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Title: **"Slave Driving" and "The Poor Man's Friend": Capitalist Farming in the Bethal District, ca. 1910-1940.**

by: **Martin Murray**

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"SLAVE DRIVING" AND "THE POOR MAN'S FRIEND": CAPITALIST FARMING IN THE BETHAL DISTRICT, ca. 1910-1940[1]

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> "What crop," I would ask, "is the small man, who has but little or no capital, to start farming with if it be not the mealie?" It is, I maintain, the "poor man's friend," and remains the best and surest crop for any small farmer in the Eastern Transvaal to take up and begin his journey along the pathway to prosperity. [Statement of Esrael Lazarus, wealthy owner of Bombardie and Cologne Estates, Eastern Transvaal].[2]

> The conditions disclosed in this case are tantamount to slave driving, the magistrate said. On a farm [near Bethal] of 400 morgen 25 native labourers were employed and they were driven to do their work by means of the sjambok. It was akin to slavery to drive the boys in this manner and practice of that type would not be permitted.[3]

> Listen District Commissioner, I am complaining that we are in trouble here. We are being beaten very much. . . . Many people die here and many disappear from the farm. My brother was killed last week and I therefore have deserted. . . . People are as slaves here at the farm J.J. Dorfan. Europeans and Boss boys carry whips here for beating the people. It is said there is nobody to whom we can complain. Even if we die it is nothing.[4]

Introduction

Bethal is a place with a reputation. The early Dutch-speaking pioneers who first settled in the area were so gratified to find such a lovely place that they bestowed it with a special name -- one which they borrowed from the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament and which means "abode of God." They thought that this name would give the town and the surrounding district a particular distinction as a holy place, like the original spot where Jacob rested and dreamed that a ladder stretched from earth to heaven, and he felt himself to be in the presence of God.[5] Yet the passage of time often has a way of dispensing cruel ironies. The reputation which Bethal acquired has little to do with the sacred ideals which its name evokes, and more to do with profane realities of profit-making. With the growth and development of commercial agriculture in the early twentieth century, the Bethal district became one of the most productive farming regions of the South African countryside. The wealthy farmers of the district -- with their huge estates and great success in growing staple crops for distant markets -- became the envy of the marginal 'little men' who struggled to stay afloat under crushing debt, high prices, and low returns. These large-scale Bethal farmers were often portrayed in ruling class circles as the standard bearers of economic advance in agriculture.[6] Yet this well-cultivated image of 'progressive' farming contrasts sharply with the historical memory of those who borne the brunt of decades of cost-cutting and profit-maximizing measures. In their relentless pursuit of profit, the farmers of the district

subjected their African labourers to such harsh and abusive treatment that it was not long before the name Bethal became synonymous with callous brutality, ill-treatment, and violent death. In the minds of Africans, working on the white-owned farms of the Bethal district was akin to slavery and was to be avoided at all costs.

Yet how and why the Bethal district achieved such notoriety is a story that cannot be easily recounted chronologically. Let us begin at the end. Bethal is a small platteland town situated in the heartland of the fertile farming zone of the eastern Transvaal highveld, about halfway between Johannesburg and the Swaziland border. The town and surrounding countryside do not carry any distinguishing marks that would set them apart from any of the other small farming centers that dot the eastern Transvaal countryside. The Bethal district has long been recognized as "one of the best agricultural districts in the Transvaal."[7] It is situated on the eastern portion of a large region commonly known as the 'maize triangle', with its apices at Ladybrand in the south, Ermelo in the north-east and Lichtenburg in the north-west. Because of the productivity of the land and the type of use to which it is put, the Bethal district has been classified as 'intensive arable', or an area suitable for staple crop production. By the 1940s, this area accounted for around 60 percent of the total maize output in the Union.[8]

What historically set the Bethal district apart from other farming areas of the same type was its peculiar blend of highly favourable ecological characteristics. The single most important climatic determinant of crop yields is rainfall. Throughout South Africa, by and large, the annual isohyet of 20 inches is generally considered the standard by which to demarcate zonally the maize-producing from non-producing areas. On the highveld plateau, the highest yields per morgen have been historically found near the 30-inch isohyet, in the Bethal-Standerton area, where the annual rainfall during the crucial growing months of December, January, and February was more or less evenly distributed. Only in the midlands of southern Natal, with annual rainfalls of between 30 and 40 inches, have these yields regularly exceeded. The loamy, doleritic soils of the highveld maize-belt made the region exceptionally fertile and largely accounted for the high productivity of the Bethal-Standerton-Ermelo area.[9]

These natural endowments laid the foundation upon which the landowning classes reshaped the physical landscape in their headlong drive to produce cash crops for market. In order to grasp why farmworkers in the Bethal district "existed in a state of semi-slavery" and were "exploited to the utmost by the majority of employers,"[10] it is necessary to provide both an understanding of the historical processes of capitalist development in this particular region and a contextualisation of that past within a broader comparative framework. Speaking broadly, there were three striking characteristics that set commercial agriculture in the Bethal district apart from the general pattern of agrarian transformation in the eastern Transvaal highveld. First, the leading capitalised farmers in the Bethal district organised agricultural production on large-scale, landed estates and employed semi-permanent workers on long-term contracts. By imposing a social dimension -- stretching out work over the course of the entire year -- upon the natural rhythms (i.e., seasonal cycles) of agricultural production, these enterprising farmers were able to fashion what were, in actuality, 'factories in the fields'. Unlike undercapitalised

farmers who struggled to 'tame' labour-tenant households, the large-scale farmers of the eastern Transvaal maize belt tried to make the most use of their labour resources by hiring wage-labourers on a full-time footing and putting them to work them in a highly disciplined and productive fashion.[11]

Second, because of persistent labour shortages throughout the eastern Transvaal highveld, large-scale farmers of the Bethal district depended in large measure upon migrant workers recruited from far afield to supplement the small labour force permanently settled on their properties. Desperate farmers regularly appealed to the state administration for assistance in recruiting labour from neighbouring territories, particularly Southern Rhodesia, Portuguese East Africa, and Nyasaland, in order to meet their labour requirements. But they also took matters into their own hands, creating their own recruiting agencies and sometimes relying upon illicit labour traffickers to supply them with requisite labour. During the early years of expansive growth, Bethal farmers illegally recruited umfaans, or child labour, and, in later years, tapped into the prisons, in order to satisfy their seemingly insatiable appetite for low-cost labour.[12] Third, and finally, the large-scale landowners in the Bethal area modelled their farming operations after the Johannesburg mines. As a general rule, they recruited young men in the prime of life who were housed in barracks-like compounds which were guarded virtually around the clock. They depended upon piece-work to speed-up and stretch-out the working-day, and they introduced the 'ticket-system' and as the principal means of payment. They relied upon African intermediaries to oversee and supervise their workers. In addition, they used harsh treatment, including beatings and other forms of physical abuse, to instil fear and ensure compliance.[13]

"An Epic of the Soil": Esrael Lazarus, the "Mealie King"

By the early twentieth century, town and country in South Africa came to depend intensely on each other, and it was commercial agriculture that provided the principal lifeline connecting the burgeoning urban markets with the points of production in the surrounding rural areas.[14] What the Bethal district shared with other highveld farming areas was that agricultural-related pursuits largely shaped its social and economic destiny. Fertile soil, consistent and adequate rainfall, the long growing season, and relatively flat terrain were the natural conditions which, combined with the close proximity to the Rand and the gold mines, made Bethal an attractive area for commercial farming. In the decade or so after the South African War (1899-1902), when agricultural production in the highveld experienced a decisive 'take off' under the protective shelter of the (Milner) Reconstruction administration, a sizeable number of English-speaking farmers, including a number of Lithuanian Jewish immigrants, acquired farms in the southern Middelburg and Bethal districts. These English-speakers thus joined an already established group of landowning Boer notables whose families had expropriated land from the original African inhabitants in the nineteenth century.[15] The demand of the gold mining industry for cheap foodstuffs created a ready market to which enterprising farmers were quick to respond. The new arrivals concentrated on maize production as their principal cash crop. By the 1920s, white farmers producing for both local and overseas markets had transformed the entire region east of Johannesburg from Kinross in the west, to Witbank and Middelburg in the north, Standerton in the south,

and including parts of the Ermelo and Carolina districts in the east, into an intensive maize-growing belt.[16]

Esrael Lazarus epitomised the rise and expansion of capitalist farming in the Bethal district. He had emigrated to Johannesburg from Lithuania at the end of the nineteenth century, thus joining the steady flow of European newcomers who streamed into the Transvaal in the wake of the gigantic mineral discoveries on the Rand.[17] Lazarus, who arrived virtually penniless, initially found work as an assistant store clerk, and within a few years, he opened his own small trading store. With the onset of the agricultural depression of 1907-1911, many financially hardpressed farmers were forced off the land by high costs and low profits. As a result, large numbers of farms changed hands.[18] During this volatile period, Lazarus reached the conclusion "that maize growing could be made more profitable than maize selling." Along with a number of other Lithuanian immigrants who made substantial profits in urban-based commerce, he pooled his accumulated savings and, along with outside financial backing, he purchased prime farm land in eastern Transvaal maize belt. At this time, access to credit was a crucial factor determining the success of commercial farming. On the one side, aspiring farmers who entered agriculture with capital were able to obtain large and already improved farms, and, consequently, they were able to use these newly-acquired properties as collateral in order to secure much-needed credit. On the other side, those white landowners with limited capital or little land found themselves trapped in a desperate situation.[19]

By 1911, Lazarus had begun farming on a "prodigious scale." He used profits from his expanding network of trading stores, along with revenues derived from land sales and milling activities, to finance more land purchases. In 1916, he bought two farms, called Cologne and Bombardie, from the Transvaal Consolidated Lands, Ltd. These properties were located south of Oogles and north of Kinross. At the time of purchase, these were just ordinary farms with land of not more than average quality. Mealie crops raised there did not exceed around eight or nine bags per morgen, average yields at the time.[20] Yet by the mid-1920s, Lazarus had converted the Bombardie and Cologne Estates into the Transvaal's maize-producing showpieces. "A plant less than eight or nine feet high was a rarity and many were twelve or thirteen feet," exclaimed an ecstatic visitor in describing the standing crops on the Estates. "So immense were the fields that from some points of view a visitor could have imagined that he was on a planet clothed with growing maize. Equally as striking as the magnificent uniformity of the crop was the cleanliness of the soil on which it grew. Weeds have a very thin time on the Cologne and Bombardie Estates."[21]

