothing

Migrant farmworkers who worked on small-scale farms live and work on the farms. These participants stated that their health and safety is not considered on the farms where they work, and only one of the participants received protective clothing from their employer in the form of one pair of overalls once a year. The three workers that do not get protective clothing have to buy their own clothes or they wear their everyday clothing and shoes to work, which are not

conducive for the type of work that they do. These farmworkers could get hurt while herding the animals in the fields. This is echoed by Nwafor & Nwafor (2020) who argue that those who work in the agricultural sector are vulnerable to health issues as they can easily get injured in the workplace.

The farmworkers on small-scale farms I interviewed also work in very hostile and isolated environments. There are thorns in the field, wild plants and animals that they might run into, and their everyday clothing does not protect them from these potential hazards. They also do not have any equipment to protect them from the wild animals in the fields:

My employer does nothing about my health and safety. I take care of my own health and safety in the workplace. I as a person need to make sure that I take care of myself. If danger comes into place, I need to make sure that I take myself out of that dangerous situation. He does nothing. Nothing at all. (Participant B)

If they do get injured, emergency services are not close by to assist them. When they do call their employers, they do not come to the workers assistance immediately. Participants said that it could take a full day before their employers would come to check in on them. Furthermore, these workers said that they are not compensated when they get injured at work.

Participants also stated that they do not ask questions when it comes to health and safety in the workplace as they are afraid of getting fired. One could argue that these participants should be asking questions about protective clothing as they are putting their lives at risk. However, resistance is difficult for this group because of their vulnerable state.

As mentioned above two of the small-scale participants' herd animals, this means that they are exposed to the sun every single day that they are in the field. They do not receive anything from their employer that will protect them from the sun. Kearney et al. (2014) argues that because agricultural workers are exposed to the sun more than those who work in other industries, they are prone to Ultraviolet Radiation (UVR) from the sun. This causes skin cancer and can damage your eyes. The UVR damages all skin types, counter to the common assumption that darker skinned individuals are not at risk of developing skin cancer (Kearney et al., 2014). Temperatures in the Northern Cape can rise to 41 degrees celsius in the summer time (van Dieman, 2023). Therefore, it is very concerning that these workers have nothing to protect them from the sun. This means that they are also at risk of developing skin cancer or a heat stroke. Heat stroke is potentially deadly, with stories emerging from a farm in Kakamas in the Northern Cape where seven farmworkers died due to heat strokes (van Dieman, 2023).

The report on the tragedy did note that some workers mentioned that some of their employers put in measures to protect them from the harsh weather conditions by bringing them cold water or allowing them to work shorter hours (van Dieman, 2023). However, preventative measures to protect farmworkers on small-scale farms from the heat were not mentioned by any of the participants in this study.

Similar to farmworkers on small-scale farms, those on large-scale farms that work on the field also outlined that their health and safety is not a priority in the workplace. These workers cultivate the land and extract the beetroot and carrot from the ground so that it moves on to the next stage of production. They need to cut the beetroot and carrot tops using knives before putting them into the crates. However, they do not receive any gloves to protect their hands from this process. The farmworkers buy gloves for themselves to protect their hands from any injuries. Similar to farmworkers on the small-scale farms, they have to look after their own health and safety in the workplace. The experiences of these field workers can be compared to those of Mexican migrant farmworkers in the United States who also work in the fields (Stallones et al., 2009) who mention the danger of using sharp implements in their work. These implements could injure the workers, and in both contexts no protective equipment is provided:

Haai those things are not there. They do not look out for those things in the farms, especially when you work in the fields. They do not care for us there. It is better for the people that work in the store room. But in the fields haaikona (no way, not on your life) they do not care. (Participant A)

The fields that they work in are also wet most of the time. The shoes that they wear do not protect them from the damp fields as they wear their everyday shoes to work. Notably, the participants that I interviewed range in age between 45 and 65. The tough working conditions have affected the older female's bones and muscles as they have been working on the farms in the same conditions for a long time. They feel these health effects now that they are older. This could be signs of arthritis which is common among women that work in the agricultural sector. Similar to the research of Stallones et al. (2009) in the US context where migrant labourers discussed the long term illnesses they suffered from working in the fields. This is further corroborated in the research of Hansen and Donohoe (2003), who present evidence that agricultural workers are at risk of developing chronic diseases because of the type of work they do.

Similar to farmworkers on small-scale farms, those working on large-scale farms are also exposed to the sun when they are at work. This means that they are also at risk of developing skin cancer, suffering from heat strokes, or experiencing damage to their eyes. With no work or protective gear provided, participants rely on their everyday clothes. When visiting the farm, I observed how the women that work on the fields use methods such as wearing different layers of clothing to protect themselves, wearing sun hats and applying calamine as a form of sunscreen. However, none of these were supplied by the employer. This is similar to the strategies of workers in a study by Kearney et al. (2014) where the protective measures used by farm workers against the sun included wearing long sleeved shirts, wearing hats and applying sunscreen. It's evident from the use of these measures that these workers are aware of the dangers that come with the exposure to the sun as they implement measures to protect themselves.

Participant B works in the storeroom. The experiences of this participant in terms of health and safety was different from her colleagues who worked in the fields. This participant made it clear that those who work in the storeroom receive protective clothing in the workplace. They receive overalls, boots, gloves and masks. There are also people who have first-aid certificates and can assist them when they get hurt in the storerooms. The difference from field workers is clear, and it is evident that the health and safety of those who work in the storeroom is made a priority.

Reflecting on the experiences of the participants in this study, the question of why the workers are treated this way arises. Is it because they are easily replaceable? The work that they are doing is classed as unskilled and is often undervalued. This once again takes us back to what Marx calls the reserve army (Ritzer, 2011). Workers who are employed in sectors that are considered unskilled in most cases have to accept their conditions as the system is set up for them to be easily replaceable with people who are willing to accept these conditions (Wood, 2017).

Small-scale farm participants' experiences around access to water and sanitation

In the previous section, I outlined that farmworkers on small-scale farms live and work there. None of the participants interviewed received any purified drinking water. They drink the same water as the animals drink that flows from the river and dams to the farms. This water which is sometimes in short supply has to be pumped to the farms, and participants noted that drinking it has given them diarrhoea on occasion: "*We do not get clean water, we drink water that the animals drink from the tanks. This water makes us sick*" (Participant D).

The mechanisms for pumping water to the farm in open drains add to the potential for contamination, as demonstrated in Photo 1 below.



Photo 1: Small-scale farm workers source of drinking water.

