

Child and Youth Labour in Eastern Cape Agriculture

Wool farming and changing labour relations, c. 1900–1960

Fredrik Lilja

Abstract

This article deals with child and youth labour in the Eastern Cape region in South Africa during the first half of the 20th century. The region was dominated by wool farming and a great deal of the child labour was in the form of shepherding. As farming activities became more mechanized and capitalized during the first decades of the century, the labour organization changed from various tenancy relations to cash wage labour, while at the same time the demand on shepherds decreased. These developments seem to have been one cause for permanent migration from the farms, which farmers tried to stop by building schools for the children of labourers on the farms. A central factor in this process was the expansion of capital in the Cape, where the British textile industry was an important actor.

Introduction

Child and youth labour¹ has been an intricate part of life in southern Africa since before the days of colonization. As in all other parts of the world children have been taking part in agriculture, helping their parents. Along with the spread of capitalism to southern Africa through colonization, black and coloured children also became part of the colonial labour force, working on the farms of white settlers. The geographical expansion of the Cape Colony, from Cape Town to the interior, was simultaneously an ex-

¹ Children and youths refer to those between ten and nineteen years old.

pansion of capital. In this way children in peripheral areas of the world-economy became involved in the capitalist production process. Children working on farms in the Cape were therefore not only working for the white farmers, but also for capitalists in core countries of the world-economy. Through commodity chains making their way from the Cape to, for example, Great Britain, the children were connected to both capital and labour in that part of the world. The Cape had close ties to colonial Great Britain, and contributed to the British textile industry. Already in the 1820s Merino sheep were imported to the colony from Britain and wool soon became the most important export product.² Farmers in the Cape have relied on demand from Britain and products like wool were definitely colonial; in 1910 the entire wool clip was exported and 51 per cent went to Britain.³ The process of colonization and imperialism has therefore had a vast impact on the forms, under which children and youths have been taking part in the labour process.

Research about child labour in southern Africa has exclusively focused on agriculture, simply because that is where it has been prevalent. Various explanations – for example poverty, obligations towards parents and coercion – have been given as to why children work. A common feature in child labour in the region, shown by for instance William Beinart (1991) and Beverly Grier (2006), is that family relations were used by settler farmers who wanted access to the labour of children.⁴ There have, however, not been any attempts to contextualize child labour within the framework of an expanding capitalism in the region, which is necessary in order to explain it. As Lars Olsson (1980) has shown in the case of Swedish industrial child labour, the development of productive forces and increased capitalization fundamentally affected child labour practices, and ultimately caused its demise.⁵

The *purpose* of this article is to outline the role of children in commercial farming in the Eastern Cape⁶ region between c. 1900–1960, and to contextualize their labour within the framework of an expanding capitalism in southern Africa. This involves both finding out the number of child labourers, their occupations and how they were affected by changes in farming and society. Since the eastern parts of the Cape have been domi-

² Hanekom 1960:24–33.

³ Beinart 2001:42, *Annual Statement on Trade and Shipping 1910*.

⁴ Beinart 1991, Grier 2006.

⁵ Olsson 1980.

⁶ The area referred to is roughly what is now the Eastern and Northern Cape.

nated by wool farming, this article will focus especially on that sector of the agricultural economy.

Farming and labour in the Cape

Access to labour has been a central issue for farmers since the early colonial period. In the late 19th century there was a fairly successful black peasantry, who sometimes competed with white farmers, and the Cape parliament passed laws designed to force black people into labour on white farms. The 1894 *Glen Grey Act*, formed by Cecil Rhodes, was, for example, an attempt to proletarianize black people by reducing their possibilities to accumulate land.⁷ Despite government aid the white farmers still had difficulties hiring labourers. Many were undercapitalized and therefore took on tenants instead. There were two major forms of tenancy: cash rent and labour tenancy. The labour tenants were given access to a piece of the farm where they could grow crops and graze cattle and sheep in exchange for the labour of the family. Children were often an important part of such relations and their labour was highly valued.⁸ The cash rent tenants, who were also called squatters, did not necessarily work for the white landlord but it was not unusual either.⁹

Tenancy was, however, not welcomed by the state, as it did not utilize the labour power of black people efficiently enough. Shortly after the creation of the *Union of South Africa* in 1910, legislation was passed in order to weaken tenant relationships. The 1913 *Natives Land Act* stipulated that tenants were to give at least 90 days of labour to the white farmer during a year and all tenancy contracts that did not entail a transfer of labour were outlawed.¹⁰ Since the tenancy system relied on the father's access to labour it is quite possible that traditional African family structures, which enabled a man to have several wives, were reinforced. A large family, with more than one wife and many children, was an advantage for a black tenant. The more women and children he had to offer the farmer, the more he could work on his own piece of land.¹¹

⁷ Bundy 1979:135–137.