The huge commercial success of his farming operations enabled Lazarus to boast in 1924 that he was the "largest maize farmer in the world." By this time, farming operations on the Bombardie and Cologne Estates alone yielded more than 100,000 bags of mealies from the estimated 6,000 to 9,000 morgen under cultivation, and produced an annual harvest of 70,000 to 80,000 bags of potatoes from 400 morgen. In 1928, for example, the average yield of maize on the Bombardie and Cologne Estates exceeded 30 bags per morgen, and in some parts exceeded 40 to 50 bags.[22] This figure was even more astounding when one compares it with output elsewhere. The average yield for the Bethal district from the years 1924-1930 was 9.24 bags per morgen. Taking the 'maize triangle' as a whole, the average yield was around 6.35 bags per

morgen during the same period.[23] All in all, Lazarus used about 1,200 tons of fertilizer per year and maintained over 2,000 oxen, which were used for ploughing, transport, and other activities.[24]

Yet mealies remained the mainstay of his operations. "The best sort of farming for any settler to start with on the high veld of the Eastern Transvaal is the mealie," he insisted. "If any young man takes up the mealie seriously he can learn a very great deal, and at the same time acquire practical experience which will enable him to go forward into mixed farming later on."[25] Lazarus used between two and three thousand tons of fertilizers annually on his farms, which included, besides the Bombardie and Cologne Estates and Langsloot, a number of smaller farms on the eastern Transvaal highveld and possibly farm properties in the Orange Free State as well. At the top of the pyramid, Lazarus hired two white farm managers to oversee his farflung commercial farming empire. He also employed around 40 white overseers, foremen, and handymen -- "and the number is trebled when their families are counted". At the bottom of the hierarchy, he employed anywhere from 600 to 750 Africans for unskilled, manual labour on the farms.[26]

Lazarus was only one of a sizeable group of <u>parvenu</u> capitalist farmers who operated in the maize belt of the eastern Transvaal highveld. By 1920, the Middelburg district was "second to only one other [district] in the Transvaal as a maize-growing centre."[27] Within the space of a few years, these farmers were employing close to 10,000 "regular workers" in the Bethal/Middelburg area alone.[28] Mr. Feldt, who was a neighbour of Lazarus, "made a fortune in [maize and potato] farming," and his farming techniques were "an object lesson to anyone, he having risen from absolute poverty to affluence." In the general vicinity of Kinross, white farmers like J.J. Dorfan and Company, Stein and Snipelisky, the Medalie Brothers, the Oppert Brothers, the Pole Brothers, Breytenbach and Sons, Samuel Gafenowitz, and many others "made money out of this sort of [staple crop] farming."[29]

Agrarian entrepreneurs like Esrael Lazarus seemed the very archetype of the new self-made men who symbolised the great strides made by progressive farmers in the South African countryside. "The story of Mr. Lazarus's work is an epic of the soil," one correspondent exuded with unbridled enthusiasm. "[T]he dynamic energy and sound common sense of one man in the transformation of the two farms Cologne and Bombardie" brought about "a monumental conquest of nature." Lazarus himself embodied the spirit of capitalism as it was understood in South African ruling class circles. Faced with the growing impoverishment of 'poor whites' in the countryside, captains of industry, civic leaders, and state officials alike looked far and wide for vivid examples of rags-to-riches "success stories" to serve as inspirations and role models for struggling white farmers. Lazarus was not adverse to indulging in self-promotion and he actively participated in cultivating this well-manicured image of himself as a man of humble origins who exemplified the values of perseverance, diligence, and thrift. Responding to allegations that staple farming offered a "doubtful and at best very risky return," Lazarus proclaimed that "[successful farming] has surely been demonstrated by neighbours and myself, practically all of whom started with nothing, and to-day own thousands of acres of profit-earning land due to mealies and other crops under high production." While he cautioned against "mislead[ing] farmers and depressing them unduly" about the prospects for successful farming, he offered praise for "many a hard-working farmer who is doing

his best to develop his own holding as well as to increase the agricultural prosperity of South Africa."[30]

Labour Shortages in the Bethal District

During the early decades of the twentieth century, chronic labour shortages and lack of capital were the two principal barriers blocking the growth and development of commercial agriculture in the eastern Transvaal highveld. For farmers, securing reliable labour was always a constant source of tension and irritation, and they complained bitterly that available labour consisted of, for example, "the 'kitchen boy' variety, who, during the term of their service are continually drunk and loafing, and are therefore never able to adapt themselves to their work."[31] The steady expansion of cash-crop production generated a demand for labour that far exceeded the capacity of the local resident work-force. In the ensuing fierce competition for labour, capitalising farmers quickly absorbed what local supplies were available at the wages they were willing to pay, driving the market price upwards and causing considerable ill-feeling amongst those who were left empty-handed.[32] What complicated matters further was that farmers in the eastern Transvaal maize belt were geographically located at a considerable distance from concentrated pockets of African settlement. The entire eastern Transvaal highveld was "practically without Reserves." With the exception one small Reserve in the Vereeniging district, there was "nothing else between Ventersdorp to Wakkerstroom and little elsewhere."[33] Capitalising farmers wanted labour, but stood steadfastly against the creation of a Reserve in the district because this would permit African owner-occupiers to acquire choice lands in the settled highveld. As one irate Bethal farmer contended, "it would be an impossible position to have native farmers in amongst the Europeans. There is no room for a native area in the district."[34]

As the commercialising impulse gathered momentum, labour shortages became more pronounced. Those capitalising farmers who wished to increase production of staple crops were intent on bringing as much acreage under cultivation as possible. As a consequence, they were understandably quite hesitant to accommodate labour-tenants on their farms because agreements of this sort meant permitting resident African households to have independent access to prime cultivation and grazing land.[35] Farmers turned to recruiting agencies for assistance, and these companies, with their well-organised networks already in place, tapped into the urban slums that sprang up around Johannesburg. Farmers left no stone unturned in their relentless pursuit of casual labour, and, in an expedient born of desperation, some resorted to hiring itinerant drifters wandering through the farming areas.

Until the 1940s, agriculture remained primarily a labour-intensive activity, and expanded production was primarily achieved through the simple expedient of enlarging the absolute size of the labour force. From the outset, the fortunes of the large-scale maize farmers of the Bethal and Middelburg districts turned on the regular supply of hired labour. In putting their operations on an efficient and profitable footing, progressive farmers quickly exhausted local labour supplies. This relentless quest for alternative channels led desperate farmers to turn their gaze far afield. In order to secure requisite labour, farmers formed their own recruiting organisations, and these private associations were exempted from licencing and other requirements under the terms of the Native Labour Regulation Act (NLRA) of 1911. In 1912, Esrael Lazarus and other enterprising Middelburg/Bethal farmers formed

the Farmers' Labour Agency [Transvaalse Landbouwers Arbeids Maatschappij] with the aim of coordinating and streamlining their recruitment efforts. The Middelburg/Bethal farmers had hoped to imitate the large-scale Mining Houses with their formalized and highly successful recruitment practices. Other groups of farmers followed suit, and soon there were a large number of farmers' recruiting associations operating in the field.[36]

From the outset, the Farmers' Labour Agency began to "import thousands of Kaffirs from Pietersburg -- Kaffirs without families. They are usually picanninies [under-age youngsters]."[37] While the 1911 NLRA banned the employment of umfaans (i.e., youngsters under eighteen years-of-age), these restrictions were waived by administrative fiat for farmers. Labour relations on the great majority of farms, most of which still operated through systems of tenancy, were inextricably intertwined with the widespread use of child labour.[38] Nevertheless, the common abuses associated with recruiting picannins for field work landed a few farmers in Court, but government officials usually chose not to interfere. Yet, as these farmers must have intuitively understood from the outset, the recruitment of child labour provided only a short-term palliative since these youngsters lacked the physical strength and durability to provide the type of arduous manual labour required on the farms. Children were recruited mainly to supplement the seasonal work of labour tenants already settled on white-owned farms and to assist adult male Africans dragooned from bushveld farms in order to "work off their rent."[39] In time, the Mining Houses discovered that their own licenced agents had surreptitiously assisted the Farmers' Labour Agency in obtaining labour, and, desiring to eliminate unwanted competition, they were able -- through a carefully orchestrated lobbying campaign -- to effectively close it down.[40]

In 1913, the state administration adopted strict regulations prohibiting not only the recruitment of so-called "tropical natives" (i.e., Africans living north of 22 degrees south) but also their employment on the mines. In large measure, these legal restrictions came about because of scandalously high death rates on the mines caused mainly to pneumonia. This ban on the recruitment of "Rhodesian and East Coast natives" interfered with what had become a prime source of labour. This combination of the elimination of 'tropical' zones as a fertile labour catchment area for the Chamber of Mines and the rapidly expanding capitalisation of agriculture contributed to intensified competition for low-cost black labour and brought mine owners and large-scale farmers onto a collision course.[41] The seemingly insatiable demands of the Mines for labour created a niche that small-scale entrepreneurs were quick to fill. Prominent recruiting agencies, headed by such well-known men as Erskine, Hadley, Kantor, Theron, and many others, established offices in places like Messina, Pietersburg, and Louis Trichardt, straddling the main labour corridors heading to Johannesburg and the gold fields. These licenced agencies did their best to cultivate an image of legitimacy, but they secretly operated in league with unlicenced 'freelancers' who transformed what was called 'illicit trafficking in natives' into a thriving underground business.[42]