Aside from the negative health implications, this is also dehumanising for the farm workers who are by inference classed at the same level as the farm animals. Evidence of similar issues around unsafe drinking water have been raised in the US context by Arcury et al. (2012). In their study, water at the camps where Mexican migrant farm labourers lived was tested by health officials who detected dangerous coliform bacteria. Furthermore, it was made clear in this study that unclean water can lead to cholera and cancer. As participant D mentioned, small-scale farmworkers complained that this water makes them sick at times. This indicates they are also at risk of developing water borne diseases that they are not aware of.

Though it was not a specific area of enquiry during the interviews, participants who worked on small-scale farms raised the issue of access to toilets, as they believed the lack of access was a danger to their health. There are no accessible flush or other toilets on the farms they work on which they can use. This means that they need to seek alternatives to relieve themselves. Some participants stated that they use a bucket or the bush when they are herding the animals. The fact that they do not have the proper facilities and services does affect their health on the farm. Likewise, Mexican migrant farmworkers in the work of Arcury et al. (2012) expressed how they did not have any privacy when using the toilet. The experiences of the participants working on small-scale farms who participated in this study are similar to those of the Mexican farmworkers. There is no privacy guaranteed, and conditions are unsanitary. This is damaging to worker's personal dignity (Arcury et al., 2012).

Hygiene and sanitation is not a new issue on farms in the Northern Cape. Female farmworkers in the Northern and Western Cape interviewed for a study by Devereux & Tavener-Smith

(2019) also did not have access to toilets on the farms they work on. The study did not focus on migrant farmworkers specifically, but it makes it evident that this is not a new issue in this province. It also points to the lack of sanitation as an issue on both small and large-scale farms.

Participants on small-scale farms concerns around safety

Farmworkers safety has been raised as a concern by participants. In Arcury et al. (2012), safety concerns related to the state of the camps they lived where structural damage in the form of holes and water damage was present. They also complained that the doors and windows on the camps they lived on were not secure enough, putting their own physical safety, and that of their belongings at risk (Arcury et al., 2012).

In the context of this study, issues of safety and security raised by participants were related to stock theft on the small-scale farms. Participants say that this issue has been going on for years across most of the small-scale farms in the area. As participants live alone and are quite isolated they cannot access police or security support easily. When thieves come onto the farms and steal the animals, they also attack the farmworkers who are supposed to protect the animals. Participants mentioned that they have nothing to protect themselves with, and the attacks happen at all times of the day and night.

There was an incident on one of the farms where thieves attacked one of the participants by going into his shack and stabbing him:

A lot of things happen on the farm. For example, sometimes I get sick or sometimes thieves come onto the farm and steal. When they come to steal on the farm I have nothing to protect myself. Sometimes I have to fight these thieves and I end up getting hurt. There was time when I got hurt as one of the thieves came into my shack and stabbed me with a knife. I could not do anything. The person I work with and I were just sleeping and the thief came in. I just saw the door opening. When I opened my eyes, I saw a knife and I tried to fight him but he stabbed my hand and I got hurt. (Participant B)

There was nothing that he could do at that time and the thieves stole the animals. I argue here that not only are the participant's windows and doors are also not secure enough as outlined in the works of Arcury et. Al (2012), but that the whole structure of the shelters used by small-scale farm labourers is inadequate in terms of safety and security. They resemble township shacks and are build of poles clad with a patchwork of reclaimed corrugated iron sheeting and boards. Not only are any windows and doors unlocked, but even if they could be, thieves could easily access the inside by pulling off a panel.

Employers blame the farmworkers when animals get stolen. One of the participant's employers asked them if they are here to sleep or here to work. The disregard for the living conditions and safety of the worker is evident from this statement. Employers should be putting measures in place to protect these workers if they care for their well-being.

Farmworkers on the large-scale farm did not outline any major safety concerns relating to shelter. Their safety concerns were more related to when they are working on the fields as they do not reside on the farm.

Law and protection for participants

The labour law in South Africa clearly states that it protects all workers. It does not state whether it protects foreign or South African nationals only but all workers (South African Human Rights Commission, n.d.a). For example, when we look at the Labour Relations Act (No. 66 of 1995), it states that only the National Defence Force, the National Intelligence Agency and the South African Secret Services are excluded from this act. Therefore, I argue that these migrant farmworkers are workers that should be protected by local labour law (Chirima, 2022).

The Occupational Health and Safety Act (No. 85 of 1993) was put in place to make sure that all employees health and safety are made a priority in the workplace. All employers have the responsibility to make sure that they provide and maintain, as far as it is reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe without risking the health of his employees (Occupational Health and Safety Act, No. 85 of 1993). Is this the case for migrant farmworkers in Barkly West? From what has been outlined above it is clear that participant's health and safety is not made a priority in the workplace. They are not provided with protective clothing, and their lives are at risk. Despite the protection of the law, this is not being provided to the participants in this study.

Munakamwe et al. (2014) argue that the location and spatiality also play a role in the type working conditions that workers will have. The more isolated these farms are the worse the conditions of the workers. This is made evident from the testimonies of participants working on small-scale farms. These farms are isolated, which makes it easier for exploitation to take place unobserved. Likewise, the lack of oversight and enforcement of the law is evident in the responses of participants who work on large-scale farms.

There are similarities in the experiences of both small-scale and large-scale migrant farmworkers. It is evident that their employers do not care about their health and safety in the workplace.

During the interviews, none of the workers mentioned inspections by the Department of Labour. Inspections in most cases take place when there has been a complaint by workers or the community in general. However, in this case these migrant workers are not able to complain to the Department of Labour as they fear being fired. Therefore, they have found their own ways to ensure their own health and safety in the workplace. This especially the case with large-scale farmworkers as it was clear from observations how they protect themselves from the harsh conditions they work under.

Chapter 5: Working hours and benefits

As part of the exploration of the working conditions of migrant farm labourers from Lesotho who work on both large and small-scale farms around Barkly West, the study explored other aspects of working conditions. This chapter deals specifically with the issue of the regulation of working hours, as well as the benefits that workers are supposed to receive.

Working hours

Participants working on small and large-scale farms had different experiences when it came to working hours. This is mainly due to the different working environments. Participants who worked on small-scale farms work seven days a week. The animals need to graze on a daily basis and there is always work that needs to be done on the farms. Although they all stated that they work throughout the week, they all had different working hours. Each farm had their own requirements.