⁸ Beinart 2001:55–56.

⁹ Bundy 1979:116.

¹⁰ Beinart 2001:56–57.

¹¹ Beinart 2001:59.

The Natives Land Act also divided the land into white and black areas – black people were given seven per cent – and members of each group could only purchase land in the area designated for them. As their most important means of production, the land, was taken from them, they were forced to become labourers or tenants on the farms of whites. According to a state enquiry into the status of farm labour in the late 1930s, all forms of tenancy had practically vanished from the Cape by then,¹² but this is highly doubtful. It continued to exist for another couple of decades, although it was being replaced by cash wage labour.¹³

Children in agriculture

The only source on the number of child and youth labourers in the Cape during this period is the 1946 census. The census does not state figures according to age and occupation by province, only on the national level, but estimates can be made. According to it there were around 67,000 black children and youths between ten and nineteen years old registered as agricultural labourers.¹⁴ The work performed by them varied depending on both the sort of production they were involved in and the nature of the work operations in that production. Due to the lack of strength of children compared to adults they did not perform the tasks that required the most physical strength. Nor were they involved in work operations that required some form of skill since it took years of experience to acquire that. Examples of work operations where children were involved were wheat harvesting and fruit picking. The children were particularly in demand during harvest time in those sectors, often accompanying their mothers.¹⁵

The largest group involved in labour was the peasants. This category included both tenants and free peasants and in 1946 there were more than 190,000 peasants in the ages ten to nineteen in the Cape. It is likely that these children and youths worked both for their parents and for white farmers.

¹² Native Farm Labour Commission, 1939. Cash wage labourers were often paid with food rations and grazing rights, which complicates the terminology. Cash wage labourer is, however, used here in order to differentiate between semi-feudal and capitalist labour relations.

¹³ See for example Davies 1990:13.

¹⁴ *Population Census 1946*.

¹⁵ Davies 1990:8–9.

One task that seemed to be well suited for children was herding. In pre-colonial southern Africa it was the task of children, particularly boys, to tend to sheep and cattle. This practice was incorporated into capitalist agriculture and during the first decades of the 20th century it was reported that children of tenants and labourers herded large flocks of perhaps 1,000 sheep for white farmers.¹⁶ This usually started quite early with young boys at the age of six or seven accompanying older brothers as shepherds and as they grew older they assumed more and more responsibility in this line of work.¹⁷ From the 1946 census we know that there were 19,934 male, black shepherds in the Cape; more than 14,000 of them were between ten and fourteen years old and around 4,000 between fifteen and nineteen. We can therefore conclude that young boys were dominating this field of labour. Since statistics regarding black people from this period are always uncertain we should assume that the actual number of young people involved in labour was even higher.

While herding was the task for boys, the household seems to have been the place of work for girls. There are no available data on the number of girls working as domestics but there were roughly 50 times more female than male domestics.¹⁸ Accounts of girls working for the farmer, or rather the farmer's wife, in the household indicate that it was not the youngest girls that were hired as domestic servants, since the work required various skills.¹⁹ Besides the hardships involved in the work itself a lot of these girls were also exposed to sexual abuse both by farmers and male farm labourers.²⁰ Girls were, however, not only employed as domestics but also as general farm labourers. In 1946 there were 41,680 female farm labourers compared to 121,933 male ones of all ages in the Cape,²¹ but these figures are most likely misleading. Women and girls were for example often used as seasonal labourers at harvest times and even though they may have been employed as domestics, the work they performed was almost certainly much more varied.²²

The switch from tenancy to cash wage labour implied a change in the relationship between the farmer and the farm labourer's child (or the farm

¹⁶ McKee 1913:332.

¹⁷ Hunter 1936:159.

¹⁸ *Agricultural Census 1956–57*.

¹⁹ van Onselen 1997:300; see also Davies 1990:25–26, who tells the story about Anna who started working as a 12-year-old looking after the farmer's children.

²⁰ Davies 1990:29.

²¹ *Population Census 1946*.

