

**FARM WORKERS' RESISTANCE TO EXPLOITATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE  
WORKERS AT AUSSENKEHR KARAS REGION, NAMIBIA**

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## **Abstract**

The central concern of this study was the exploitation of farm workers and the different strategies of resistance to such exploitation. The study used the conceptual framework of resistance ‘weapons of the weak’ by Scott. According to this theory, the weapons of the weak are manifested through everyday resistance to exploitation. The study was conducted at Aussenkehr farm situated along the banks of the Orange River, which forms the boundaries between Namibia and South Africa. The study was qualitative. The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide to capture the experiences of workers. Workers' daily activities were also observed and recorded in the observation guide. The sample for this study was 29 farm workers both permanent and seasonal farmworkers at Aussenkehr.

Although the production of grapes is an important component of the agricultural sector in Namibia, and a lucrative industry for exports, the study found the living and the working conditions of farm workers in Aussenkehr to be exploitative. Most of the grape farm workers in Aussenkehr live in reed houses, with no sanitation, electricity, and access to clean running water and earn low wages. The results further revealed that there are gender disparities. It was difficult to detect any forms of overt and covert resistance because one would have had to live with the community first to understand how the workers resist. The most common forms of resistance that were identified through the interviews conducted include gossiping, joking, name-calling and speaking in native languages. The workers preferred not to engage in any collective resistance due to the fear of losing their jobs, as strikes are strictly forbidden in their employment contracts. The most vocal workers are seen as a threat to the companies, and they are often removed with no explanation.

The study also found the available social institutions to be weak and lacking the necessary capacity to fight exploitation and to forge resistance. Moreover, the trade unions only seem to serve the interests of the companies and not necessarily those of the workers.

**Keywords:** Exploitation, resistance, everyday resistance, Aussenkehr and farm workers.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ANC- African National Congress

ILO- International Labour Organisation

MAWLR- Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform

MLIREC- Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation

NAFAU- Namibian Food and Allied Workers Union

OPO- Owambo People's Organisation

SWAPO- South-West African People's Organisation

SADC- Southern African Development Community

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to the Lord God Almighty who has granted me the strength, knowledge, tenacity, and courage to pursue this sensitive study to the end. Secondly, this study is dedicated to the farm workers at Aussenkehr who produce one of the world's best table grapes but live and labour in the most inhumane conditions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I desire that this study will help to bring an end to the violation of their rights and cause a change in their situation for the better. Thirdly, this study is dedicated to every other agricultural worker in Namibia, Africa, and the rest of the world at large, who produce food but remain amongst the most exploited workforce.

## **Declaration**

I, Gloria Unotjari Tjitombo, declare hereby that this study is a true reflection of my research, and that this work or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution.

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Gloria U. Tjitombo

Date

11-12-2020

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background of the study

Aussenkehr is a settlement, which lies along the banks of the Orange River in the !Karas Region of southern Namibia, where the production of table grapes takes place. In 1949, Aussenkehr was surveyed but it was not until 1988 that the farm was set up and grape production began. It covers about 3000 hectares of land. Land use is mainly for agricultural activities, in particular the production of grapes on an irrigated area of close to 2000 hectares (Munyika et al., 2014). Other activities in the settlement and along the Orange River include urban development and weir construction which is a low dam built across a river to raise the level of water upstream. Due to a boom in economic activities over the years, there has been a population increase due to an influx of employment seekers, which has resulted in the proliferation of unplanned settlements along the river with no proper sanitation facilities (Munyika et al., 2014). The number of people working in Aussenkehr increased, and there was more demand for shelter. The current statistics indicate that the settlement is home to about 20,000 inhabitants who work on the farm (Bosman & Botha, 2015). The production of grapes at Aussenkehr plays a critical role in employment creation in the country. It is estimated that in 2015 there were 5500 permanent and 6000 part-time workers (Seibeb & Ndalaon, 2019). This study intended to uncover how the employees were being exploited and how they resisted exploitative conditions i.e., the resistance strategies employed.