When we look at Sectoral Determination 13 s11 (b) (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No 75, 1997), it clearly states that all farmworkers that work for five days a week should only work for nine hours per day. If a farmworker works for more than five days a week, they should work for eight hours per day. This was not the case with Participant B who stated that they work from 08:00 until 17:00 which is 9 hours. Chirima (2022) argues that the agricultural sector is known for its long hours. Exploitation is evident in the fact that this participant is working more than legally allowed.

Moreover, all small-scale farmworkers in this study outlined that they do not get a break during their working hours. When asked about their working hours this is what participant's B and D had to say:

No ma'am there is no lunch. (Participant D)

Yes I am always on duty. If the animals go missing, he will ask where was I. (Participant B)

If they leave animals in the field alone to have a lunch break, and the animals are stolen, employers will blame the workers. Their only break occurs when they finish each day. Participants complained about this as they felt like they do not get time to rest, which drains them physically. This is evidence that the employers do not care for the wellbeing of the workers.

Literature suggests that farm workers often exceed the legislated working hours (See Munakamwe et al., 2014; and Tjitombo, 2021 for examples of workdays extending to 12 hours) The evidence from participants in this study demonstrates that the problem is not unique to large-scale farms.

In this research, some participants had issues in terms of being able to accurately estimate their working hours due to limitations in their literacy and education levels. Some participants were not able to tell how old they were, which day of the week it was and stated that they cannot read or write. Interviewees mentioned that the reason why they work in this sector is because they are not educated enough to work in other sectors: *“I migrated because I was looking for a job as I do did not go to school. I do not have any qualifications”* (Participant F).

Participant A stated that they go to the field at 11:00 and finish at 13:00 daily. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3, all the interviews took place at 17:00 when the interviewees finished work. It is clear that some participants are not aware of how many hours they work as they cannot tell time. As stated by Tjitombo (2021) the lack of education and literacy amongst farmworkers contributes to them being exploited, in this case the participants inability to tell time contributes to their vulnerability to exploitation.

All small-scale interviewees also mentioned that they work on Sundays. In the Sectoral Determination 13 s16 (1) (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No 75, 1997), it clearly states that an employer needs to pay double wages to a farmworker that works on a Sunday. However, this is not the case for all these small-scale farmworkers. The fact that small-scale farmworkers do not understand labour law, do not know their rights and are afraid to speak up makes it easier for employers to take advantage of them (see also the study by Munakamwe et al., 2014).

I argue here that farmworkers on small-scale farms are controlled and constrained by their employer (Wood, 2017). Universal laws such as the Sectoral Determination 13 (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No 75, 1997) should be protecting them from being controlled and constrained by their employer. However, this is not the case for these workers as they are still controlled and exploited in the workplace due to their vulnerable and precarious state. Furthermore, it is evident once again that farm owners do not comply with the law which leads to workers being exploited.

The responses in terms of working hours for large-scale farmworkers were different from those of small-scale farmworkers. Participants working hours all depend on whether they have a lot of work to do on the farm. For example, participant F stated that if they have a lot of work that

needs to be covered on the farm, they will start work at 06:30 in the morning and finish at 18:00. However, if there is not a lot of work to do on the farm they finish work at 16:30. This is how Participant F explained their working hours:

I work from 06:30 and then finishing, it all depends on the amount of work we have to do. If they say that there is a lot of work, then we stop around 18:00. However, the set time for us to finish work is 16:30. This is mainly when wintertime is near.

This means that there are times when they do work more than nine hours. Their workdays are limited to five days a week though. Despite the variation in their working hours, and occasional days that last longer than nine hours, their working hours are more regulated than their counterparts working on small-scale farms.

The variation in working hours to deal with seasons when there is more work is governed by Sectoral determination 13 s14 (3c) (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No 75, 1997). It clearly states that there needs to be an agreement between the employer and employee in terms of overtime in the workplace. The interviewees stated that they have an agreement with their employer to work overtime when needed. They also do get paid for working overtime. This is in line with evidence from a study by Chirima (2022) where farm workers who work overtime during harvest season are paid for the extra hours. In other words, there is evidence that the sectoral determinations are applied in some cases.

The migrant farmworkers on large-scale farms have an idea that they ‘work for themselves.’ This is especially the case with those that work in the fields. When asked about their lunch hours at work, those who work in the fields stated that it is up to them whether they take a lunch break or not. This is because these workers in the fields always need to produce. The moment they take a lunch break it means that for that whole hour, they will not be producing:

So here everyone works for themselves. There is no set time for lunch here. So you need to come up with your own times as to when do you eat. You need to decide to eat before working or if you have filled enough crates. (Participant F)

Participants stated that most of them decide to not take a break for lunch as this affects their salaries which are calculated based on volume produced, not hours worked.

There is a clear difference above in terms of the working hours of participants between the small- and large-scale farms. Participants who work on small-scale farms work more hours than those who work on the large-scale farm. Furthermore, the workers on the small-scale

farms stated that they do not get paid for overtime. As outlined above they also work during weekends and should be compensated for this. In terms of a work break or lunch, those on small-scale farms stated that they do not have a lunch break as they are still in the field during lunch. They cannot leave these animals on their own due to the stock theft in the area. Those on the large-scale farm have the option to take a break during working hours however, most of them do not take the lunch break. They prefer to continue working as if they stop, it affects their income.

Benefits

Benefits in the workplace was one of the key areas of focus in this research. According to literature, farmworkers generally do not receive benefits (Munakamwe et al., 2014; Tjitombo, 2021). Benefits in this case can be defined as the perks that are given to people who have a job in addition to their wages. For example, employees should receive paid leave, annual leave, maternity leave, unemployment insurance fund (UIF) contributions and health insurance as part of their salary and benefits package (Werner & Balkin, 2021). It is important to note that farmworkers are also entitled to get these benefits as outlined in the South African Human Right Commission (n.d.b). This applies to permanent and seasonal farmworkers. It is also clearly outlined in the Sectoral Determination 13 (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No 75 of 1997) that farmworkers are entitled to get annual leave, sick leave, family responsibility leaves and maternity leave.

All the participants in this study except for one mentioned that they do not receive benefits in the workplace. These participant's experiences of not receiving benefits can be compared to Zimbabwean large scale farmworkers in Limpopo who also do not receive benefits in the workplace (Jinnah, 2017). During the interviews, two of the participants who work on small-scale farms did not know what benefits are. I had to explain to them what I meant when asking the question of benefits in the workplace. Another two from this group knew what benefits referred to, but none of the farmworkers working on small-scale farms received any. They claimed they had no formal leave:

Because I do not get time to rest at all. I cannot even rest for two weeks or a week. I work from January to December every single day. I only rest December when I am in Lesotho.
(Participant C)

No we do not get any benefits in the workplace. There is no form of pension and we do not get any leave. They only thing that we get is the money that we get paid. We do not rest at all. (Participant A)

Participant C went on to say that they have been working on the same farm since 2013. When asked whether they received unemployment insurance fund, the answer was no. The participant further went on to say that to him this is ‘a piece job’ because he is not gaining anything from it but his monthly salary.