²² Davies 1990:24–25.

labourer's family). When it was no longer understood that children worked as a part of the father's labour power, children would have to be hired instead. In order to do this, the farmer usually went through the father, his employee, and made an agreement over the specifics of the child's labour contract.²³ The hiring of children was also, more or less, facilitated by the law. In the period investigated the law only stipulated that farmers were not allowed to hire blacks under the age of 16 without guardian's consent if the child was to be working on any other farm than that of his/her guardian.²⁴ This meant that children of employees on the farm could be hired even without guardian's consent.

The implementation of cash wages also meant that fathers lost some of their control over their family's labour. Children of labour tenants were still required to complete their contracts according to the *Masters' and Servants' Act* and the *Native Service Contract Act* but as they were not part of the fathers' labour power they were freed from bonds that were rooted in a pre-colonial society and there are examples of how children ran away from farms to towns or to the mines.²⁵ Especially the older children migrated to the mines, where they could earn more money than in farming. The lack of control over youths became a problem for farmers in the 1930s,²⁶ probably both because it became harder for them to gain access to their labour and because it disrupted the reproduction of the labour force.

Recruitment of children

Farmers' demand for children was often seasonal and they usually had access to the children of labourers or tenants on the farm, but they were in no way passive regarding recruitment. Instead of hiring labourers some farmers tried to register their farms as a *private native location*, which meant that they could house black families as tenants. In 1944 R. V. Staples, a farmer in Barkley West, was allowed to take on two male and two female adults along with seven children even though he had ten labourers and as many as 34 children living on the farm.²⁷ It has not been possible to de-

²³ Both cash wage and rations were a part of children's remuneration. Department of Native Affairs. 2/SPT 41. (CA).

²⁴ Farm Labour Project 1982.

²⁵ Beinart 2001:59.

²⁶ Native Farm Labour Commission, 1939:21.

²⁷ Department of Native Affairs. 1/BKW 7/19. (CA).

termine how widespread this practice was, but not everyone who applied for a location was granted one. For example, a farmer in Port Elizabeth, Dr Froelich, was not considered to have “enough work for two white men and nine native families” and was told to “engage a few extra labourers, rather than to keep all these natives on his farm without work for the greater part of the year”.²⁸ Despite the government attempts to implement cash wages, the tenancy arrangements continued, which can only be explained by its popularity among both white farmers and black tenants; tenants were given access to land, and farmers were given access to cheap labour.

Apprenticeship was another way for farmers to gain access to child labour. In short, those eligible for apprenticeship were children under the age of sixteen who were destitute, wanderers without home and/or parents or guardians and without visible means of subsistence.²⁹ An apprentice was normally in the service of the farmer until he or she was eighteen years old which meant that many children were apprentices for as many as ten years. Records show that it was not unusual for children aged eight or nine to be apprenticed. For example Piet Koopman was apprenticed in 1935 by Samuel Jacobus van Schalkwyk, a sheep farmer in the district of Fraserburg, at age seven. Piet was apprenticed for ten years and according to the contract the master, Mr. van Schalkwyk, was expected to “teach and instruct [...] the Apprentice, in the occupation of farming operations in the best manner that he can [...]”.³⁰ The first three years Piet would not be paid a cash wage. He would, however, receive clothes, food, medicines and shelter during the entire contract period.³¹ Judging by the name Piet was either white or coloured, but children from all race groups could be taken in as apprentices and all were probably expected to work. The white apprentices were taught skills, which was not the case with children from other race groups, but it is unlikely that that they turned into farmers themselves. Instead they probably became part of the white rural working class, perhaps joining the *bywoners*, the white tenants, who were often considered to be at the heart of the “poor white problem”.³²

²⁸ Letter from the District Commandant, Port Elizabeth, to the Magistrate, Port Elizabeth, 29/4/41. Department of Native Affairs. 4/PEZ 4/1/88. (CA).

²⁹ Children’s Protection Act, 1913 (No. 25 of 1913). *Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1911–1961*.

³⁰ Form of Contract of Apprenticeship, 1/FBG 9/1/2/1. (CA).

³¹ Form of Contract of Apprenticeship, 1/FBG 9/1/2/1. (CA).

³² Grosskopf 1932:17–24.