Chronic labour shortages nurtured a growing desperation on the part of capitalising farmers in the eastern Transvaal highveld. Under these circumstances, necessity became the mother of invention. The steady rise in the demand for farm labour put considerable pressure on

individual farmers to find loop-holes that would allow them to circumvent the spirit if not the letter of the law.[43] It was an open secret that farmers routinely ignored existing labour statutes. In order to combat the dramatic increase in recruiting practices of questionable legality, the state administration heaped new regulations upon the older more ineffectual ones. Inevitably, the rules governing labour recruitment became so clouded in ambiguity that state officials found it virtually impossible to interpret with exactitude what were authorized procedures and what were not. "Various instructions on the subject [of the employment of Rhodesian and East Coast Africans] have from time to time been issued," one perplexed bureaucrat to another, "with the result that the position has become rather confusing both to myself and those authorized to employ such natives."[44]

The large-scale farmers of the eastern Transvaal highveld took advantage of the reigning bureaucratic uncertainty to broaden the geographical scope of their recruitment efforts. During the 1910s, Lazarus employed labour agents who searched the city slums of Johannesburg and who reconnoitered the rural areas of the northern Transvaal in search of work-seeking migrants who had crossed the Limpopo and were heading for Johannesburg by foot. However, this approach to securing labour produced only haphazard results, and the supplies of labour obtained in this manner were inadequate to satisfy his growing demands. Lazarus, who was consumed by the desire to secure hired labour for his growing farming operations, seemed undeterred by bureaucratic obstacles. Imitating the success of the recruiting agencies that supplied labour for the Mines, he turned his attention beyond South Africa's borders, and, in 1919, he had wrested at least unofficial permission from the Director of Native Labour to recruit Rhodesian labourers.[45] Lazarus worked in league with recruiting agents who transported supplies of food by wagon caravan to sites scattered at favourite crossing-points along the Limpopo. These agents and their 'native runners' bribed impoverished Rhodesian labourers with food and cash advances, luring them southward with false promises of hygienic working conditions and relatively high cash-wages on the white-owned farms.[46]

In mid-1920, the Supreme Court of Natal and the Eastern Division Supreme Court of the Cape Province overturned existing regulations restricting labour recruitment and authorized employees of white farmers to recruit Rhodesian labour.[47] Almost immediately, Lazarus appointed two employees to act as official labour agents in his name. In actuality, these employees who masqueraded as <u>bona fide</u> labour agents conveniently masked the operations of "the real recruiters carrying on a profitable business" of gathering labour.[48] Lazarus depended upon 'native runners' to make initial contacts with Rhodesian labourers who were brought to Louis Trichardt where they were handed over to G.E.W. Gould, a labour agent who was employed by both Lazarus and David Erskine. In turn, Gould fed, clothed, and forwarded the recruited labourers via the railway to Lazarus at Oogies Station.[49]

In October 1920, Esrael Lazarus once again appealed to both the Secretary for Native Affairs, E.R. Garthorne, and the Director of Native Labour "for any assistance possible to secure further Rhodesian Natives."[50] His persistent requests for special dispensation eventually bore fruit. The Director of Native Labour instructed the Sub-Native Commissioner at Louis Trichardt to "recognize the engagement of Rhodesian Natives by runners working for Mr. Lazarus and extend the

necessary facilities for them to be forwarded to Mr. Lazarus." At the same time, he emphasized that "we should extend to farmers every assistance to procure labour," requesting that the Sub-Native Commissioner "assist as far as possible to inducing natives to accept farm employment where you are satisfied the conditions are good."[51] Virtually overnight, white farmers reaped the rewards of this shift in labour policy. "Labour Agents in the [Zoutpansberg] District," the Sub-Native Commissioner at Louis Trichardt conceded, "have become much interested and active in connection with the collecting and employment of Rhodesian Natives whom they pass through the runner to the employer."[52] Esrael Lazarus quickly transformed this propitious opportunity into a profit-making advantage for himself. Not only did he continue to recruit Rhodesian labourers for the Bombardie and Cologne Estates but he also expanded his labour recruitment operations to include supplying labour for white farmers at Empangeni in Natal.[53]

The labour recruitment euphoria quickly faded. In particular, the large-scale and highly capitalized farmers clustered around Kinross were unable to satisfy their own labour demands through far-flung yet ad hoc recruitment efforts. In 1924, the political alliance between the Nationalist and Labour Parties swept the ruling South African Party from office in the general election that signalled a massive shift of white voters' sympathies toward more formalized segregationist policies. The Hertzog-Creswell Pact that took office in June 1924 was genuinely sympathetic to white farmers but was also strongly committed to the protection of white wage-earners.[54] A steady stream of influential Eastern Transvaal highveld farmers, including N. Moss, whom The Farmer's Weekly identified as the "the right-hand man" of Esrael Lazarus, made the trek to Pretoria to petition and plead with the newly-installed Cabinet Ministers to overturn the prohibition against the importation of labourers from above latitude twenty-two degrees seven minutes.[55] Labour-starved farmers were confident that the Pact regime would concur with their opinion that the restrictions on labour recruitment which had been endorsed under the South African Party regime of Jan C. Smuts did not really apply to farm labour.

However, in September 1924, the new Government notified the civil administration that the legislative prohibition against the importation of labour effectively barring white farmers from recruiting labour in Rhodesia and Portuguese East Africa would remain in place. If the complaints of the large-scale Eastern Transvaal highveld farmers were justified, then their growing frustration was also predictable. The so-called up-to-date farmers on the Eastern Transvaal highveld had come to depend upon imported labour. "Native labour from Rhodesia and Portuguese Africa is of immense value to us," one farmer complained. In general, recruited labour contracted for twelve months' service. These workers were housed in barracks-like accommodations in order to maximize control and surveillance. Recruiting fees were considerably less than the prevailing rates expended on obtaining labour within South Africa's borders. The wages were, as one farmer put it, "exactly half of that our Union boys get." Equally important, labourers recruited from Rhodesia and the Portuguese territories submitted more readily to the discipline and drudgery of farm work. "The boys are raw and not spoiled by town life," one farmer contended. "[They] are good workers and not half as brazen-faced as the Basuto or the N'Xosa who are rather spoon-fed at present."[56]

Farmers were outraged at the insouciant attitude of the Pact

regime and this feeling was contagious. "The position now is that our crops are growing and we have not sufficient labour to deal with them," N. Moss exclaimed. "All the farmers are grumbling." A number of influential men like Lazarus, Hillman, Feldt, and others even went so far as to threaten a 'production strike' in order to press their class demands. Moss epitomized this sentiment. "If the Government are [sic] not prepared to help us we shall be obliged to decrease production," he angrily declared. "We shall have to give up mealie planting and go in for sheep and other things. In time, South Africa will be driven to importing its mealies."[57]

This bluff appeared to fall on deaf ears. Prime Minister Hertzog and D.F. Malan, the Minister of the Interior, responded sympathetically to the rising crescendo of complaints about labour shortages but steadfastly refused to adopt the course of action favoured by farmers. Colonel Creswell, the chief Labour Party representative in the Pact Cabinet, provoked the ire of hard-pressed farmers because of his insistence that they remedy their labour shortages by hiring white labour. This suggestion was more than white farmers could bear. Numerous large-scale Eastern Transvaal farmers had experimented in earlier years with the employment of white labour and "found it an utter failure." The kingpin of Eastern Transvaal farming circles, Esrael Lazarus, had himself employed perhaps more 'poor whites' than any other large-scale farmer on the Transvaal highveld. Eventually, however, he abandoned this practice because the 'poor whites' were "too lazy to work." For the most part, the white men who had been employed "would not and often could not do the work of the kaffir." Other highly capitalized highveld farmers added their voices to the growing chorus of complaints about the unreliability and inefficiency of white labour. "It is no use pretending that South Africa is ever going to be a white man's country in the sense that white men will take the place of kaffir labourers on the farms," Moss proclaimed. "It is necessary for the farmer to have an ample supply of cheap native labour which, incidentally, for this purpose, was much more efficient [than white labour]."[58]

In early 1925, highly successful highveld farmers like Lazarus, Frenkel, and others felt obliged to enter the political fray, once again raising their collective voice in public protest. "The farmers on the high veld of the Eastern Transvaal," Lazarus contended, "are in a hopeless position in regard to labour supply." He pinpointed the 'civilised labour policy' of the Pact regime as an ill-conceived solution to a widely-misunderstood problem. "May I point out to the Government," Lazarus warned, "that the farmers of South Africa are not going to have the white labour policy of the Labour Party foisted on them. Your poor white labour problem is not a cause, it is an effect. Molly-coddling the native is the cause." Reiterating his principle objection, he exclaimed: "I am feeling very sore about this matter of labour, because the future of the agricultural industry seems dark to me on account of the stupid policy pursued in regard to this matter."[59] Others joined the chorus, placing the blame on the privileged position of the mining industry. ""It seems that the Government does not want any other industry in the country than mining," H. Frenkel fumed. "The slightest hint on the part of the 'powers that be' that the mines are short of labour, and their requirements are speedily attended to." Despite the fact that mining and agriculture were inextricably "locked together for all practical purposes," it seemed that "agriculture has

got to play second fiddle to the mines."[60]

The Segmented Labour Market

The nub of the problem of labour shortages was the inability of hard-pressed white farmers to pay competitive wages. Hemmed in by indebtedness, low productivity, and lack of credit, farmers looked to the state administration to assist them in obtaining cheap labour. In 1922, the Director of Native Labour begrudgingly acknowledged that "the farming industry is considerably handicapped in regard to its native labour supply" because the "present system of recruiting favour[s] the mines and wealthier and organized employers."[61] Farmers' associations, particularly the Transvaal Agricultural Union, increasingly articulated the common grievances of agrarian capital, complaining bitterly about the preferential treatment that the Mines enjoyed with respect to labour recruitment and demanding state intervention to tip the scales in the other direction.[62] In the late 1920s, farmers who had applied to the Director of Native Labour to obtain Rhodesian labour at Louis Trichardt were placed on a "waiting list" and were left cooling their heels for more than a year.[63]