It is important to note that these farmworkers stay and work alone on the farm. They therefore need to look after the animals on a daily basis which means that they work from Monday to Sunday. These farmworkers mainly complained about the lack of leave days as they do not get time to rest. The only time they do get to rest is when they ask their employer to go to Lesotho for the December Holidays. This is similar to findings from Griffin (2011) who showed how migrant domestic workers did not get leave.

Participants stated that they do communicate with their employers that they are tired and need to rest. However, they say employers always make empty promises to them stating that they will look for someone to fill in for them, but this never happens. They do not ask further questions when the employer does not find anyone to relieve them, and they keep on working because they need the money. Interviewees stated that one of the reasons they do not get benefits is because they have not signed contracts with their employers and relied on verbal agreements. Contracts are legally binding whether they are verbal or written. Therefore, these workers have a verbal contract with their employer (Munakamwe et al., 2014). However, it was clear that small-scale participants were not aware that this was a formal and enforceable contract. Munakamwe et al. (2014) argue that employers in the agricultural sector prefer verbal contracts because they can be altered at any time. However, this puts these workers at a risk and makes them vulnerable to exploitation as there is no evidence if the employer or employee breaches the contract or agreement they had.

Enforceability for verbal contracts is harder though. If there was a verbal agreement that the small-scale farmworker will get time off and the employer does not comply with this, there is no evidence of the breach of contract. These workers are entitled to benefits like leave days. However, it is clear that because of their vulnerable state they are overworked and exploited in the workplace.

In terms of sick leave, farmworkers stated that they do not get any sick leave. Participant A stated that when he is sick, their employer will ask him if he is able to work, if he says no then the employer will send him back to Lesotho. Therefore, he is afraid at times to tell his employer when he is sick: *“Well I tell my boss and then she comes to the farm and asks if I will be okay to continue work. If I cannot work this means that I will have to go back to Lesotho”* (Participant A). Similar to the participants working on small-scale farms, three of the four large-scale interviewees stated that they do not receive benefits in the workplace. They all work in the fields. Distinct from the workers on small-scale farms, these participants stated that they have signed contracts before they started working on the large-scale farm. However, all of them stated that they did not know what was on their contracts. They were just told to sign it so that they can start working.

Migrant farm labourers on large-scale farms in the citrus valley outlined similar experiences of signing contracts and not knowing what was on them (Maisiri, 2020). Therefore, even if the farmworkers have benefits as per contract, they would not know as they do not know what is on their contract. All they know is the duration of employment which they are told before signing the contract. My findings support the literature that there is compliance with provision and signing of contracts for migrant labourers on large-scale farms, inclusive of temporary and permanent workers (Chirima, 2022; Munakamwe et al., 2014). The issue identified across studies, and by my participants is that the contracts are general, employers do not comply with these contracts and employees do not know what is on these contracts. Even if the participants had time to read the contracts, they may not be able to do so. Most of the participants in this study could not read or write. Thus, it is easy for employers to take advantage of these workers.

The same three participants stated that they do not get leave days, health insurance or UIF contributions paid. Leave is not formal, but rather participants did not work during periods when vegetables were not growing and are not paid when they are not working. When they fall sick, they just tell their supervisor that they are not feeling well. If they do not go to work on that day, the supervisor will ask for a doctor's letter as proof that they are really sick. Even when they do submit the proof, they do not get paid for those days that they are not at work. In Chirima's (2022) study, migrant farmworkers in Ceres are compensated on the days when they are sick and off from work. Despite the uniformity of the law and regulations, this demonstrates that they are not applied consistently.

Participant E has been working on the farm for more than ten years, but they still do not get UIF as one of their benefits from their employer:

No we do not get those, unless you work in the storeroom you will get such things. We who work in the fields, we just work. So there are about ten or twelve people who work with the machinery, I believe that they get such. However, the lot of us are just working so that we can get money. There are no such things. (Participant E)

This is a violation of the workers' rights, and in violation of Sectoral determination 13 (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No 75 of 1997).

Despite some evidence that seasonal farm workers do get access to UIF (Munakamwe et al., 2014), participants who work in the fields on the large-scale farm in this study do not, despite the length of their employment. Participant E's assertion that benefits were for people who worked in the machinery, storeroom and packhouse was supported by participant H who works in the storeroom and has UIF deducted from their salary on a monthly basis. This participant also stated that those that work in the storeroom are treated differently from those who work in the fields. The different treatment between seasonal and permanent workers is also evident amongst farmworkers in Namibia (Tjitombo. 2021). This is evidence that this is not only a problem in the South African context. UIF is the only benefit that Participant H mentioned in the interview. The variation in access to benefits, and limits to accessing benefits therefore exists within the large-scale farm participants work on, and in other contexts. For example, some employers give access to medical cover and funeral contributions (Chirima, 2022). However, it is clear in the context of Barkly West that only one of the participants who works in the storeroom only gets UIF as a benefit.

The lack of access to benefits for seven out of eight of the participants is evident that benefits are not commonly accessible to these migrant farmworkers, despite some of them working at the same farm for over 20 years. The fact that over 20 years of work has not translated to a permanent contract with access to benefits is evidence of the extent of the ways employers take advantage of these migrant labourers. This was a concern to some of the participants, however, most of them do not ask questions when it comes to why they do not get UIF as one of their benefits or why they are not hired permanently. These workers have to accept these conditions as they mentioned that they are doing this for the money and cannot find employment elsewhere. Exploitation in this case is easy as employers know that workers are desperate. As

argued by Johnston (2007) migrants' workers are more attractive than locals as they do not ask for much and work for less.

Wages

It has been argued that the reason why farmers have depended on migrant labour is because of access to cheap labour. Despite the introduction of a national minimum wage, with special sectoral determinations for farm and domestic labourers, migrant farmworkers have been known to be paid below the sectoral determination wage (Fletcher & Kubik, 2017; Ulicki & Crush, 2007). When conducting interviews with workers on small-scale farms, they demonstrated how they were paid below the legislated minimum wage for their sector.