Although Nangolo and Ndapwa (2020) found that only a total of 3 827 people were employed at Aussenkehr, it was not clear whether these were permanent or part-time workers. Nevertheless,

Grape farming has, in one way or another, contributed to the reduction of unemployment which remains a concern throughout Namibia; the Namibia Statistics Agency reported in 2018 that the unemployment rate stood at 33.4%. The production of grapes is an important component of the agricultural sector and export in Namibia (Namibia Trade Forum, 2018). In 2016, it was reported that grapes' exports totalled N\$800 million (Kaira, 2017).

Although the grape industry at Aussenkehr has presented employment opportunities for many, there have been reports of poor living and working conditions. Since the farm was set up, there is only one clinic with three nurses that cater for the workers. There is also only one pre-primary and primary school. Workers at Aussenkehr are languishing in poverty, and they live in makeshift houses (reed houses) without decent sanitation (Hamutenya, 2018). While it is true that Aussenkehr contributes to the reduction of unemployment in the country, the kind of employment at the Aussenkehr farm can be described as exploitative. Workers are said to be working and living in poor conditions and are forced to relieve themselves at the river where they also collect water for household use (Cloete, 2017).

Although the exact number of farms in Aussenkehr could not be determined, information from the interviews conducted indicates that there are about 7 to 10 grape farms in Aussenkehr and they are all dependent on the water that is sourced from the Orange River. Some of the companies operating there own up to four different farms on one big piece of land but operate under different names. The farms that could be identified by name are known as Frontier, Orvi, Cape Orchard Company, Namibia Grape Company, and Solar. The farm owners rent out parts of their farms to different companies, some of them belonging to South African nationals. Two

companies were found to belong to the Namibian government, namely the Namibia Grape Company and one run under the Namibia Development Cooperation (NDC).

The government-owned farms seem to operate the same as the privately-owned farms. According to information sourced from the interviews, the NDC-run farm seems to have closed down due to a lack of funds and other unknown reasons; while the Namibia Grape Company, popularly known as black power by the workers, is the only government-owned farm that is in operation at the time of conducting this research. Concerns were raised about the working and living conditions of workers employed by the Namibia Grape Company, due to a lack of housing and sanitation. The company had completed the construction of houses for the permanent workers however these houses were never handed over to the workers, and have been unoccupied for about six years. Similar conditions were experienced by workers at another farm at Aussenkehr and these workers had written an open letter where they emphasised their poor living conditions and the lack of proper social services such as sanitation (Cloete, 2017), but their grievances had still not been addressed by the time of conducting this research.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The central concern of this study has to do with the exploitation of workers and their different strategies of resistance to this exploitation. Although the Aussenkehr grape farms/settlement has created employment, the workers are reported to be living in poverty (Hamutenya, 2018). Moreover, there are no studies done (Munyika et al-2014, Hamutenya, 2018, Cloete-2017) on the working and living conditions and forms of resistance to exploitation. This lack of knowledge of the workers' conditions suggests a research gap. Therefore, this research intends to fill this void.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

- To identify the different resistance strategies of the workers towards exploitative conditions.
- To examine how the workers resist exploitative conditions.
- To assess the roles of social institutions (church, family) in fostering resistance.

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

When the researcher first started doing a desktop search on farm workers in Namibia, there was so little and outdated information surrounding this topic. Aussenkehr was one of the searches that appeared consistently but only in newspaper articles; however not much empirical evidence was available. The researcher thus thought, with the lack of knowledge surrounding farm workers in post-independent Namibia, it was imperative to bring such knowledge to the academics, policy makers, future researchers, and the general public at large. This study may contribute to the body of knowledge by documenting the exploitation and resistance of the workers at Aussenkehr. This study may help policymakers at the central and regional government level especially when dealing with issues concerning the wellbeing of the workers.