In addition to this there were also labour agents recruiting what they called under-aged or juvenile natives. In order to do this the agents needed a special certificate and guardian's consent. Juveniles were those under the "apparent" age of eighteen but not younger than the "apparent" age of sixteen,³³ which in reality meant that also those under sixteen were recruited. Any farmer who wanted to recruit labourers for himself could do so without a license, but according to the *Labour Regulation Act* (No. 15 of 1911) a labour agent license was required should he want to recruit for others. The activity required resources, though, since it implied both locating and transporting labourers. As most farmers could not afford to hire a full-time recruiter, companies undertaking large-scale recruiting were formed.³⁴ Labour agents were only licensed to recruit under-aged or juvenile labourers for agriculture but they were recruited for employment in other sectors as well, particularly mining.³⁵

The wool industry – mechanization and capitalization

The increased demand on agricultural products brought on by the First World War and the development of the railway system resulted in more commercialized farming and a more frequent use of machinery from the 1920s onwards.³⁶ The wool sector was very much a part of the capitalization and mechanization of agriculture; already before the 1920s electric shearing machines and mechanical wool presses were implemented by the wealthier farmers. More important, however, was fencing. Fencing was not uncommon in the early 20th century but its geographical spread was limited. The area where fences were mostly widespread by the turn of the century was the one containing the large wool producers in the Cape, such as Graaff-Reinet, Cradock, Bedford and Somerset East.³⁷ This area has been the centre of the wool industry since the outset in the 1820s and it is no surprise that fencing started in that region, but it probably spread to other areas rather quickly. In the first decades of the century wool experts

³³ Labour agent license. Department of Native Affairs. 1/ALC 10/14. (CA).

³⁴ Native Farm Labour Commission 1939:65, 66.

³⁵ For example 41 in July 1952, 27 in September 1956 in the district of Kuruman. Department of Native Affairs. 2/KMN 34. (CA).

³⁶ Africa 1976:2–4.

³⁷ van Sittert 2002.

promoted the use of fences and paddocks for the sheep³⁸ and it is likely that at least the wealthier farmers followed their advice. It was prestigious to have fenced farms and judging from sales ads we can conclude that it was widespread in the 1940s.³⁹ Fencing was expensive, though, and the farmers sought to influence the government already in the early 20th century, for instance through an enclosure movement, and in 1912 legislation that facilitated joint purchases of fencing material was passed.⁴⁰ In the 1930s the Cape farmers sought new subsidies. It is unclear if the government agreed to this, initially the farmers were denied,⁴¹ but it is possible that subsidies were paid in the 1940s.

The implementation of fences contributed to increased production of wool but in the 1930s depression and droughts caused problems for wool farmers in the Cape.⁴² The droughts may not have been as big a problem in some of the Karroo areas since this was the region with the highest number of boreholes for water in the Cape. In the early 20th century the lack of proper water supply was considered one of the main problems for the wool industry.⁴³ The use of mechanical water supply was in that regard a vital part of the success of the industry in the early 20th century but the real increase took place in the following decades; the number of boreholes in the Cape trebled to 22, 083 between 1911 and 1926. In 1924 Land Bank Loans became available for water development and the number of boreholes increased to 50, 655 in 1946.⁴⁴

During the late 1930s the wool farmers tried to convince the government to create a greater demand for South African wool, both at home and abroad. Especially the US was one market, which the farmers wanted to expand on and the National Wool Growers' Association (NWGA) wanted the government to facilitate trade with the Americans. Although the US had become a major buyer of South African wool during the 1940s Britain was still the most important export market.

³⁸ Mallinson 1915, McKee 1913.

³⁹ *Farmers' Weekly* 1917, 1937, 1947.

⁴⁰ van Sittert 2002, Act No. 17 of 1912. *Unie van Suid-Afrika. 1912.*

⁴¹ Replies by the Secretary for Agriculture and Forestry to resolutions from the Cape Province Branch of the National Woolgrowers' Association, 1938–1939. Department of Agriculture and Forestry. LDB 4812 Z 608/1F. (NA).

⁴² Beinart 2001:46.

⁴³ Mallinson 1915:61, 94.

⁴⁴ Beinart 2003:192, 261.

Table 1. Top three buyers of South African wool. Figures indicate percentage of the total exports.

1910	1920	1939	1950
Great Britain 51%	Great Britain 35%	Germany 23%	Great Britain 30%
Germany 39%	Japan 27%	France 19%	France 19%
Belgium 7%	Belgium 14%	Great Britain 19%	Germany 14%

Source: Annual Statement on Trade and Shipping, 1910, 1920, 1939, 1950.