The national minimum wage for all workers in South Africa in the year 2024 has been increased from R25,42 to R27, 58 per hour for each ordinary day that is worked (South African Government, 2024). However, small-scale migrant farm workers in Barkly West are not paid according to this hourly rate. Throughout the interviews it was clear that these farmworkers were not getting paid the same amount of money. The range of salaries was between R1500 to R3000.00 on a monthly basis. As previously mentioned, some of these farmworkers work nine hours per day seven days a week. When calculations were made, it was clear that the farmworkers were getting paid way below the national minimum wage which should be at least R6950.16 given their working hours averaging 9 hours a day. This underpayment is a form of exploitation which is not particular to this research site. This is not a new phenomenon (see Johnston, 2007; Munakamwe et al., 2014), rather it shows that despite efforts to improve farmworkers' wages through law, these participants remain underpaid.

These farmworkers complained about their salaries as they outlined that it is not enough to sustain them in the South African economy. Moreover, they migrated in order to find work so that they could send money back home. After they send money home, they are left with nothing to support themselves. These workers' experiences can be compared to Basotho domestic workers who also complained that they are left with nothing to support themselves after they send money home as they are paid below the minimum wage (Griffin, 2011). However, the difference with these small-scale farmworkers and domestic workers is that domestic workers live with their employers. Therefore, they do not have to pay for basic needs like food, water and electricity whereas the small-scale migrant workers are expected to provide themselves with the basic needs such as food and clothing.

Tjitombo (2021, p. 14) uses Marx definition of exploitation which states that “exploitation exists when there is an unequal exchange of labour for the goods.” Participants stated that they are not able to afford much or sustain themselves although they put in so much work producing for their employer. This means that the employer benefits more from their employment, clearly demonstrating that they are being exploited. Participant B complained: *“No I am not happy at all. It is not a lot of money and we do a lot of work on the farm.”*

Although participants complained about their salaries, they also stated that they just accept what they are paid because they really need the jobs: *“As a herder we just accept anything that is given to us because we are just here to work. We do not get paid a lot of money”* (Participant A).

Whilst the workers on small-scale farms received fixed monthly salaries, the participants who worked on the large-scale farms said their wages varied throughout the year. This is because their wages depend on the amount of work that they do on the farm. For the three who worked in the field, their wages depended on how many carrots and beetroots they could extract from the ground, cut the tops off and then put them in crates. Their salaries are calculated according to how many crates they have produce per day and ranged from R3000.00 to R6000.00 per month. If they work well, they can get paid R6000.00 or even more than that.

The salary does not remain the same. It all depends on the work and how you work and how fast you are. If you are a fast person you can make R5000.00 to R6000.00. However currently our work is not as much, which means that we are not working well. This also means that we are not getting paid well. The most we are getting now is around R3000.00 or R4000.00. Everyone works for themselves there. (Participant E)

Despite the higher wages in comparison to workers on the small-scale farms, these amounts still fall under the national minimum wage hourly amount when averaged out. The employer seems to be using what is known as the Piece Rate system (Taylor, 1914). The system operates on the assertion that workers who produce more need to be rewarded by higher wages. Workers who do not produce and do not meet targets are paid low wages as they are seen to be unproductive and lazy. Taylor developed this system because he felt like workers were not putting in enough effort in the workplace, and incentives to foster productivity should be introduced. He called this Scientific Management (Taylor, 1914). The system operated by making workers think they are benefitting themselves, whilst really, they are benefitting the owners. This system of paying on the basis of production means the company produces more

surplus value, and makes more money based on paying less to workers, whilst asserting that workers have the possibility to earn more if they would just work hard enough. Because workers are being incentivised, they think that they are benefiting from this system. However, in reality the only beneficiary in this system is the company. Time also plays an important factor in this system as there is always a supervisor or a foreman watching over the workers to make sure that they are producing.

Although this system of scientific management was developed in 1914, I argue that this exploitative system still exists and is evidently being used on the large-scale farm participants were drawn from. The more they produce the more they get paid at the end of the month. This is not unique to this farm, it seems to be common in the agricultural sector (Chirima, 2022; Hall, 2012; Munakamwe et al., 2014). Participants stressed their need to be fast and not take breaks in order to earn more money. In addition, determining wages is not done by the workers themselves. Interviewees explained That their supervisor counts the crates that they have produced, and these numbers are sent to the human resource (HR) department which then decide how much they get paid:

So our Foreman is the one that counts the crates for us. However, the one who fixes our money, what do you call them HR, we do not know how they calculate our salary. We just see the money at the end of the month. (Participant E)

These workers did not complain about their salaries as their salaries are high compared to other farmworkers, even though the compensation is not based on the same criteria. These workers are being exploited in the workplace because of this system. The fact that they get paid R5000.00 or R6000.00 means that consent is being manufactured through false consciousness. They are manipulated into thinking that they are not being exploited with their wages. The reason why I make this argument is because although there were issues of health and safety on the farm, these workers still expressed at the end of the interview that they do not have any problems with their working conditions. Furthermore, what about the workers who are not fast? These workers get paid low wages at the end of the month. This is also a form of exploitation in the workplace as they are being paid below the national minimum wage. As argued by Hall (2012) the piece rate system leads to difference in wage rates on farms as some workers fail to keep up with this system which is a problem.

It is evident that the salaries the participants differ across small- and large-scale farms are different. Workers on large-scale farms are paid more in comparison to those on small-scale

farms. This seems to be a continuation of the way capital has depended on cheap labour since colonial times (Wolpe, 1972). Based on the information participants have offered, it seems clear that farmworkers on small-scale farms are now part of this system of exploitation. They are paying employees less than the minimum wage. Workers on the large-scale farm are being paid close to the minimum wage that was introduced. However, it is the way in which their salaries are calculated that is an issue. As outlined previously, the more they produce the more they get paid. However, if you do not produce more it means that your salary will be less. Therefore, I argue that to a certain extent the exploitation of labour takes place on the large-scale farm as well.

Chapter 6: Resistance and representation in the workplace

Introduction:

One of the aims of this research was to investigate if migrant workers from Lesotho working on small and large-scale farms have some form of representation in the workplace. In this chapter it will be made evident that migrant farmworkers on large and small-scale farms have issues of formal representation in the workplace which is common for farmworkers in the South African context (Munakamwe et al., 2014). As has been made evident above in Chapter 4 and 5, migrant workers on both large-scale and small-scale farms are being exploited in the workplace. Therefore, there is an issue of formal representation workers are often forced to find strategies to resist their conditions on their own. However, because farmworkers are vulnerable, in most cases they need to find undetectable strategies to resist their conditions (Scott, 1990). Therefore, this chapter also focuses how do these workers covertly resist the exploitative conditions that they work in.