White farmers accused the Chamber of Mines of monopolizing the most valuable labourers and leaving the 'rejects' -- who were regarded as unsuitable for hard work -- to be picked over by labour-starved farmers.[64] The Director of Native Labour admitted that "there is a considerable supply of natives, consisting of youths, men of middle age and adults who are for various reasons not fitted for mine work, that could be made available for farmers at small cost." "At present," he continued, "such natives are either recruited by labour agents, who lay themselves out to secure farm labour, and are sent to individual farmers at a cost of about L3, plus railage and advances, to the farmer, or find their own way to the larger industrial centres." If these Africans who congregated in the urban slums did not "find work on their own account," they were eventually "picked up by one of the labour [recruiting] organizations and drafted to small employers."[65] One agricultural expert argued that "it is an old, festering scandal" that labour recruitment for the white farms "is handled by private 'enterprise' for private profit." Recruiting agencies concentrated their efforts on supplying the mines, "with a fitful by-pass to the farmer of boys too old, too young, or too unfit for mine work; under no control, with no visible system, and on fees which are simply a blood-tax screwed out of the farmer's dire necessity."[66] One Bethal farmer admitted that "to get labour one has to use unscrupulous methods." Others complained that farmers' recruiting organisations were "nothing but a racket."[67]

White farmers, with the exception of the Natal sugar growers, failed to satisfactorily address their labour supply problems "for the simple reason that it is impossible for fifty or a hundred farmers in any district to organise themselves into an association and successfully carry out a labour scheme."[68] The Randlords learned through their own bitter experience the folly of maintaining their own separate labour recruiting organizations. Intense competition resulted in the dramatic upturn in the cost of obtaining labour. "But the attempt," a prominent licenced recruiter contended, "to bring a farmer from Malmesbury growing wheat, another from Zululand growing sugar, another engaged in wattle plantation or growing mealies in the high veldt of the Eastern Transvaal, or cattle or sheep farmers in the Free State and other farmers together, and imagine you will get them to see

eye-to-eye precisely what should be done for the benefit of all of them in regard to [labour recruitment], I feel . . . is hopeless."[69] Comparatively speaking, while it was quite an "easy matter for five or six heads of the mining industry, all living in Johannesburg, to meet and establish an organization to supply the mines with labour, it is an entirely different matter for thousands of farmers spread out all over the Transvaal and Free State, with the varying conditions and circumstances under which they are farming, to form such an organization."[70]

As a general rule, white farmers remained fiercely individualistic. Local farmers' associations often experienced considerable difficulty in encouraging cooperation amongst their members and imposing at least a modicum of discipline. In the Bethal district, at least three separate labour recruiting organisations supplied local farmers with labour during the 1930s and 1940s. Some farmers complained that the largest recruiting agency, the Boere Arbeidsvereeniging, was "run by a small clique for their own benefit more or less on a political basis."[71] Nevertheless, there were a few success stories. In the early 1920s, the Lydenberg-North District Farmers Association, for example, went to great lengths to "place their native farm labour on a less slipshod basis." The farmers divided "their areas into little circles of perhaps a half a dozen farms, the number of farms in each circle being greater or less according to local conditions." The Association appointed a leading farmer in each circle was "to look after their common interests," including the all-important question of farm labour. This leading farmer "must see that native trekking to farms do not all go to one man but are gradually more evenly distributed within his circle."[72]

Ad hoc solutions of this sort more or less satisfied local needs but did little or nothing to address the overall problem of chronic labour shortages on the white-owned farms. Some prominent individuals complained that "small private enterprises here and there" were woefully inadequate to deal with the problem of farm labour shortages "to the best interests of the Country." They suggested instead that an adjunct branch of the Department of Agriculture be created to coordinate labour recruitment. "In other words," it was boldly stated, "you have to organize for [the farmers]."[73] To say the least, government bureaucrats were very reluctant to assume this additional burden. The Director of Native Labour expressed the common sentiments of high-ranking state officials when he declared: "There are many difficulties in the way of Government undertaking the allocation of labourers to farmers who are not known individually to natives, and some guarantee would have to be provided that natives were treated in terms of their contract."[74] During the 1920s, farmers in the Bethal, Middelburg, and Ermelo districts began to tap the prisons in order to secure much-needed labour. This practice was not particularly novel. Farmers in various regions of South Africa had in certain instances been able to acquire labour from the prisons. But what distinguished the mid-1920s Bethal/Ermelo experiment was its extent and scope. When the Prisons Department had agreed to supply Bethal farmers with large batches of prison labour, they had housed "the natives in the same compounds, and under the same conditions," as those used for accommodating ordinary contract labourers.[75]

The Despotic Labour Regime on the Bethal Farms

The steady expansion of commercial agriculture in the Bethal

district was accompanied by a substantial increase in the size of the permanent African population. From 1921 to 1946, the number of Africans in the district increased from 18,000 to 39,000. This population increase was largely the result of the influx of extra-Union Africans from Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland who had initially came to work on the farms but lingered on at the expiry of their contracts, filling up niches in the local casualised labour market. By the 1940s if not before, approximately 110 farmers on large-scale landed estates in the heartland of the eastern Transvaal maize belt employed 'foreign' labourers who migrated principally from Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia, but also from Bechuanaland, Northern Rhodesia, and Portuguese East Africa, and who were housed in closed compounds.[76]

The first step toward incorporating African work-seekers into the alien world of the large estates began well before they set foot in the maize belt. The great majority of migrants who came to the white-owned farms worked under six- or twelve-month contracts. The labour contract was secured when recruits, whether singly or in large batches, appeared before a magistrate, or other state-approved "attesting officer," who verified that they had agreed to work and understood the terms of employment. The standard farm labour contract was a legally binding agreement obliging Africans to work for a designated period under the supervision of a particular farmer. The stylised ritual of coming before an inquiring government official masked a highly unequal relationship where African recruits often understood very little about the procedures that were conducted in their name. The system of labour contracting was fraught with such ambiguity that it openly invited fraud and deception. In preparing an expose on the Bethal farms for Drum magazine, a journalist reported that the method of recruiting casual labour off the streets of Johannesburg amounted to nothing more than groups of fifty Africans parading past an "attesting officer" and touching a pencil held above the contract sheet. By piecing together fragments scattered throughout the archival records and elsewhere, it is possible to arrive at the conclusion that Africans had little influence over where they contracted for work and were frequently surprised when they found themselves on white-owned farms when they expected to be somewhere else.[77]

The labour contract imposed a new social identity on African recruits. In the course of temporarily binding them to a fixed term of employment under particular conditions, the contract established these recruits as legal entities subject to penal sanctions, including imprisonment and deportation. On their part, farmers welcomed the stiff penalties for breach of contract and frequently called on state assistance in tracking down deserters who fled their farms in the dead of night.[78] The relations of power on the large estates were played out in the interstices of the built environment. The big farms were carefully divided into two sociocultural worlds that reflected the great chasm dividing master from servant, European from 'native', and propertied from propertyless. As a general rule, the most prominent feature -- both architecturally and visually -- of the large landed estate was the complex of well-constructed buildings comprising the living quarters for the family of the owner or manager. The grandeur, spaciousness, and cleanliness of the homestead symbolised the class power of the landed elite.[79] In contrast, the drab, unsightly living quarters for workers were more often than not situated away from the center of the estate and hidden from view.

Large-scale farmers modelled their estates after the Rand mines, and, as a consequence, were compulsive about encasing their labourers within an all-encompassing sociocultural environment. Almost without exception, workers on the large estates were housed in barracks-like accommodations. The quality of these living quarters varied considerably. On occasion, estate owners provided properly ventilated, well-constructed brick structures with cement floors and bunks on the inside. Some compounds were "in an orderly and clean state," where latrines and places for washing and bathing were provided." But these conditions were the exception and not the rule. Most compounds were in such a dilapidated state that they were "unsuitable for the occupation of natives" or were "places into which no decent employer would house his animals."[80]

Frightening stories about ill-treatment on the Bethal farms, repeated with monotonous regularity, eventually gained the attention of state officials, particularly those connected with the Health Department, the Government Native Labour Bureau, and the Native Affairs Department. In response, various state bureaucracies sometimes authorised first-hand inspections of farm compounds, and, fortunately, scattered and fragmentary selections of these reports have been preserved in the archival record. For example, the observations of the Bethal magistrate after inspecting the farm compound of Jacob Hyman offers a rare glimpse into the deplorable living conditions on the white-owned farms:

> There were no lavatories or conveniences and human faeces were lying everywhere around in the immediate vicinity of the compounds. The compound was completely enclosed by a high wall in places protected by broken bottles and glass. The outer door was locked from the inside. There were two rooms inside, one of which was also under lock and key from the outside. These two rooms were occupied by a large number of natives whose only bedding consisted of sacks. Should any inmate wish to go to the arrear he had to knock on the door until the so-called policeboy or bossboy would open it and escort him outside the compound for fear he should run away.[81]

Government inspectors routinely reported that compounds were surrounded by high walls or "enclosed with barbed wire nine feet high." Windows or openings in the walls were almost always covered with iron bars. Many compounds were watched by armed sentries who were on duty night and day, and gates were locked from the outside every evening to prevent the inmates from deserting.[82] The "natives," who sometimes slept on dirt floors with only straw mats to shield them against the cold winter nights, "have to relieve themselves in the mealie fields nearby," or through small holes in the compound walls, because of the absence of toilet facilities. As a general rule, the compounds did not provide proper lighting and ventilation. Most were "verminous, with flies in myriads, and some are indescribably filthy." Overcrowding was commonplace, and farmers frequently resorted to placing the spillover from the compounds in sheds and backyard hovels dispersed around their farms. Beginning in the mid-1940s, a number of estate owners constructed formidable brick and cement buildings to house their workers. While these new facilities showed marked improvement over older, dilapidated wooden structures, they were, in the words of the Secretary for Health, "nothing else but formidable prisons."[83]