### **1.5 Limitation**

One of the biggest setbacks encountered in conducting the interviews was the tight schedules of the workers. They work from 06:00 in the morning to 17h00 in the afternoon, Mondays to Fridays; and when they return from work, they have to walk long distances to collect water for their households. On the weekends, they are mostly found busy with their families, gardening or

at the river fishing. As a result, it was difficult to get a hold of participants, especially the female participants. Another setback was that some people were afraid to participate or be seen by the researcher. Some completely refused to participate in the research in fear of losing their jobs – this, the researcher respected. Those who were readily available were not working at the moment the research was being carried out or had been out of work for some time; thus, information received from them could not be included in the body of research. Another limitation encountered was when one of the farm managers approached the researcher demanding to know what the research was all about, whether the intentions were to gather information and create competition for them or whether this research was posing a threat to the area.

## **1.6 Delimitation**

The study was conducted in the southern part of Namibia where the geography and weather conditions are different compared to other parts of the country. The area is arid but grape farming takes place there due to the irrigation systems in place. Based on the reports in the Newspapers it was deduced that the workers are living and working in exploitable conditions. However, the extent to which this exploitation is taking place was not known. The farm workers had reportedly engaged in some form of resistance but the extent to which they resist is not recorded or known.

## **1.7 Chapter Summary**

The focus of the chapter was to introduce the study, by presenting the background and orientation of the study, the statement of the problem, research objectives, the significance of the study, limitations of the study, and its delimitation. The chapter presented an overview of the

exploitation that occurs at the Aussenkehr farm. The research problem is the exploitation of workers in an independent Namibia, which is a challenge considering the number of years the farm has been in existence and no change has taken place. It further sustains the importance of this research which can be used by the government to affect change not only in the law but also on the farm itself. The following chapter presents a comprehensive literature review.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

There is a large body of literature on the working and living conditions of workers in the agricultural production industry. Shapi (2017) stated that agriculture is vital for the economy when it comes to reducing poverty amongst many Africans as it creates employment opportunities, reduces poverty and promotes economic growth but it comes with many challenges as well. These issues are tackled below.

Firstly, aspects of exploitation are explored drawing from authors such as Marx (2007 [1867]), Holmstrom (1977), Arqueros-Fernandez (2016). Secondly, resistance and what it entails is presented and focus is placed on everyday resistance using authors such as Cohen (2007), Sinwell (2012), Scott (1987), Lilja (2009), Mutekwe (2019).

The wide gap in the literature in Namibia on farm workers compared to other countries such as South Africa where similar topics were researched and documented by academics, journalists and other concerned institutions calls for serious academic research which presents empirical data on the conditions and life experiences of farm workers and more related to this study.

#### **2.1.1 Conceptualising and historicising labour exploitation**

Exploitation is defined by Marx (2007) as an unequal exchange of labour for goods. The exchange is unequal when the amount of labour embodied in the goods, which the worker can purchase with his income, is less than the amount of labour put into the production. According to Carling (1987), existing literature suggests that exploitation, extortion, and oppression describe

unjust social arrangements that ought to be challenged and therefore changed. The concept of exploitation is particularly associated with Marx's critique of capitalism, and hundreds of years after its deployment, exploitation continues to characterise the economic systems of many countries including Namibia. Zwolinski and Wertheimer (2016) term exploitation in its broadest, normative (ethical) sense, describing the process as often that which takes the form of unfair or unjust economic exchange, unfair advantage-taking of another person for one's benefit or unfair use of other human beings.