Representation

Representation in terms of farmworkers joining organised labour unions has been an issue throughout South Africa's colonial and apartheid history (Webb, 2017). Post-apartheid, farmworkers were included explicitly in revisions to labour legislation and were now able to be part of unions (Webb, 2017). However, there are still limitations to the implementation these revisions, and as evident in the participants' experiences and other research (Munakamwe et al., 2014), exploitation of farmworkers continues. The lack of organised representation, through for example unions, hinders farmworkers from openly resisting their exploitation (Munakamwe et al., 2014). Unionisation on farms is a problem as farm owners control access, and often do not allow unions on their farms (Munakamwe et al., 2014).

Participants in my study conform to this pattern, stating that they have no form of representation in the workplace. They were not part of any organisation or union as this was not allowed on either the large or small-scale farms. Participants did know about unionisation and thought that it would be nice to have someone reliable that can stand up for them: *"I really think having some sort of representation would really help, like a union as they would do much better"* (Participant F).

Large-scale migrant farmworkers stated that when they have a problem in the workplace, they report it to their foreman who then must take it up to HR so that it can be solved. However, they mentioned that their foreman barely reports issues. Furthermore, when the issues are reported by the foreman, the workers are threatened by the farm owner that if they continue to

complain, they will have to leave the farm. Farmworkers on the large-scale farm said having a union will be a much better option than reporting to their foreman, as issues are never resolved, resulting in them keeping quiet. April (2023) and Webb (2017) argue that the reason why it has been difficult for unions to organise farmworkers is due to paternalism, particularly for farmworkers that live on the farms where they work. The participants who work on the large-scale farm in Barkly West do not live on the farm, which is a limiting factor to paternalistic factors. It is clear from Participant F's response that it is not so much paternalism, as outright refusal to allow workers on the farm access to organising, unions or any form of representation to challenge the current working conditions:

At our farm, I do not even want to mention the name, but they do have problems with such. They do not even allow unions at the farm because they know that unions speak up for workers so they do not want us to have one. (Participant F)

Despite evidence that unions prefer to organise permanent farmworkers on large-scale farms (April, 2023; Munakamwe et al., 2014; Webb, 2017), even the permanent workers on the large-scale farm where participants in the study work are not allowed to access unions, as the farm owner will not allow union representatives to enter the farm.

As outlined in by April (2023) the Department of Labour implemented what is known as the Farm Worker Forum. The purpose of this forum is for farmworkers to raise any issues they have with their employer and give workers a voice in their workplace. None of the farmworkers in this study mentioned any platform or forum where they could raise their concerns. The only option for those working on the large-scale farm was to complain to their foreman which most of the time does not result in any change. Rather it results in threats from their employer, hence they have chosen to keep quiet.

Migrant farmworkers on small-scale farms would only be able to complain directly to their employer, and only one participant spoke about doing that. Other than that, these workers had no representation. When they are not happy with conditions, they just keep quiet and keep on working. The fact that they have no form of representation in the workplace was a problem for workers as they stated that no one speaks up for them when they are not happy: *"No we have no one that speaks up for us. We have a very serious problem this side as no one speaks up for us"* (Participant A).

It is clear once again similar to large-scale migrant farmworkers, small-scale migrant workers do not mind being part of a union or having any form of representation which would lead to

overt political action, specifically in relation to wages. Participant A goes on to say *“The one thing that is a problem is the money that we get. It is too little. We need to buy food with this money.”* This is in contrast to migrant farmworkers from a study by Cohen and Hjalmarson (2020) who said they would rather not be part of any overt political action that would lead to their deportation.

Rather the participants who work on small-scale farms say that their employers have access to organisations which help them when they have issues on their farms: *“No ma’am. Our employers are the only ones that have meetings where they discuss issues that they have on their farms but we have nothing”* (Participant D).

These organisations work closely with the Department of Agriculture to ensure that these farm owners issues are resolved. Participants mentioned that their employers are always attending meetings in the township to discuss their issues on farms. The farmworkers, especially migrant ones are not represented in these organisations at all.

Once again the rights of these farmworkers are being violated. It is clearly stated by the South African Human Rights commission that all farmworkers have the right to associate themselves with any organisation that they feel serve their interest, including the right to join a trade union, participate in a trade union and to strike (South African Human Rights Commission, n.d.b). This cannot be dictated by their employer. None of the participants interviewed were able to enact or access mechanisms to exercise these rights.

According to Munakamwe et al. (2014) the reason why there is low unionisation and lack of awareness of unions amongst farmworkers is not because the main union (The Food and Allied workers Union [FAWU]) does not want to represent workers. It is rather because of structural issues that prevent mobilisation from taking place. These range from fear amongst workers, limited resources of unions, and the physical barriers to accessing farms. Lastly the migration status of workers plays a huge role as well (Munakamwe et al., 2014). Given FAWU’s claim that limited resources makes it difficult for them to represent farmworkers, and the clear need for representation to address exploitation in this sector, resources need to be invested so that these workers can access the representation guaranteed to them under the law. This sector employs a large number of migrant workers and relies on their cheap labour. They contribute to the economy and therefore it is important that they are protected in the workplace. These workers want to be part of unions as they are aware that they are being exploited:

We really need help as farmworkers this side, so that someone can speak up for us and so that we can have meetings. No one ever asks us about our conditions so you have really given me some light. (Participant D)

The lack of access to representation to pursue their rights through mechanisms like collective bargaining means that the workers in this study continue to be abused and exploited, as is evident in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Unionisation therefore is an imperative strategy to assist farmworkers in accessing their rights and fighting their exploitative working conditions.

Resistance

Given the struggles that farmworkers face, especially those who are migrant farmworkers, and their lack of access to representation, it is important to investigate how participants react to these workplace conditions. Lacking access to formal or overt means of resistance to oppressive working conditions, do participants turn to other means? Is there any form of resistance that takes place and if yes, how does it take place? Having demonstrated that there is no representation for formal challenges to unfair working conditions, the study draws from the work of Hollander and Einwohner (2004) and their concepts of overt and covert resistance to explore whether resistance is taking place amongst participants in this study. Hollander and Einwohner (2004) identify both collective resistance where a group of individuals come together to reject their subordination (overt) or individual resistance. Individual resistance refers to when an individual takes the decision to reject oppressive conditions through actions such as foot dragging, speaking up for themselves, or even be quitting their job. As a vulnerable group, what type of resistance to participants use in their workplaces, if any? Do they operate individually, or collectively and in overt or covert ways?