One of the most striking features about large estates of the

eastern Transvaal maize belt was the rigid regimentation of the working day. The logic of the system of labour relations corresponded to what Eugene Genovese described in another context as one which "pushed the masters to break their slaves' spirit and to reconstruct it as an unthinking and unfeeling extension of their own will."[84] Farm work was backbreaking, manual labour which required an "incessant [expenditure of effort] in the lands from 'sunrise to sunset'."[85] To put it more precisely, depending upon the time of the year, workers generally toiled in the fields from 5:00 a.m. till after 7:00 p.m. In contrast with agricultural production on the small farms, white farmers on the Bethal estates made use of nascent Taylorist modes of labour organisation to eliminate natural pores in the working-day and accelerate the pace of work. The labour process was structured along quasi-military lines, and the harsh regime of discipline and surveillance prevailing on the estates was extended into the fields. In order to coordinate their activities and concentrate their efforts, workers were organised into gangs. Tasks were fragmented and simplified. In order to prevent loafing, supervisors assigned specific tasks to individuals or work-teams to be completed during the course of the working day. The young, the old, and even the sick were expected to keep pace with the more robust workers. If anyone failed to complete their piece-work quota, foremen refused to mark their ticket. Lazarus, for example, recognized that "part of the secret" of operating large-scale farming enterprises revolved around the efficient and judicious use of labour-time. "If a kaffir would remain in employment on the Lazarus Estates," he contended, "he must work to time; he must promptly and smartly obey orders and execute tasks. All his working hours belong to the employer, who pays him a money-wage and supplies him with his needs."[86]

Work activities consisted of little more than simple cooperation where labourers relied primarily upon hand-held instruments of production to complete their daily tasks. Without the widespread use of mechanically-driven farm equipment, farmers depended upon harnessing draught animals for the heavy work of plowing, harrowing, and haulage. The flip-side of this type of work regime that depended principally upon sweated labour and primitive tools was the extensive use of force and violence to compel Africans to expend greater physical effort. "Native foremen, and frequently white overseers on horseback," followed behind the gangs of field hands, "invariably with whips or some instrument in their hands" to spur the workers to move quickly. "Throughout the hours that the labourers are at work," one inspector reported, "they have to work <u>hard</u> and continuously and are naturally continually being urged on."[87]

Workers were paid by on the 'ticket system' where the completion of 30 separate shifts was equivalent to a month of contracted labour service. Supervisors rarely marked work-books at the end of each day, but at the week-end. Labourers were not paid for Sundays and days not worked. Because proper records were practically non-existent, workers were subjected to widespread abuse of trust and were cheated at every opportunity. Labourers frequently complained that their tickets were not marked when work was stopped on account of rain. They also protested bitterly that "if anyone talked in the lands while working, or became ill and could not carry on, or lagged behind when working or proceeding to work, he was sent back to the compound, got no food during the day and his ticket for that day was not marked."[88]

Wage rates on the Bethal estates naturally fluctuated over time and by category of worker. By the mid-1930s, wages for contract workers ranged from 15/- for youths to 30/- for adults per 30 shifts worked, along with food and quarters. On the big farms, there were a number of long-service employees who occupied intermediate posts such as baas-boys, foremen, and oxen drivers. These labourers had special privileges such as living in their own separate quarters, were frequently married, and received wages that sometimes reached L2.10 per month. The large estates also employed full-time cooks. Food preparation was generally carried out in a primitive way -- that is, in three-legged pots in the open over "mealie stronk" fires. In some places, there were open sheds "where flies and other filth abound." At Bombardie, Cologne, and Longsloot Estates, there were brick fireplaces with large built-in pots, under cover of a roof in corrugated iron sheds with open sides. Yet in all these places, "flies are much in evidence and little effort seems to be made to keep them down." At Cologne and Bombardie, the compounds had water spigots; but at Longsloot, labourers fetched water in large drums at considerable distance from living quarters. In other places, water was obtained from the usual farm supply and washing facilities were located at dams and spruits. Farm labourers, and especially the so-called 'tropicals', were particularly susceptible to respiratory diseases. Gross overcrowding in the compounds facilitated the rapid spread of contagious diseases, and poor or nonexistent sanitation ensured that exposure to infection was ubiquitous.[89]

Compound managers made every effort to gain compensatory savings on standard expenses -- and in particular non-wage costs such as rations, housing accommodations, and medical care. Farmers formally agreed to provide rations, including separated milk, vegetables, and meat, over the duration of the labour contract. Workers, however, rarely if ever received what they were promised. The principal article of food was mealie meal -- served thrice daily at breakfast, midday and evening. Labourers complained that during the day they generally received only mealie meal, frequently insufficiently and badly cooked, and that milk was provided only at the evening meal. Workers ate their breakfast and midday meals in the fields. On the larger farms, the food was taken to them at lunch time in drums by scotch cart, and in the smaller places by wheelbarrow. "Some natives have little billy cans into which their porridge is placed," Brink explained. In most cases, however, "they are simply given the food in their hands which, of course, they have no opportunities of washing." Some farmers made a regular habit of selling the meat of animals which died, and dead fowls, to their labourers. In accordance with common practice, the price of the meat purchased was marked on the back of the ticket and deducted from wages due. Once absorbed into the labour regime on the estates, it became extremely difficult for farm labourers to break loose of the tightening bonds. After accepting advances ranging from L1 to L4, the ordinary recruit arrived on the farm already in debt. Recruits were expected to compensate their employers for the costs of rail or lorry transport to the farm. Each recruit was expected to "repay these [debts] before he receives a penny for his labours." It was thus not unusual for farm workers to toil in the fields for three months before acquiring any cash payments, by which time they were usually in debt at the company store which most farmers kept on the properties. Farmers automatically deducted the costs of items

purchased at the company store from wages due. Hence, almost all workers had virtually nothing to show for their labours by the time they completed their contracts.[90]

At the expiry of their contracts, recruits found it very difficult to serve notice and leave the farms. Farmers quite cleverly resorted to all sorts of tricks to hold their workers in semi-bondage and extend their contracts of service. Generally speaking, farmers withheld wage payments to their labourers for at least a month after they were due. By holding wages in arrears, farmers were applying a tourniquet to stop the labour hemorrhaging brought about by widespread desertions. Yet accumulated earnings were almost always relatively meagre, and, in the case of workers desperate to escape the deplorable living and working conditions, their loss was hardly a sufficient deterrent. By the 1940s, Bethal farmers had to recruit upwards to 30,000 migrant workers annually in order to meet their actual requirements of between 14,000 and 18,000 workers. Desertion rates varied from farm to farm and year to year. But, on balance, perhaps as many as 20 percent of the migrant labourers fled the farms in violation of their contracts.[91]

The Ambiguities of Conflict and Accommodation

Uprooting Africans from their disparate rural communities and throwing them together on the Bethal estates did not transform these wage-labourers into a homogeneous mass of proletarians where their shared experience as exploited workers overshadowed and dissolved their previously-held sociocultural bonds. Rather than erasing past social ties, the harsh realities of living and working on the Bethal farms appeared to reinforce, paradoxically as that might seem, old loyalties and to create new ones. Africans from Rhodesia usually arrived in the Transvaal in "bands of from ten upwards in number" were reluctant to split up into sub-groups of twos and threes, and preferred instead to contract en masse for employment on white-owned farms. Once on the farms, labourers tended to cluster into social groups that were largely ethnic in origin and composition.[92] These minute networks of "cultural reticulation," as Pino Arlacchi puts it, "broke the solidarity" founded on purely economic criteria, thereby undermining strictly class mobilisation on the estates.[93]

The main fault lines dividing the supervisory staff on the large-scale estates were racial in nature, but even here there were gradations in authority, income, and outlook. At the top, white farm managers supervised the whole production process on the large estates. They occupied, to use Erik Olin Wright's concept, "contradictory class locations."[94] On the one side, successful farm managers often used their experience and savings to vault into landownership, the "the poor man's chance" it was called. On the other side, supervisory jobs symbolised the downward mobility of 'poor whites' pushed off the land.[95]

Researchers who have studied agrarian relations in South Africa have frequently wondered at the overt quiescence of farm workers in the face of grinding poverty and daily harassment. At face value, it might seem puzzling that farm workers only rarely went on strike or revolted. Grievances accumulated and festered, occasionally spilling over into protest meetings, surging crowds, and rioting. These were the exceptions and not the rule.[96] It should be obvious that collective protest of whatever sort invariably invited severe retaliation and repression, and the agrarian underclass seldom had the political or social organisation or material resources at their disposal to make

direct confrontation a useful and winning strategy. Under circumstances where management absolutism reigned supreme, farm labourers who served out the terms of their contracts had little alternative but to resign themselves, ostensibly at least, to the iron discipline of their overseers. Yet even if workers did indeed perceive themselves to be virtually enslaved on the farms, there is plenty of evidence, both circumstantial and otherwise, which suggests that they did not simply act as apathetic, passive victims. Farm labourers certainly developed acute feelings of injustice about their peculiar situation. But without strikes and independent organisation, it is only possible to know the ways that they struggled to soften the burden of work by 'reading the signs' of largely hidden, silent, and individualised acts of resistance to management absolutism. Workers tended to fall back on their own devices, and footdragging, sabotage, and theft, along with other forms of defiance, which James Scott has so admirably described in another context, were commonplace.[97] It must be stressed that although these actions were largely spontaneous they were certainly not random. Individualised acts, repeated again and again, forged recognizable patterns of resistance which kept estate management off balance. In the context of persistent labour shortages, desertion was perhaps the most damaging act of resistance. Why contract workers wanted to flee was not difficult to understand. Recruiting practices involving force and deceit often backfired. "It is no use persuading the Natives to go to the farms when they don't want to," one exasperated farmer exclaimed. "Unwilling labour is useless." Those Africans who were tricked into agreeing to long-term contracts or who had been forced against their will to go and work on the farms often took the first opportunity to run away.[98]