Exploitation is a concept embedded in Marx's (2007 [1867]) writing "The Capital" which tries to properly explain how systems and modes of production work. Marx's view on capitalism has a direct link to understanding exploitation, systems and modes of production. Capitalism and capitalist mode of production and other class society speak of an unfair social system (Wood, 1972) which Marx (2007 [1867]) also argued that in the capitalist mode of production, labourers are forced to produce more than what is necessary this is known as "Surplus labour". This surplus-labour is what Marx uses to explain how capitalists make their profit. The value of anything is determined by how much it is used, meaning that the value only becomes a reality by how much it is consumed (Marx, 2007 [1867]). As such, these items are produced by the labourer who sells his "labour-power" to the capitalist; the capitalist then uses the labour-power to produce these items that are consumed by the capitalist and other consumers. In the case of Aussenkehr, the workers produce the grapes by tending to the vineyards throughout the year and the grapes are then harvested at the end of the year and sold in large quantities and much income is made for the owner of the farm. There is no much benefit sharing with those who produce the grapes they receive close to nothing (Cloete, 2017).

It is imperative to note that when Marx speaks of exploitation, he is not only referring to the social distribution of wealth; but goes beyond that to include the environment and setting in which one is (Holmstrom, 1977).

Although Marx in his manuscript of *Das Kapital* (Marx, 2007) highlights some of the most common forms of exploitation and new forms of exploitation. The concept of exploitation did not start during Marx' time, but it was already observed during the slave trade era under the feudal mode of production from where the leading narratives around exploitation are developed. Under this ancient system, the slaves, being just another tool in the hands of the slave-owners, lacked any incentive to improve their productivity and develop their level of technique. For example, Milonakis (1993) writes that slave-owners had two ways of effecting increases in the surplus product they appropriated; (one) by increasing the exploitation of the slaves already in their possession or (two) by increasing the number of slaves they owned. Notably, the feudal mode of production co-existed with other modes but some were non-exploitative. Wickham (2008) argued that the feudal mode had two different relations of production, namely, the slave mode with its full enslavement and maintenance of primary producers; and the capitalist mode with its paid, usually legally free, labour-force- both indicate the exploitative nature of feudalism. In Namibia, slavery by Europeans dates back to the 1780s where slaves were traded for arms and alcohol.

The existence of the different forms of exploitation explains the historical trajectories of human abuse at the expense of capital accumulation. Namibia's history is a clear reflection of accumulation by dispossession where German colonialists dispossessed mostly Nama and Hereros {sic} from off their land and livestock. This is however not where it ended, as they took possession of the Nama and Hereros as slaves for hired labour. Primitive accumulation,

according to Marx, is first and foremost, the ‘historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production and transforming the immediate producers into wage-labourers (Harvey, 2003) as in the case of Namibia. Therefore, it is argued that primitive accumulation should be called primitive expropriation because it means the separation of the producers from the means of production (Fuchs, 2018). One of the first processes of introducing waged labour in Namibia alienated the people from their land and livestock and dispossessed them. Bonefeld (2011) contests that primitive accumulations are the basis on which all capitalist agendas are carried out while expropriation is the alienation of the producer from the product. In Africa, especially in southern Africa, exploitation of the natural resources by the western world came about because producers were alienated from the means of production through dispossession, looting and stealing of resources, and the introduction of waged labour. Cheap labour was no longer allowed in Europe and the focus was now on Africa to exploit resources and labour (Arrighi & Saul, 1969). Today, throughout Africa, the colonial legacy is witnessed and Aussenkehr is no exception to this extension of neo-colonialism. Some may argue that these people freely give their labour-power and in turn are exploited; however not many look to the fact that the owners of the means of production are creating a breeding space for exploitation to exist within that particular sector and the already existing systems allow for these practices to continue.

It is important to understand that the forms of exploitation are varied and cut across different lenses. The narratives about the forms of exploitation are not far-fetched, and they exhibit what seems to be the abuse of poor human beings at the expense of the monopoly in many parts of the world. These views are in line with those of Arslan, (2018), who views exploitation as a global problem especially, in agriculture and other supply chain industries. Arslan, (2018) further suggests that uncovering the causes of the persistent exploitation is vital to addressing poor

working and living conditions (Arslan, 2018) as in the case of Aussenkehr. Even though exploitation enjoys uninterrupted debate in global literature, the fundamental causes of its existence have been for the most part largely unexplored (Cockbain et al., 2018) thus this research was carried out, to bring understanding and perspective from the Southern African stance. More particularly, labour exploitation has more generally been recognised in industries such as agriculture (Chesney et al., 2019). In this study, there seems to be some sort of exploitation at Aussenkehr farm which is an agricultural industry (Cloete, 2017). Therefore, if the exploitation is lessened, the wages and working conditions of the workers producing the branded item will be improved (Pines & Meyer, 2005).