The importance of the British Empire and its textile industry for the farmers in the Cape was definitely larger in the beginning of the century, but except for 1939 the British were the largest buyers. From the late 1930s the NWGA worked closely together with representatives of the British textile industry and wool organizations in Australia and New Zealand to enhance both the quality and the sale of wool. During the Second World War the British government even signed a contract with South Africa to buy all its wool at fixed prices, which was also done with Australia and New Zealand, in order to secure wool supplies. After 1950 the British even seem to have increased their influence in the South African wool industry; in 1959 the British imported twice as much as the second importer, the US.⁴⁵

Fewer shepherds but more farm labourers

The mechanization of South African agriculture in general did not result in a lowered demand on manual labour. Instead there seemed to be an increase in manual farm labour which may have been related to a rising overall demand for labour as farm production increased.⁴⁶ This did, however, not apply to the wool industry, which is visualized in table 2.

Table 2. Shepherds, farm labourers and peasants in the Union of South Africa, ages 10–19. Male and female.

Year	Shepherds/herders	Farm labourers	Peasants
1936	95,091	141,183	846,000
1946	50,607	405,367	644,725

Source: Population Censuses 1936 and 1946.

⁴⁵ Hanekom 1960:131.

⁴⁶ Africa 1976:9.

It has, unfortunately, only been possible to compare statistics on the national level, but it is still a good indication of the changes in farm labour. One result of the mechanization of wool farming was that the demand on shepherds decreased. As fences kept the herds in place, and water-pumping brought water to the sheep, shepherds were no longer required to the same extent, and almost half of them seem to have disappeared between 1936 and 1946. The large decrease seems revolutionary, and some reservations must be made regarding both the accuracy and the method of enumeration, but considering the changes in the wool industry in the previous decades it is not unlikely either. As the practice of fencing had begun in the late 19th century the demand for shepherds had decreased already in the first decades of the 20th century.⁴⁷ In 1937 a witness to the Commission of Enquiry into Coloured People stated that in the southern Cape there was “less work than in the past. Before, say thirty years ago, they worked the whole year as shepherds, but with fencing most have had to move to villages. Now they work for four months a year for farmers”.⁴⁸ It seems like labour demands in wool farming became more seasonal, which probably made a large part of the child labour force unemployed, at least for a part of the year. Fencing also seems to have been an effective way to turn tenants into labourers, as a shared use of a farm became much harder with fences.⁴⁹ Even though it has been impossible to establish the decrease of shepherds in the Cape specifically there is no reason to assume that developments there were different than in other parts of the country. Due to the advancements in wool farming made in the Cape it is likely that the decrease of shepherds there was equivalent to that of the rest of the country, if not larger.

The developments of child labour in wool farming can be related to what happened in industrial child labour in Sweden during the 19th century. As Lars Olsson (1980) has shown the children were replaced by machines as soon as that proved to be more productive. In that case the work operations performed by children were the easiest ones to mechanize, and therefore also the first ones. The same logics applied to fencing in wool farming. The implementation of fences increased production, and it also

⁴⁷ Bundy 1979:116.

⁴⁸ Cited in Beinart 2003:232.

⁴⁹ The dispossession of black people through fencing is described in the *Report of the Natives Land Commission, 1916*.

spared the sheep of long treks – walks – to and from pastures, which improved the quality of wool.⁵⁰

The other striking feature in table 2 is the large increase of farm labourers and large decrease of peasants. The apparent transformation of peasants to labourers corresponds to the provisions of the 1936 Natives Land Act, which reinforced restrictions on black people's possibilities of owning land. The peasant children, or rather their parents, were dispossessed as a result of the act and turned into labourers. Some of the shepherds may have been transformed into farm labourers, or may have been registered as labourers even though they were still shepherds. It is, however, more likely that the large increase in labourers was a result of increased demand on labour in other sectors than the wool industry. For example fruit and wheat production, which were important sectors in the Cape, were largely relying on children during harvest time even in the 1980s.⁵¹ Mechanization in those sectors did not replace children, both because it was cheap to hire children and because it seems to have been difficult to mechanize for instance fruit picking.