Violence and Social Death

Orlando Patterson suggests that the condition of slavery involved two contradictory principles, namely, marginality and integration. Slavery, he contends, historically entailed "institutionalised marginality," where slaves were socially nonpersons who existed in a "liminal state of social death."[99] For Patterson, these conditions were the defining characteristics of slavery. In many ways, what Patterson has to say about slavery bears a striking resemblance to the miserable treatment and brutal exploitation of 'foreign' recruits on the large estates of the eastern Transvaal maize belt. In this sense, his understanding of the sociohistorical significance of enslavement can assist us in coming to grips with the special place that the Bethal farms occupy in the inglorious history of agrarian evolution and development in the South African countryside. Estate workers set foot in the eastern Transvaal highveld as semi-permanent resident aliens. From the point of view of employers and state officials, their most important possession was their labouring capacity, and once this capacity was expended or lost they were subject to expulsion. As outsiders with few legal rights and no social standing, contract workers existed in limbo, or at least something akin to a state of suspended animation. In both the press and official government circles, reports surfaced time and again about how unsuspecting Africans had "disappeared," seemingly without a trace, from the streets of Johannesburg, from prison, or elsewhere, only later to be found on the Bethal farms, claiming to have been 'press-ganged', or dragooned, into service against their will.[100] Labourers spoke in hushed tones about fellow-workers who had been beaten to death in the fields or who

perished in the compounds due to unknown maladies, only to be buried without benefit of a medical post-mortem in unmarked graves on the Bethal farms.[101]

The rituals of rulership on the Bethal estates were intimately connected with efforts of farmers to assert control over the bodies of their workers. Careful investigation and analysis of the ways in which estate managers physically brutalised their workers can bring a heightened awareness of the molecular underpinnings of agrarian capitalism -- or what Michel Foucault has called the "microphysics of power." Physical force, administered with callous disregard for the well-being of those who were victimised, contributed to the disciplining of habits and breaking the spirit of strong-willed workers. 'Cheeky natives' were imprisoned and chained. The 'lazy' and shiftless' were routinely denied food rations. Assaults, floggings, and beatings took place with monotonous regularity.[102] The domination that estate owners exercised over the bodies of their workers symbolised their absolute power over life and death. To be more specific, the act of physical disfigurement and ritualised scarring -- the stigmata of the oppressed -- were outward signs of 'symbolic death'. One shocked labour inspector intuitively understood the power of brute force on the white-owned farms:

> What struck me particularly on some farms was the cowed appearance of the labourers and their demeanor when questioned as to complaints. It was obvious that they were afraid to voice any complaints and it was only after I resorted to the method of examining their bodies that I discovered two cases of gross ill-treatment. In the one case I found a gang of about 60 labourers, 75 percent of whom bore old and fresh marks of beatings -- there were fresh weals and old scars all over their bodies, a sight really pitiful to see. According to the natives the beatings had been administered by a native foreman.[103]

The sheer randomness and capriciousness of corporal punishment spread fear amongst the workers. This calculated application of physical violence rendered coercion possible. For frightened workers, the experience of physical abuse engendered a sense of powerlessness, stimulating acquiescence to authority and compliance with order.

The exercise of excessive force and violence on the estates was directly linked to the desire on the part of owners to impose new work habits and a new time discipline on raw recruits, particularly umfaans and so-called 'blanket kaffirs', who were more accustomed to the irregular labour rhythms of subsistence agriculture. In the fields, it was a common practice for both white and African overseers "to use their whips when they consider the occasion warrants it." Workers were routinely treated as unthinking beasts of burden. "We are inspanned like oxen," wrote a group of seven Africans from Northern Rhodesia who also complained of excessive fatigue and one meal of rationed porridge per day, "[our] necks are swollen on account of the yokes we are inspinned [sic] to."[104] This imagery of equating the treatment of workers with that of animals appears frequently in the archival records. "We are flogged for no reason as cattle," one African proclaimed. Others complained that "their sleeping accommodation is not fit for pigs."[105]

The large-scale farmers who specialised in cash-crop production were forced to operate in a fiercely competitive market for migrant

labourers. Wretched living conditions, appalling physical abuse, and exacting penal sanctions were not aberrations, a reflection of the moral callousness and cruelty of a handful of white farmers and their overly enthusiastic managers and foremen. Instead, these were an integral part of the estate order, central elements in the historical process through which a large, amorphous, and revolving mass of 'foreign' labourers were compelled to work against their will on isolated farms in the eastern Transvaal highveld. The profits of the estate owners depended upon squeezing labour-time out of reluctant workers, and it was toward this ultimate end that the savagely harsh labour regime was directed.

NOTES

1. The source of much of the inspiration that lies behind my thinking on this subject can be traced to Robert Morrell, Rural Transformations in the Transvaal: The Middelburg Distrct, 1919 to 1930 (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983), and to Helen Bradford, A Taste of Freedom: The I.C.U. in Rural South Africa (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987). I would like to thank Keith Breckenridge, Keith Shearer, and Siyobonga Ndabezitha for assistance at the archives, and Jonathan Crush and Alan Jeeves for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

2. The Star, 22 May 1928. "Staple Crop versus Mixed Farming."

3. De Echo, 6 June 1947.

4. Central Archives Depot (CAD), Archives of the Bethal Magistrate (LBH) 70, N3/13/4 [Part I]. E.H. Harris, Nyasaland Government Representative, Johannesburg, to the Magistrate/Native Commissioner, Bethal, 8 March 1946. Enclosure: letter from Nyasaland farm labourer, Kinross [n.d.].

5. Michael Scott, A Time to Speak (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 169.

6. The Star, 22 May 1928, "Staple Crop versus Mixed Farming."

7. Union of South Africa, Natives' Land Commission, Report of the Natives' Land Commission. Minutes of Evidence, U.G.22-1914 (Cape Town: Government Printers, 1914). [Hereafter cited as Beaumont Commission, U.G.22-14.] Evidence of W.G. Schuurman, p. 323.

8. A study conducted in the early twentieth century found that over a period of 21 growing seasons, Bethal had nineteen good and two indifferent crops with no failures. See H.D. Leppan, The Agricultural Development of Arid and Semi-Arid Regions (Johannesburg: Central News Agency, 1928), p. 59.

9. John Wellington, Southern Africa: A Geographical Study. Volume II: Economic and Human Geography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 6-8.

10. Manuscripts and Archives Division, Jaggar Library, University of Cape Town, Native Economic Commission, 1930-1932. Minutes of Evidence [typescript], Statement of P.J. Bosman and J.J. Williams, Middelburg, p. 948.

11. Robert Morrell, "Competition and Cooperation in Middelburg, 1900-1930," in Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930, ed. W. Beinart, P. Delius, and S. Trapido (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), pp. 378-380.

12. See Helen Bradford, "'Getting Away with Slavery: Capitalist Farmers, Foreigners and Forced Labour in the Transvaal, c. 1920-1950," History Workshop Conference, 6-10 February 1990. Of course, the use of child labour on the white-owned farms was part of the country-wide division of labour, and this feature alone did not set the Bethal farmers apart.

13. Helen Bradford, A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924-1930 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), pp, 145-187.

14. The scholarly literature is extensive. See, for example, M.L. Morris, "The Development of Capitalism in South African Agriculture: Class Struggle in the Countryside," Economy & Society 5 (1976), pp. 292-343; Martin J. Murray, "The Origins of Agrarian Capitalism in South Africa: A Critique of the 'Social History' Perspective," Journal of Southern African Studies 15,4 (1989), pp. 645-665; Timothy Keegan, "The Making of the Rural Economy: From 1850 to the Present," in Zbigniew Konczacki, Jane Parpart, and Timothy Shaw (eds.), Studies in the Economic History of Southern Africa, Volume II (London: Frank Cass, 1991), pp. 36-63; Belinda Bozzoli (ed.), Town and Countryside in the Transvaal (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983); William Beinart, Peter Delius, and Stanley Trapido (eds.), Putting a Plow to the Ground; and Helen Bradford, "Highways, and Byways, and Culs-de-Sacs: The Transition to Agrarian Capitalism in Revisionist South African History," Radical History Review 46/47 (1990), pp. 59-88.

15. Morrell, Rural Transformations, pp. 203-204.

16. Robert Morrell, "The Disintegration of the Gold and Maize Alliance in South Africa in the 1920s," International Journal of African Historical Studies 21,4 (1988), pp. 620-621.

17. See Charles Van Onselen, Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914. Volume One: New Babylon (London: Longman, 1982).

18. CAD, Department of Lands (LDE), 550, 7223/95. Secretary for Lands, Pretoria, to the Magistrate, Bethal, 20 November 1917.

19. The Star, 20 February 1928. "Miles of Mealie-Clothed Veld. Wonder Crops of Cologne and Bombardie." Morrell, "Competition and Cooperation in Middelburg," pp. 378-380.

20. One bag = 200 lbs.; and one morgen = 2.12 acres.

21. The Star, 20 February 1928. "Miles of Mealie-Clothed Veld. Wonder Crops of Cologne and Bombardie."

22. Journal of the Department of Agriculture, 9,3 (March, 1925), p. 204. [Thanks to Robert Morrell for pointing out this reference to me.] The Star, 20 February 1928. "Miles of Mealie-Clothed Veld. Wonder Crops of Cologne and Bombardie."

23. See S.J. deSwardt and J.C. Neethling, "Report on an Economic Investigation into Farming in Four Maize Districts in the Orange Free State, 1928-1930," Bulletin of the Department of Agriculture of South Africa, Economic Series 22 No. 173, pp. 79, 89.