Contrary to the above, Wolff (1999) argues that exploitation does not have a universal definition but it rather varies in different societies and sectors, furthermore, he states that exploitation does not exist but rather individuals never get back what they put into their labour. He further argues that exploitation only exists if an individual has exploitable circumstances. This is said to be what the capitalist uses to take advantage of the vulnerability and exploitable circumstances of an individual. Wolff (1999) further states that exploitation is entrenched in capitalism and capitalism is a system of mutual exploitation where individuals with exploitable conditions have no choice if they are going to survive but to sell their labour-power for whatever the capitalist is offering to buy it for. These exploitable conditions come from the power that one has over the other i.e., owning the means of production and in this case creating employment for workers in the grape industry. Vulnerability is highlighted by Wolff (1999) as one of the exploitable conditions where one is “poorer, more ignorant, less intelligent, less cunning, or less ruthless than another, or have some other bargaining weakness” (p. 111).

## **2.2 History of exploitation in Namibia**

Labour exploitation of workers in Namibia is a reflection of former colonial and Apartheid practices that dates back to the 1900s (Botes, 2013). Labour in Namibia was introduced through the contract labour system. Interestingly, most of the labourers came from the Northern and North eastern part of the country where colonialism did not have much if any effect.

For the contract labour system to have been successful there needed to be aid from organisations that were responsible for contracting labourers. One of the then well-known contracting labour systems was SWANLA. Before SWANLA existed, other labour contracting bodies existed such as the Southern Labour Organisation (SLO) and Northern Labour Organisation (NLO) and these were believed to have broken up the Namibian family units and forced men into waged labour which supposedly did not exist (Cooper, 1999). Notably, it can be said these organisations were responsible for introducing exploitation through waged labour which is still reflected in some sectors of the Namibian labour force. One of how Namibians engaged was by migrating from their homes to other towns. The trend of workers moving from one region to another in search of employment is rather widespread. In the case of Namibia, the movement of workers from one locality to another was more pronounced during the colonial period. Based on the foregoing, it has been documented that during the German administration of 1884-1915 and eventually the much longer South African rule of 1915-1990, workers from the northern part of Namibia were only allowed to work in colonial towns (Jauch, 2018). This highlighted the nature of the contract labour system in Namibia. Botes (2013) states that the circumstances of the contract labour system in Namibia was characterised by unfair treatment, racism and discrimination and resemble a colonial history of Namibia. During the apartheid period, the contract labour system was regulated by the South West Africa Native Labour Association (SWANLA). The

organisation was regarded as the body that introduced the first forms of the exploitation of temporary employees, in 1943. It used the desperation and vulnerability of the employees to the advantage of Namibian (then South West African) employers. Under the contract labour system, the government of South West Africa served as an official employment agency through which Africans sold their labour and white employers could obtain African workers (Cooper, 1999). The contract labour system lasted for 51 years between the years the 1920s to 1971. The system was responsible for sourcing labourers, mainly from the former homelands of Okavango and Ovambo [sic] and once recruited these workers had no right to decide on the type of employment or negotiate their salary (Likuwa & Shiweda, 2017). Under this system, contract labourers were subjected to dehumanised working conditions, described as extremely dire, the workers lived in prison-like compounds. Even worse, the farm workers are said to have “slept in small rounded houses called Pondok that were usually situated in the backyard of the main house of the farm” (Likuwa & Shiweda, 2017: 33).