Scott (1990) argues that everyday forms of resistance – similar to Hollander and Einwohner's (2004) definition of individual or covert resistance - take place amongst vulnerable groups as visible collective resistance is usually suicidal for the weak. Everyday forms of resistance here refer how people act or behave in their everyday lives to challenge power and bring the changes that they desire to see or have their demands met (Colburn, 2016). This ranges from name calling, farmworkers speaking in their native language and group dynamic, sabotage, strikes, gossiping and not responding to instructions (Colburn, 2016). However, do all vulnerable people make use of only covert resistance as argued by Scott (1990)? Mansour-Ille and Hendow (2018) investigated the resistance strategies of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon and show that is possible to use overlapping covert and overt forms of resistance to their oppressive working conditions.

Similar to domestic workers in Lebanon, large-scale migrant farmworkers who participated in this study also use a combination of both covert and overt forms of resistance in the workplace.

Participants in my study who work on large-scale farms had various responses when asked how they respond to their oppressive or exploitative workplace conditions. They stated that there are certain steps they take, the first is to report to their foreman (line manager) who then is supposed to report to HR. However, participants stated that there are times when the foreman says that he/she will report these issues to the HR but this barely happens. Foremen seem to be a problem on commercial farms in South Africa. Zimbabwean farmworkers in a study conducted by Jinnah (2017) in Limpopo expressed unhappiness with their foreman as they do not do anything when they complain about their conditions, hence they resort to covert forms of resistance. One participant in my study stated that they had complained that they are unhappy with their salaries to their foreman, however he/she never reported this issue to HR.

This resulted in them coming together as migrants with other workers on the farm and told their foreman that they are not working until they have increased their salaries. This has happened in other agricultural spaces. Wilderman (2014) documented the 2012 strikes by seasonal farmworkers in Dedoorns in the Western Cape. One of the main reasons for this strike was the low wages in the sector. The workers were demanding to get paid R150.00 per day (Wilderman, 2014). Participants in this study spoke about the way they deployed a similar tactic.

Yes, that is true. So there was actually a time when we were not getting a lot of money and we were working very hard. We were getting paid two point something or three point something and we complained to our foreman. We ended up telling them that we are not working today. We were very tired of working hard but we are not getting paid a lot of money. We did not go into the fields that day to work. The foreman then went to fetch our boss and then the boss went to fetch the person who processes our salaries every month. It was then realised that this person who processes our payments is at fault. The foreman was not at fault as they do note how many crates each one of us produces. So the person at fault here is the one who processes our payments. However, after we fought, they were able to fix it. (Participant E).

This is important as it proves that migrants as vulnerable groups do not only use covert forms of resistance as would be argued by Scott (1990) due to their vulnerable state but also use overt forms of resistance.

It could be argued that it was easier for the more vulnerable migrant farm labourers to take action in this manner as they collaborated with local farmworkers who shared their struggle. They were able to come together and resist their conditions. April (2023) argues that there always divisions amongst farmworkers, including nationality as well as between permanently and seasonally employed. Farmworkers from the large-scale farm in this study managed to work across these divisions on this occasion because they could see that they are facing the same issues. Working collectively, they were able to demand that their salary be increased and that they were paid what was due to them.

The farmworkers on small-scale farms who participated in the study spoke about multiple reasons as to why they cannot collectively react to their conditions. They never meet up with other farmworkers to discuss their problems as they are always working on the farm. They do not have the time, or are often physically isolated in their work as they are confined to the farms they work on:

No we never meet up to discuss these problems. The chances of us meeting up are very slim. We are always in the field every single day. There is no time for a meeting. When you get back from the field you lock up the animals, you need to cook and clean yourself. By that it is already late. If you leave the farm, the thieves come onto the farm and that is a problem again. I will then get blamed again if animals are taken. (Participant B)

Participant B has complained to their boss about their conditions. I argue that individual overt resistance took place when this worker complained about their conditions. However, when they complained, their employer told them that they are free to leave the farm. This participant did not leave the farm because they need to job. As would be argued by Scott (1990) overt type of resistance is usually suicidal for the weak, and migrant labourers often meet these criteria (Cohen & Hjalmarson, 2020). This is exactly the case with these farmworkers as they are constantly threatened by their employers. Therefore, because it is risky for these workers to visibly resist, they resort to covert forms of resistance.

Other than these two examples, the primary forms of resistance identified by participants were covert. They said that there are times when there is division in the workplace and collective resistance cannot take place. One participant said that most workers on the farm do not want to complain much about their conditions as they are scared of getting fired. Moreover, most of them say that they are there to work for their children. They will put up with the conditions as long as they get money at the end of the month to take care of their families. They instead end

up gossiping and talking about amongst themselves: *“Yes, so it’s like we are gossiping amongst ourselves. That’s where it ends. We do not go and tell the white man straight. We cannot do that”* (Participant E). Gossip as a form of covert resistance is very common amongst vulnerable workers (Tjitombo, 2021). The participants in this study spoke about the way workers gossip on the side or on the bus on their way home about their conditions at work.

Participant B stated that they resort to silence rather than complain and potentially lose their job. I argue here that dissimulation takes place (Scott, 1990) in that workers disguise their feelings. As mentioned above, they are threatened if they express themselves. Participant B went on to mention *“I am not happy at work because I cannot say anything to my employer when I am not happy in the workplace. I cannot tell them how we feel because he can fire you at any time.”* This makes it evident that these participants do not have a say in the workplace and that they are controlled by their employer. In this case overt forms of resistance are not possible for these workers which means that they resort to covert forms of resistance. Furthermore, it is important to note that silence in this case is also a form of survival strategy by these farmworkers. They avoid attention by being silent as they fear being deported/fired. Similar to small scale farmworkers in Barkly West, Zimbabwean commercial farmworkers in Limpopo also resort to silence as a form of survival (Jinnah, 2017). Migrants not only use silence as dissimulation, but they also use it as a form of economic survival as they fear losing their jobs by speaking out.

Another form of covert resistance is feigned ignorance (Scott, 1990) where workers pretend that they do not know how to do the work required. Participant B spoke about the way that when they started working with livestock on the farm, they would try to work with their employer to ensure that the animals on the farm were well taken care of. They would make suggestions to their employers thinking that they had a voice in the workplace. However, they soon realised that their suggestions were not well taken by their employers, and they started feigning ignorance. Animals started dying on the farm. Their employer kept on asking why the animals are dying, but they just kept quiet and ignored them. Furthermore, the employer started to ask them what they suggest they do, and they would pretend like they do not know what to do. This participant knew exactly what the reasons are for the animals dying and what the solutions are but withheld this information from their employer. This disadvantages the employer because they are losing their livestock.