Also the adult labour force was affected by the mechanization and capitalization. Instead of being tenants with farming activities of their own they turned into labourers. Since wages in agriculture were lower than in mining or urban industries many of the black labourers started to migrate. Unlike the migrants to the mines, who were usually male and returned to the farms, the town migrants were often entire families who tended to stay there. The process of permanent migration, or flight, from the farms, which had characterized the countryside during the 1930s, eventually became too dire for farmers. They therefore turned to the state in order to solve the problem.

Farm schools to retain labour

In rural South Africa in the 1940s there were few opportunities for black people to go to school and one way for farmers to keep their labourers on the farms was to provide education for their children. Many black farm labourers moved to urban areas in search of better work in urban industries

⁵⁰ Beinart 2003:222.

⁵¹ Davies 1990:8–9.

and at the same time education for their children.⁵² However, since farmers had to pay for the school and the teachers it was a costly affair and a more lasting solution was demanded. The government therefore decided in 1945 that farmers could apply for grants to start so called *Native Schools on European Farms*. The schools were only meant for children of *bona fide* black agricultural labourers, a group separated from tenants, and were thus a means for the state to promote cash wage labour. The farmer, who became the manager and hired the teacher, would have to erect the building but teachers and also maintenance were paid by the state.

As managers, farmers had almost unlimited authorities regarding the running of the school and could close it down at wish.⁵³ They could also close it during certain periods when extra labour was required and the children were then more or less ordered to go out into the fields to help with the harvest, picking of grapes or fruits, or any other farm duty that was required.⁵⁴ In that respect the farm schools were not different from schools in Europe that had holidays during the busy seasons of the agricultural year.⁵⁵ Even though they were labour reserves the most important purpose of the schools was to secure future labour for farmers. The educational level in the schools was extremely low and directed towards creating farm labourers. Most pupils did not attend school for more than a couple of years and once they had dropped out they had few alternatives besides staying on the farm.⁵⁶

The first of these farm schools started in 1946 and their number seems to have grown rapidly, three years later there were more than 1,000 farm schools in the country.⁵⁷ In the Cape region farmers were eager to apply for a school. For instance W. H. J. van Rensburg at the farm Kleinplaas in Cradock who opened a privately owned farm school in 1945 wanted a school on his other farm, Skurweberg, in 1946, which he got.⁵⁸ Others who received grants in 1946 were for example E. K. Trollip on the farm Dagaboer, V. D. Shone on the farm Thorneycroft, both residing in Bedford, and W. S. Pringle on the farm Grenoble.⁵⁹ Everyone who applied for a

⁵² Gaganakis & Crewe 1987:7–8.

⁵³ Gaganakis & Crewe 1987:13, 4–5. The only obligation for the farmers was to keep the school open for five years.

⁵⁴ Davies 1990:19–20.

⁵⁵ Rahikainen 2004.

⁵⁶ Gaganakis & Crewe 1987:20, Davies 1990:20.

⁵⁷ Plaut 1976:4.

⁵⁸ Department of Education. BEK 17 CE 340. (CA).

⁵⁹ Department of Education. PAE 59A. (CA).

farm school did not receive grants, though. H. P. Shone in Hartfell, Somerset East, applied for a school for about 40–50 children in 1948 but was denied due to lack of funds. Trying to apply the following year Shone was eager to find out how the request was handled “as we are all losing our natives round here: They are going to the towns to send their children to school and things are desperate”. Instead of waiting for approval from the state he started a private farm school in 1949. The same year he was worried about the school’s future and reported that he could not afford it much longer without state funding.⁶⁰ Eventually Shone did, however, receive grants for his farm school.⁶¹ The episode illustrates quite clearly the opinions of farmers regarding labour supply during this period. The labour force was leaving the rural areas and farmers believed they had to prevent it.

Similar schools were founded in colonial Zimbabwe in the late 1920s in order to attract labour power in the form of families. In some places the children were recruited to tea farms to work while at the same time getting access to education; an arrangement known as “earn while you learn”.⁶² Both in Zimbabwe and South Africa the farm schools were an important means to gain access to child labour, and the parents. It is, however, not sufficient to characterize the farm schools as instruments to attract labour and labour reservoirs, primarily because in the Cape they seem to have been the most popular in places where the demand on child labour had decreased in the 1940s.