24. The Star, 20 February 1928. "Miles of Mealie-Clothed Veld. Wonder Crops of Cologne and Bombardie." Lazarus also owned the Longsloot Estate, near Kinross, a few miles southeast of the Bombardie and Cologne Estates. He placed an estimated 1,800 morgen under cultivation on this farm, of which nearly 1,500 were devoted to maize. In 1928, these lands yielded an estimated 40,000 to 45,000 bags of maize. He also branched out into other areas, producing such staple crops as oats, turnips, beans, and rye. In particular, he devoted about 300 morgen to teff, a favourite feed crop for livestock. Lazarus also specialized in raising pure bred Afrikander cattle, show horses, and prize-winning sheep (The Farmer's Weekly, 11 February 1925. Correspondence from E.P. Alexander, Natal; The Star, 20 February 1928. "Miles of Mealie-Clothed Veld. Wonder Crops of Cologne and Bombardie"). At another place, Lazarus gave different figures for the amount of acreage under cultivation: Longsloot, 2800 acres; Bombardie and Springboklaagte, 4250 acres; Cologne, Wondegsvlei, and Goedgevonden, 3500 acres; Frisgewaagd, 1000 acres; De Laaste Drift, 400 acres; and Hartbeestfontein and Vlaklaagte, 1800 acres [Transvaal Archives Depot (TAD), Government Native Labour Bureau (GNLB) 122, 1950/13/240. E. Lazarus, Middelburg, to Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 4 July 1925.

25. The Star, 22 May 1928. "Staple Crop versus Mixed Farming."

26. Morrell, Rural Transformations, pp. 201-202. Middelburg Observer, 27 June and 24 February 1928. [Cited in Morrell, Rural Transformations, p. 203.]

27. The Star, 5 October 1921. [Special thanks to Robert Morrell for pointing out this reference to me.]

28. Morrell, Rural Transformations, p. 193.

29. The Star, 22 May 1928. Correspondence from G.E. Haupt, "Farming for Profit."

30. The Star, 20 February 1928. "Miles of Mealie-Clothed Veld. Wonder Crops of Cologne and Bombardie"; The Star, 22 May 1928. "Staple Crop versus Mixed Farming."

31. TAD, GNLB 412, 81/9. S. Jankelowitz, Benoni, to the Chief Native Commissioner, Benoni, 27 November 1931.

32. It was reported in 1908, for example, in the Bethal district, "most of the natives are ordinary squatters [i.e., labour-tenants], but a good many come in from Swaziland and Zululand but do not care to stay on the farms" [Transvaal Colony, Native Affairs Department, Annual Report for the Year Ended 30 June 1908, T.G.16-1910 (Pretoria: Government Printing and Stationery Office, 1910). Annexure B(1). General. Native Commissioner, Bethal, p. 52]. TAD, GNLB 107, 1237/13/D53[26]. J.A. Beyers, Kinross, to Minister of Native Affairs, Pretoria, 18 January 1917.

33. Union of South Africa, Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Union Native Council Bill, Coloured Persons Rights Bill, Representation of Natives in Parliament Bill, and Natives Land Amendment) Bill, S.C.10-1927 (Cape Town: Cape Times, Ltd., 1927). Evidence of W.H. Macmillan, p. 151.

34. Beaumont Commission, U.G.22-14. Evidence of J. Naude, Bethal farmer, p. 23. [Special thanks to Robert Morrell for pointing out this reference to me.]

35. Morrell, "Competition and Cooperation," pp. 390-391; Bradford, "Getting Away with Slavery," pp. 1-5.

36. TAD, GNLB 107, 1237/13/D53[26]. Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, to Director, Native Labour Bureau, 16 February 1917.

37. Beaumont Commission, U.G.22-14. Evidence of W.G. Schuurman, p. 323. [Special thanks to Robert Morrell for pointing out this reference to me.]

38. William Beinart, "Transkeian Migrant Workers and Youth Labour on the Natal Sugar Estates 1918-1948," Journal of African History 32 (1992), p. 47.

39. TAD, GNLB 41, 622/1912. Acting Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 24 January 1913; GNLB 107, 1237/13/53[28]. H.S. Cooke, Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg. Circular to Magistrates, Native Commissioners and Sub-Commissioners throughout the Union, 4 April 1925; Morrell, "Competition and Cooperation," p. 391; TAD, GNLB 41, 622/1912. Sub-Native Commissioner, Sekukuniland, to the Director, GNLB, Johannesburg, 12 February 1912.

40. The Farmers' Weekly, 19 March 1919. [Cited in Morrell, Rural Transformations, p. 216.]

41. Beinart, "Transkeian Migrant Workers," p. 46; Morrell, Rural Transformations, pp. 210-212; Morrell, "The Disintegration of the Gold and Maize Alliance," pp. 626-629.

42. Patrick Harries, "'A Forgotten Corner of the Transvaal': Reconstructing the History of a Relocated Community through Oral Testimony and Song," in Belinda Bozzoli (ed.), Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), pp. 97-98.

43. TAD, GNLB 123, 1950/13/D240. Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, to Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 27 October 1920.

44. TAD, GNLB 123, 1950/13/D240. Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, to the Sub-Native Commissioner, Louis Trichardt, 21 October 1920; CAD, Department of Native Affairs (NTS) 1451, 87/280. G.E. Liefeldt, Sub-Native Commissioner, Louis Trichardt, to the Native Commissioner, Zoutpansberg District, 1 December 1920.

45. TAD, GNLB 412, 81/9. S. Jankelowitz, Benoni, to the Chief Native Commissioner, Benoni, 27 November 1931; TAD, GNLB 122, 1950/13/240. E. Lazarus, Middelburg, to Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 4 July 1928; CAD, NTS 1451, 87/280. Acting Director of Native Labour, H.S. Cooke, to the Sub-Native Commissioner, Louis Trichardt, 21 October 1920.

46. TAD, GNLB 123, Part 150/13/D240. Esrael Lazarus, Middelburg, to Director of Native Labour Johannesburg, 17 October 1919; TAD, GNLB 123, Part 150/13/D240. Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, to the Sub-Native Commissioner, Louis Trichardt, 21 October 1919; CAD, NTS 1451, 87/280. T.E. Liefeldt, Sub-Native Commissioner, Louis Trichardt, to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 28 October 1920.

47. CAD, NTS 1451, 87/280. Acting Director of Native Labour, H.S. Cooke, to the Sub-Native Commissioner, Louis Trichardt, 21 October 1920.

48. CAD, NTS 1451, 87/280. T.E. Liefeldt, Sub-Native Commissioner, Louis Trichardt, to the Native Commissioner, Zoutpansberg District, 1 December 1920.

49. CAD, NTS 1451, 87/280. David Erskine, Pietersburg, to the Sub-Native Commissioner, Louis Trichardt, 1 June 1920.

50. CAD, NTS 1451, 87/280. Acting Director of Native Labour, H.S. Cooke, to the Sub-Native Commissioner, Louis Trichardt, 21 October 1920. CAD, NTS 1451, 87/280. Secretary for Native Affairs, E.R. Garthorne, to Esrael Lazarus, Middelburg, 6 November 1920.

51. CAD, NTS 1451, 87/280. H.S. Cooke, Acting Director of Native Labour, to the Sub-Native Commissioner, Louis Trichardt, 21 October 1920.

52. CAD, NTS 1451, 87/280. T.E. Liefeldt, Sub-Native Commissioner, Louis Trichardt, to the Native Commissioner, Zoutpansberg, 1 December 1920.

53. CAD, NTS 1451, 87/280. Esrael Lazarus, Middelburg, to Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 14 May 1921. CAD, NTS 1451, 87/280. General Manager, South African Railways and Harbours, to Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 26 May 1923.

54. See R.H.R. Davenport, South Africa: A Modern History (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 199-202.

55. The Farmer's Weekly, 11 February 1925. Correspondence from E.P. Alexander, Fascadale, Natal.

56. The Farmer's Weekly, 11 February 1925. Correspondence from F. Schalk, Val. A northern Transvaal farmer who assumed the nom de plume 'Lonely Rancher' bragged: "Now the Rhodesian boy is clean, honest, hard-working and respectful. He will work as hard behind your back as when you are watching him. He is always the first to work in the morning, and the last to leave in the evening." As if these stellar qualities were not convincingly enough, 'Lonely Rancher' boldly asserted that "the Rhodesian boy will do the work of two local boys for half the money" (The Farmer's Weekly, 6 May 1925. Correspondence from 'Lonely Rancher', Northern Transvaal).

57. The Farmer's Weekly, 7 January 1925. "Native Labour Supply"; The Farmer's Weekly, 11 February 1925. Correspondence from F. Schalk, Val.

58. The Farmer's Weekly, 7 January 1925. "Native Labour Supply." The Farmer's Weekly, 11 February 1925. Correspondence of F. Schalk, Val. A successful Kinross farmer charged that experiments with hiring white labour were shelved because "ninety-nine per cent. of these same poor whites are too lazy and afflicted with that infectious disease 'Natal fever'" (The Farmer's Weekly, 4 March 1925. Correspondence from H. Frenkel, Kinross).

59. The Farmer's Weekly, 7 January 1925. "Forcible Views."

60. The Farmer's Weekly, 28 January 1925. Correspondence of H. Frenkel, Kinross.

61. CAD, NTS 2027, 37/280. Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 2 September 1922.

62. The Farmer's Weekly, 7 January 1925. See also Morrell, Rural Transformations, pp. 218-219.

63. CAD, GNLB 413, 1950/13/240. H.G. Falwasser, Director of Native Labour, to Justice Krause, Johannesburg, 11 January 1929.

64. CAD, NTS 2027, 37/280. T. Theron and Company, Labour Contractors, Johannesburg, to the Honourable The Minister for Agriculture, 29 December 1921. "A percentage of the labour recruited for the Mines are rejected on arrival here [i.e., Johannesburg] as being physically unsuitable for the purpose," Theron acknowledged, "and it was in trying to find an outlet for

such rejects, and so save the heavy cost of bringing them up here, that I first came into touch with the farmers" (The Farmer's Weekly, 27 February 1929. Correspondence from Theron & Co., Southern Life Buildings, Johannesburg).

65. It is important to bear in mind the crucial distinction between the private labour companies and the farm recruiting organisations which were established to exploit loopholes in existing regulations regarding labour contracting. Farmers and their "bona fide servants" did not need to have recruiting licences and were not subject to Act 15 of 1911. CAD, NTS 2027, 37/280. Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 2 September 1922.

66. The Farmer's Weekly, 16 March 1927. C.R. Prance, "Segregation and the Land: Regulation of Natives Remaining on Farms."