Likuwa (2014) narrates the exploitation of farm workers in Namibia, focusing specifically on the former homelands of Kavango [sic] (now Kavango East and West region) as much of the literature focuses on the Ovambo [sic] homelands. These farm workers experienced varying degrees of hardship that are considered dehumanising. According to Likuwa (2014), some of the hardships that these farm workers went through includes poor shelter, low and irregular wages, and long working hours. The low wages meant the farm workers stayed on contract longer because they were not able to save money to support their families. This comes as a continuation of farm workers being exploited on farms in Zimbabwe and Angola (Likuwa & Shiweda, 2017). At independence at least two-thirds of the country’s population lived in absolute poverty, this scale of poverty particularly amongst the majority-black Namibian is said to be the result of

systematic labour exploitation (Jauch, 2018). More so, after regime changes, there was free movement of people from one place to another in search of jobs. However, the movement of people in search of jobs in post-independent Namibia did not mean the absence of challenges, as these workers still seem to experience some form of exploitation. It is argued that there is a lack of clarity regarding the working-class base of the labour movement and whose interests it is meant to serve (Jauch, 2015). Due to high unemployment in Namibia, the movement of people becomes more necessary, as stated by Venditto (2017), that migration in post-independent Namibia is encouraged by the search for lifestyles, work, income, welfare benefits and the chance to aid family networks back home through remittance. Thus, Migrants may be seen as social actors or agents who attempt to confront structural socio-economic issues, which offer both constraint and opportunity (Venditto, 2017) given the conditions they are often exposed to. Although these wage labour practices did not happen without opposition. History suggests that in the period between the 1930s and 1940s, there were few black workers' organisations such as trade unions and other movements in Namibia that fought for workers' rights. There were only a few organisations at the time because any attempt to organise workers in Namibia into trade unions at the time was met with severe reprisals from the South African regime (Melber,1983). In the country's unequal economy, levels of discontent among workers were high, and there were strikes nearly every year between 1946 and 1959. These strikes occurred mainly in the mines and other places where workers were massed together (Wallace & Kinahan, 2011) which led to the formation of trade unions and other labour movements. Despite trade unions' contribution to the liberation movements, the trade unions have become weak and face a lot of challenges that may undermine the labourers' capacity (Jauch, 2018). Therefore, there is a need to explore ways that yield fruitful collaboration on issues of common interest; such as the protection of workers'

rights, fighting exploitation and unemployment and improving labour legislation (Jauch, 2018). This is despite the Labour Act (Act 11 of 2007) which became operational in 2008, labour migrants seem to experience all forms of exploitation, especially in the agricultural sector. After independence, the right to join or form trade unions within the wider right to freedom of association is protected by the constitutional bill of rights in Namibia (Parker, 2012).

### **2.3 Forms of exploitation**

Labour exploitation is linked, among others, to Karl Marx's theory of surplus-value, where it is argued that labour exploitation or surplus-value extraction is a structural feature of the capitalist mode of production in which the accumulation of capital depends on the exploitation of labour-power (Zwolinski & Wertheimer, 2016). Otherwise, Steiner (2010) argues that exploitation is a type of transaction, meaning it is any event that involves at least two people and in which goods and services are transferred from at least one of them to the other.

More so, Vrousalis (2013), regards exploitation in a capitalist economy as a form of domination, that is, domination for self-enrichment. In this case, it is viewed that those that are economically vulnerable are used as a means by the capitalist, where they are exploited for their labour-power. The working and living conditions of foreign labour (that which labourers are not accustomed to) in rural areas, particularly in agriculture, have to date not received much attention in academic and public debates, at least in many developing nations, including Namibia. Although Zawojaska (2016) seems to suggest that there is some evidence that points to workers in many parts of the world experiencing poor working conditions, unfair wages and even violence from their recruiters, employers, supervisors, and others this evidence is yet to be documented and presented. Some of the identified forms of exploitation are discussed below.