During the first years after the introduction the majority of the farm schools were situated in the eastern parts of the Cape. The districts with the largest number of schools were Cradock with 12, Alexandria and Fort Beaufort with 11 and Bedford with 10 schools.⁶³ The same pattern can be seen in 1959; all of the districts with most farm schools were situated in the Eastern Cape and the leading wool districts like Cradock, Somerset East, Tarkastad and Bedford were among the largest ones.⁶⁴ The eastern parts of the Cape were more densely populated by black people than the western parts were, which may have been one explanation for the high incidence of schools there. It is not a satisfactory explanation, though, since

⁶⁰ Letters from H. P. Shone to A Vlok. Department of Education. EM 171/3. (CA).

⁶¹ *Bantu Education Bulletin*, 1957.

⁶² Grier 2006:174–185.

⁶³ Department of Education. PAE 59A. (CA). It was not possible to conclude what years these statistics were from but probably the early 1950s, and definitely after 1949.

⁶⁴ *Bantu Education Bulletin*, 1959.

black people lived all over the Cape, and sometimes in rather large numbers. In a couple of cases it has been possible to establish what sort of farms the schools were situated on. For instance S. M. Hart's Happy Valley in Cathcart, E. K. Trollip's Mount Prospect in Bedford and J. J. Moolman's Eldorado in Cradock were sheep farms. Other farms, like the abovementioned H. P. Shone's Hartfell in Somerset East, W. H. J van Rensburg's Kleinplaas and Schoeman's Honey Grove, both in Cradock, bred cattle.⁶⁵ We cannot determine with any certainty that there was a connection between sheep and cattle farming and farm schools, but it is interesting to note that the schools were more popular in a specific and very limited geographical area, which corresponds to the one where fencing had started early on. The relationship between these factors can thus not be overlooked.

Considering that agricultural labourers increased between 1936 and 1946 while the number of shepherds decreased, it is possible that the schools were implemented as a response to a changed labour organization in wool farming, which included decreasing levels of child labour. The children were less in demand on the sheep farms, and their parents had become seasonal labourers. It is therefore likely that the schools were an instrument both for keeping adults on the farm and for social control of children.

When the Nationalist government implemented the *Bantu Education Act* in 1953 further state funding was directed towards farm schools. After this the schools grew quite rapidly in number but far from all black children had access to education. Those who did were subjected to a curricula focused on producing a literate (or rather semi-literate), semi-skilled labour force for farmers.⁶⁶ Susan Levine (2006) has argued that Bantu Education was an important tool in upholding the structural inequality that has underpinned child labour in South Africa.⁶⁷ In order to explain the relation between child labour and Bantu Education we must, however, also consider factors such as capitalization and mechanization of agriculture. The Bantu Education Act in general was a response to a growing demand on semi-skilled labourers in industry and agriculture, which is an indication that production in agriculture had changed the previous decades.⁶⁸ In some

⁶⁵ *Farmers' Encyclopedia*.

⁶⁶ Plaut 1976:4, Gaganakis & Crewe 1987:1, 32.

⁶⁷ Levine 2006:19–20.

⁶⁸ Levine 2006:19–20.

cases, such as wool farming, the children were less in demand while they were still required in other sectors.

Conclusions

It is clear that child labour was widespread in South African agriculture during the first half of the 20th century. Children were a cheap source of labour, and farmers usually gained access to them through parents. However, the changes in agricultural production, which took place primarily after 1920, altered labour relations in several ways. Firstly it replaced various tenancy relations with cash wage labour, which meant that children no longer had obligations to work for farmers. Secondly, the mechanization seemed to create a larger demand for manual labour, including that of children, in general, but reduced the demand for shepherds. As much of the child labour in the Eastern Cape region was in the form of herding, it seems as if those children became unemployed. Thirdly, the new labour relations meant that black farm labourers no longer had obligations to stay on the farms and since higher wages were paid in urban industries and in mining, many of them left. One way for farmers to hold on to their labour force was to provide education for the children. It seems like the eastern Cape wool farmers were especially interested in this solution and we can assume that it was related to changed labour relations, where adult farm labourers were in demand on a seasonal basis, and the children to a large extent unemployed.

The expansion of capital was a central feature of the changed labour relations in the Cape during the first half of the 20th century. As Rosa Luxemburg points out, capitalism requires other modes of production for supply of raw material, but at the same time consumes them.⁶⁹ Even though one can argue that capitalism cannot be confined within nation states, it is evident that the expansion consumed semi-feudal labour relations such as tenancy. Wool was an important commodity for capital in the core of the world-economy and increased extraction of it from the periphery in the Cape resulted in increasing capitalization and mechanization of wool farming. The expansion of capital consequently altered labour relations and cash wage labour came to dominate. The development and implementation

⁶⁹ Luxemburg 2003:349.

of productive forces, such as fences, simultaneously reduced the demand for children in that industry.