Name calling as a form of covert resistance also came up during the interviews. Participants working on the small-scale farms kept on referring to their employers as ‘Lekgoa’ in the interviews, which means white man/boss. It is important to note that the employers of the small-scale farmworkers that were interviewed are black. According to Tjitombo (2021) referring to a farm owner/manager as a white man/boss has its own historical meaning. During apartheid farmworkers would refer to the Afrikaner as a white man/farmer when feeling oppressed. They would do this with rage and frustration. This type of resistance operates through symbolic terms which represent some sort of meaning to the actor. It is important to note that this type of resistance is not common. However, it allows workers to get through their days at work (Tjitomobo, 2021).

It is clear that participants used overt and covert forms of resistance. This does not support Scott’s (1990) assertion that overt forms of resistance are risky for vulnerable populations. In the case of participants working on small-scale farms collective forms of overt resistance were not possible due to their isolation and time constraints that prevented them gathering to discuss collective issues. Therefore, some workers would resist individually by complaining. However, because of the threats they resorted to silence as a form of covert resistance. On the other hand, participants working on the large-scale farm used collective overt resistance to demand that their salaries be calculated properly and that they must be paid what was due to them. This was easy to achieve due to the fact that they worked in close proximity to each other, facilitating collective engagement, and were able to co-opt South African workers which made the collective big enough to make a difference. Thus, the farmworkers in this study deployed both overt and covert forms of resistance, and I argue that resistance for vulnerable is not only confined to private sphere anymore as would be argued by Scott (1990).

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study focused on how migrant farmworkers from Lesotho who work on both small- and large-scale farms in and around Barkly West experience exploitation in the workplace. The sample included seasonal and permanent workers. Their health and safety, working hours, wages and benefits, and representation in the workplace were investigated in this study. Furthermore, the study also investigated how these workers who are especially vulnerable to exploitation due to their migrant status, react to their working conditions on the farms. For the purpose of understanding how these workers react to their conditions in the workplace, the conceptual framework of resistance drawn from Scott (1990) was used.

The focus on farms in Barkly West extended research that focussed mainly on other provinces in South Africa to include the Northern Cape. It also included farmworkers who work on small-scale farms which is currently under-represented in academic research.

The results made it evident that workers who work on large and small-scale farms all experience forms of exploitation. Their health safety is not made a priority, and workers are responsible for making sure that they fully protect themselves from workplace hazards with no support from their employers. Only two participants from the study received protective clothing from their employer. One participant's employer only bought him overalls once a year, not even the full requirements for proper health and safety. It was also clear that the conditions migrant farmworkers on small-scale farms are worse in comparison to who work on the large-scale farm. Farmworkers on small-scale farms are also more isolated, and lacking in basic provisions such as water, sanitation and adequate and safe shelter.

The working hours of participants who worked on both large-scale and small farms varied. Workers on small-scale farms worked more days and more hours in comparison to those working on the large-scale farm. Lunch breaks were not possible for workers on small-scale farms, those who work on large-scale farms had the option to take a break. These participants decided not to take their lunch break as the more they produce, the more they get paid. Therefore, taking a lunch break for them is a loss. The study also made it evident that out of the eight participants that were interviewed, only one has access to benefits in the workplace. This is a permanent worker on the large-scale farm that works in the storeroom.

It was also discovered legislated basic leave benefits were not available to the participants. Those that worked on small-scale farms only rested in December when they are home in Lesotho. Seasonal workers on the large-scale farms get to rest when there is no work that needs

to be done on the farm. Although this does not fall under their benefits, they do get time to rest. It was also confirmed that participants are under-paid on both large-scale and small-scale farms although their salaries are calculated differently.

The study also found farmworkers lacked any form of formal union representation to present their concerns to their employers or negotiate for better working conditions. Workers on large-scale farms were not allowed to be part of unions as their employers do not allow unions on their farms. Workers on small-scale farms did not know of any organisations or unions that they could join or that could represent them. They did mention that their employers had access to representation in organisations that helped them. Participants were open to being part of unions as they were aware that they are being exploited in the workplace. However, accessibility is an issue for these workers.

The lack of representation is especially important because of the vulnerability of migrant farmworkers to exploitation. Therefore, this study investigated how these workers' resist/react to their conditions in the workplace. The reason for this is because where exploitation takes place, there ought to be resistance. Using Scott's (1990) framework for everyday forms of resistance, the strategies used by participants to resist their conditions were explored. In Scott's (1990) framework, he argues that weak and vulnerable workers use only covert forms of resistance, individual and invisible to the employer. He argues covert forms of resistance would be suicidal for this category of worker. There were instances that both small-scale and large-scale workers overtly resisted their conditions. For example, one participant who worked on a small-scale farm would complain to their employer about their conditions. Another asked for a raise in their salary as they were being paid below the national minimum wage. However, most of the participants who worked on small-scale farms were mainly silent and did not complain to their employer about their conditions as they were afraid of losing their jobs. It is important to note that silence is also a form of resistance. However, it was difficult to detect how they used this silence as resistance in the hidden transcript (Scott, 1990).

Similarly, migrant farmworkers on the large-scale farm had used both overt and covert forms or resistance in their workplace. For example, these workers collectively resisted their conditions in the workplace as they were not happy with their salaries. At times overt resistance is not possible so workers resort to covert resistance in the form of gossiping.

Therefore, although participants do not consistently resist their conditions, I have argued that it is clear that vulnerable groups do not only depend on covert but overt forms of resistance.

However, further research is needed on how these workers resist their condition in the hidden transcript. This means that further research is needed on the living conditions of workers on both large and small farms where covert forms of resistance might be more visible.

Research contribution

When we look at the available literature in relation to migrant farmworkers, the focus has always been on farmworkers on large-scale farms. However, as outlined in Chapter 2, there is a gap when it comes to those working on small-scale farms. This research paper has shed some light on what the conditions of these workers are. This is very important because small-scale farming is very common in South Africa and the fact that there is no literature that investigates these workers' conditions is concerning.

This research paper also investigated the conditions of migrant farmworkers on a large-scale farm outside Barkly West. This is an under-researched context, and this research assists in bolstering research done in other parts of South Africa and the world.

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