67. TAD, Archive of the Chief Native Commissioner Northern Areas, Pietersburg (HKN) 63, 90/0. Notes of a meeting held in the Minister's Office, Pretoria, 13 June 1947.

68. CAD, NTS 2027, 37/280. T. Theron and Company, Labour Contractors, Johannesburg, to the Honourable The Minister for Agriculture, 29 December 1921.

69. CAD, NTS 2027, 37/280. T. Theron and Company, Labour Contractors, Johannesburg, to the Honourable The Minister for Agriculture, 29 December 1921.

70. The Farmer's Weekly, 27 February 1929. Correspondence from Theron & Co., Southern Life Buildings, Johannesburg.

71. CAD NTS 2137, 245/280/C. H.R. to Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 15 December 1939; and E.W. Lowe, Chief Native Commissioner, Northern Areas, Pietersburg, to Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 27 December 1939.

72. CAD, NTS 2027, 37/280. Sub-Native Commissioner, Sekukuniland, to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 21 April 1922.

73. CAD, NTS 2027, 37/280. T. Theron and Company, Labour Contractors, Johannesburg, to the Honourable The Minister for Agriculture, 29 December 1921.

74. CAD, NTS 2027, 37/280. Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 2 September 1922.

75. Union of South Africa, Parliament, House of Assembly, First Report of the Select Committee on Public Accounts, S.C.1-1914 (Cape Town: Government Printers, 1914), p. 154; The Farmer's Weekly, 29 January 1930. "Convict Labour Conditions"; Rand Daily Mail, 17 July 1947.

76. CAD, JUS 272, 1/399/13. Part 7. "Native Agricultural Labour: Bethal District," by B.H. Wooler, Magistrate, Bethal, 28 June 1947; and CAD, Department of Public Health (GES) 2316, 131/38. Y. Gale, Secretary for Health, Pretoria, to the Minister of Native Affairs, Pretoria, 24 October 1947.

77. Anthony Sampson, Drum: The Newspaper that Won the Heart of Africa (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), pp. 45-47; TAD, GNLB 307, 81/19/35. Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, to Government Secretary, Bechuanaland Protectorate, Mafeking, 10 May 1920. (Attached statements).

78. TAD, GNLB 307, 81/19/35. A. Stein, Manager, Longsloot Estate, Kinross, to Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 18 November 1920.

79. The most exquisite feature of the Bombardie homestead was the great grassy square. "It is as large as the central space in many a rural town," one correspondent blushed with obvious envy, "but instead of being surrounded by churches, banks, hotels and stores, there are the home and gardens and outbuildings backed by tall timber or mealies." The Star, 20 February 1928. "Miles of Mealie-Clothed Veld. Wonder Crops of Cologne and Bombardie."

80. TAD, Archives of the Bethal Magistrate (LBH) 70, N3/13/3. Part I. W.J.V. Visser, District Commandant, Heidelberg, to the Deputy Commissioner, South African Police (SAP), Transvaal Division, 11 December 1946; Office of the District Commandant, Heidelberg, to the Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Transvaal Division, 11 December 1946.

81. TAD, LBH 70, N3/13/3. Part I. Magistrate, Bethal District, to Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 25 July 1946.

82. "One ingenious individual [farmer] has evolved a method of his own to prevent desertion. His compound is not locked, neither has he guards but his labourers are deprived of their own clothes and belongings, which are locked up during the terms of their contract while the employer issued them with a shirt and a pair of shorts on which the employer's name is painted in large letters, and the clothing marked in small letters 'deserter'. It is certainly a very effective method!!" CAD, Department of Health (GES) 2316, 131/38. D.L. Smit, Secretary for Native Affairs, Cape Town, to Edward Thornton, Secretary for Public Health, 12 February 1937. Enclosure: "Labour Conditions on Farms in Bethal and Witbank Districts," by J.M.S. Brink, 29 January 1937, p. 11. [Hereafter cited as Native Affairs Department [Brink] Report].

83. TAD, LBH 70, N3/13/3. Part I. Inspector, District Commandant, Heidelberg, to the Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Transvaal Division, 18 December 1946; Inspector, District Commandant, Middelburg, to Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Transvaal Division, 3 January 1947; Secretary for Health, Johannesburg, to the Building Controller, Johannesburg, 20 January 1947.

84. Eugene Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 317.

85. TAD, LBH 70, N3/13/4 [Part 1]. Station Commander S.A. Police, Leslie, to Public Prosecutor, Bethal, 24 July 1944; CAD, GES 2316, 131/38. D.L. Smit, Department of Native Affairs, Pretoria, to Dr. P. Allan, Secretary for Public Health, Pretoria, 7 September 1943. Enclosure: Inspection of Labour Conditions on Certain Farms in the Bethal District, by J.C. Yeats, Native Commissioner, Rustenburg, 23 August 1943 (Hereafter cited as Yeats Report, 1943); and Native Affairs Department [Brink] Report.

86. Middelburg Observer, 4 [30?] January 1929. [Cited in Morrell, Rural Transformations, p. 194.]

87. Native Affairs Department [Brink] Report, p. 16.

88. The Farmer's Weekly, "Labour in the Maize Lands"; and Native Affairs Department [Brink] Report, pp. 6-7.

89. Native Affairs Department [Brink] Report, pp. 6-7, 16.

90. Native Affairs Department [Brink] Report, p. 10, 6-7.

91. Native Affairs Department [Brink] Report, p. 8; Star, 11 July 1947; Sunday Times, 20 July 1947; TAD, GNLB 119, 1953/13/154. Magistrate, Bethal, to Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 20 August 1925.

92. CAD, GNLB 413, Part 1950/13/240. H.G. Falwasser, Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, to J.J. Goldstein, Bethal, 2 November 1925; CAD, JUS 441, 3/10/28 [Annexure]. Preparatory Examination in the Case of Samuel Gafenowitz, 30 January 1928.

93. Pino Arlacchi, Mafia, Peasants and Great Estates: Society in Traditional Calababria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 85. On the other side of the coin, the reigning despotism on the farms ensured that workers were kept in a constant state of dependence and insecurity. Farmers played an active role in exploiting whatever variations in ethnic/cultural background could be found in order to foster tensions and otherwise create conflicts amongst those whom they employed. Housing workers along 'tribal' lines and selecting baasboys from amongst certain ethnic groups, for example, also had a hand in displacing worker protest into expressions of ethnic identity and solidarity. Yet class relations never entirely displace other criteria and forms of differentiation or hierarchy (e.g., ethnicity, gender, age) in the constitution of social identities and in encouraging collective action. It would therefore be wrong to interpret ethnic loyalties and oppositions as if they signalled atavistic holdovers pure and simple without acknowledging their place as survival mechanisms for African migrants working in an alien environment at a considerable distance from home.

94. Erik Olin Wright, Class, Crisis, and the State (London: NLB, 1978), pp. 61-64.

95. "I went to the highveld, and have managed large estates where as many as 130 to 150 natives were employed, where mealies, potatoes, and teff are produced on a very large scale, I myself having produced over 23,000 bags of produce and 200 tons of teff in one season. And, after all this hard work and being given a life's experience for the last thirteen years, I am where I was at the beginning, except that I am much older, and I have no prospects of ever being anything better than a white slave." Correspondence of "Sorry South Africa," The Farmer's Weekly, 18 March 1925. See also "Farm Assistants," the Farmer's Weekly, 8 April 1925. As a general rule, African foremen, or baasboys, directed field labour and possessed supervisory as well as police authority over field hands. "If [the baasboy] hated or disliked you," one African remembered, "he would push you, he would make himself a white man. If you fought him, the Baas would thrash you and ask you why you fought his Baasboy" [Oral History Project, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand. Evidence of J. Nkadimeng, p. 16. Cited in Morrell, Rural Transformations, p. 193.]

96. TAD, GNLB 389, 33/94. C.P. Jacobs, South African Police (SAP), Ooglies, to the District Commandant, SAP, Middelburg, 22 September 1933; CAD, NTS 7661, 23/332(1), J.H. Irvine, District Commandant, Ermelo, to Deputy Commissioner, SAP, Pretoria, 12 December 1917; CAD, Department of Justice (JUS) 441, 3/10/28 (Sub). Statement of S. Gafenowitz, Mizpah Estate, Bethal, 4 January 1928.

97. James Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

98. TAD, HKN 63, 90/0. Minutes of Meeting held at Cape Town, 10 February 1948. [Statement of Rossouw]. TAD, GNLB 119, 1933/13/54. Magistrate, Witbank, to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 17 August 1925.

99. Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 46, 293.

100. Sampson, Drum, pp. 37-54; Ballinger Papers, A410, C2.9. Muriel Horrell, South African Institute of Race Relations, to William Ballinger, Cape Town, 12 May 1959; Joel Carlson, No Neutral Ground (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1973), pp. 46-66; TAD, LBH 70, N3/13/4 [Part 1]. Agent for High Commission Territories, Johannesburg, to the Native Commissioner, Bethal, 15 August 1945.

101. TAD, GNLB 389, 33/94. Statement of S.D. Menego, 21 September 1933.

102. TAD, LBH, 70 N3/13/4 [Part I]. Public Prosecutor, Bethal, to the South African Police, Trichardt, 25 July 1944.

103. Native Affairs Department [Brink] Report, p. 16.

104. Native Affairs Department [Brink] Report, p. 16; TAD, LBH 70, N3/13/4 [Part 1]. E. Warren, Northern Rhodesia Labour Officer, Johannesburg, to the Magistrate/Native Commissioner, Bethal, 25 July 1945. Enclosure: Letter from Minyoni, et. al., Kinross, 5 June 1945.

105. TAD, LBH 70, N3/13/4 [Part 1]. C.D. Morgan, Native Commissioner, Bethal, to Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 10 November 1945. Enclosure: letter from James Bowen, Kinross [n.d.]; E. Warren, Nyasaland government Representative and Northern Rhodesia Labour Officer, Johannesburg, to the Magistrate/Native Commissioner, Bethal, 13 February 1947.