Sources

Unpublished sources

Western Cape Provincial Archives, Cape Town (CA)

Department of Native Affairs:

Box 2/SPT 41

1/BKW 7/19

1/ALC 10/14

2/KMN 34

4/PEZ 4/1/88

1/FBG 9/1/2/1

Department of Education:

Box PAE 59/A

BEK 17 CE 340

National Archives, Pretoria (NA)

Department of Agriculture and Forestry:

Box LDB 4812 Z 608/1F

Published sources

South Africa Bureau of Census and Statistics:

Sixth Census of the Population of the Union of South Africa, Enumerated 5th May, 1936. Volume IX. Natives (Bantu) and Other Non-European Races. Pretoria 1942.

Population Census 1946. Volume V. Occupations and Industries of the European, Asiatic, Coloured and Native Population. Pretoria 1955.

Report on Agricultural and Pastoral Production and Sugarcane Plantations, 1956–57, No. 31. Pretoria.

Department of Customs & Excise:

Annual Statement of the Trade and Shipping of the Union of South Africa. 1910, 1920, 1939, 1950. Pretoria.

Department of Native Affairs:
Bantu Education Bulletin, 1957, 1959. Pretoria.

Farm Labour Project. 1982. *Submission to Manpower Commission on Farm Labour*.

Native Farm Labour Commission. 1939. *Report of the Native Farm Labour Commission, 1937–1939*. Pretoria.

Report of the Natives Land Commission. Volume II. Appendix IX. Minutes of the evidence. Cape Town 1916.

Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1911–1961.

Wette van die Unie van Suid-Afrika, 1912.

Farmers' Weekly 1917, 1937, 1947.

Literature

- Africa, R. 1976. Mechanization in South African agriculture. In: *SALDRU Farm Labour Conference*. Cape Town.
- Beinart, W. 1991. Transkeian migrant workers and youth labour on the Natal sugar estates, 1918–1948. *Journal of African History* 32(1).
- Beinart, W. 2001 *Twentieth-Century South Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beinart, W. 2003. *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa. Settlers, Livestock, and the Environment 1770–1950*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bundy, C. 1979. *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*. London: Heinemann.
- Davies, W. 1990. *We Cry For Our Land. Farm Workers in South Africa*. Oxford: Oxfam.
- Farmers' Encyclopedia*. Cape Town.
- Gaganakis, M. & Crewe, M. 1987. *Farm Schools in South Africa*. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations.
- Grier, B. 2006. *Invisible Hands. Child Labor and the State in Colonial Zimbabwe*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Grosskopf, J. F. W. 1932. Economic report. Rural impoverishment and rural exodus. *The Poor White Problem in South Africa*. Volume 1 of the Report of the Carnegie Commission. Stellenbosch.
- Hanekom, A. J. 1960. *The South African Wool Industry*. Johannesburg: Hayne and Gibson.
- Hunter, M. 1936. *Reaction to Conquest. Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Levine, S. 2006. The picaninny wage. A historical overview of the persistence of structural inequality in South Africa. *Anthropology Southern Africa* 29(3–4).
- Luxemburg, R. 2003. *The Accumulation of Capital*. London: Routledge.
- Mallinson, C. 1915. *The Merino in South Africa*. Sydney.
- McKee, W. M. 1913. *South African Sheep and Wool*. Cape Town.

- Olsson, L. 1980. *Då barn var lönsamma. Om arbetsdelning, barnarbete och teknologiska förändringar i några svenska industrier under 1800- och början av 1900-talet*. Stockholm: Tiden.
- Plaut, T. 1976. Farm schools for African and coloured children in South Africa. In: *SALDRU Farm Labour Conference*. Cape Town.
- Rahikainen, M. 2004. *Centuries of Child Labour. European Experiences from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*. Cornwall: Aldershot.
- van Onselen, C. 1997. *The Seed is Mine. The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894–1985*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- van Sittert, L. 2002. Holding the line. The rural enclosure movement in the Cape Colony, c. 1865–1910. *Journal of African History* 43(1).

Fredrik Lilja
Historiska institutionen
Uppsala Universitet
Box 628
SE-751 26 Uppsala, Sverige
e-post: fredrik.lilja@hist.uu.se