### **Poor working conditions and living conditions**

Poor working conditions can be categorised into long working hours in hazardous spaces where workers are exposed to chemicals without proper protection for example. Another aspect could be that workers do not have good sanitation facilities at work where for instance women can feel safe when using them and not having to look for alternatives where there could be a threat. Farm workers' living conditions often consist of a series of concerns whether it is sanitary, housing, access to water and other basic services and Aussenkehr is no exception. Grape farm workers in South Africa and Namibia are housed on the farms on which they work. The workers are often housed together in poor and cramped conditions.

### **Unfair wages**

The wages of unskilled workers, by contrast, in Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and other African countries have remained consistently low. For instance, farm workers in basic or informal occupations received on average N\$429 per month in 2005 (Labour Resource and Research Institute, 2005). Although the minimum wage for farm workers has more than doubled from when Namibia gained its independence until now the unfortunate reality remains that the wages are still low. The current minimum wage stands at N\$1400.00 per month and includes free housing, water, food and electricity (Nakale, 2019). Farm workers at Aussenkehr have been left to fend for themselves as many still do not have access to clean water, sanitation and housing (Cloete, 2017). According to Humblet et al., (2002) payment to the workers and the time spent working and the working conditions is said to directly affect the lives of workers daily. They further state that the minimum wage is used to bring workers to the same standards as others that fall within the same industry or to allow for workers to at least afford to pay for their minimum needs.

## **Forced labour**

Forced labour can be understood in two folds. According to the (ILO, 2009), there is forced labour imposed by the state, forced labour linked to poverty and discrimination in the developing countries and forced labour that arises from migration and trafficking across the world, often associated with globalisation.

More usefully, the ILO has developed a set of indicators to facilitate the identification of instances and situations of forced labour (Anderson & Rogaly, 2009). These include amongst others, restriction of movement and confinement to the workplace or a limited area debt bondage and withholding wages or making excessive reductions (that violate previously made agreements). Thus, workers in forced labour situations have agency and exercise choice, but their choices are believed to be severely limited by the actions of those who seek to exploit them for profit (Straus, 2012).

## **Labour markets**

Lastly, the issue of labour markets and level of education tie into how and why workers are exploited. In terms of labour markets, workers want to work where the wages are high but employers prefer to pay low wages, this is the simplest form of a capitalist system as presented in Marxist writings (Marx, 2007) and Marxist centred writing by Wolff (1999) and Wood (1972). As a result, Storm (2007) stresses the importance of regulating labour markets as a means to ensure workers will be able to bargain for better wages and make sure that employers pay their employees legally acceptable wages.

Another way worker can ensure they are paid accordingly would be to possess skills which are indicators of labour market advantage in Namibia. Historically, access to education and training was differentiated along racial lines: most white people have a senior secondary qualification and

whites constitute the vast majority of those who have attained higher education (Klerck, 2008). Apartheid's "Bantu" education and the near-total absence of occupational training have effectively trapped many black people in the lower rungs of the labour market of Namibia. In the labour market, formal education plays a very important role in the job market, and those with limited skills are more vulnerable to exploitation in the informal economy such as agriculture. Therefore, the level of education determines one's position in the labour market, otherwise, lack of education could result in the exploitation of the labourers. The result of limited knowledge and ignorance leads employers to overlook the labour laws. As a consequence, the workers are therefore disadvantaged because they are not able to bargain beyond what the employer offers to them.

In summary, these works of literature seem to highlight the fact that exploitation does not only take away humanity, but it degrades individuals that are exposed to these conditions. Furthermore, exploitation is not only about low wages but also the labour and living conditions in which these employees are found and whether what is stated in the agreement or contract is being fulfilled. Exploitation within the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be observed with the naked eye but somehow individuals remain oblivious to this. Labour exploitation through excessive working hours, unsafe work conditions, abuse of workers, forced and child labour, as well as insufficient compensation, may compromise the health of the individuals. In a study by Chesney, Evans, Gold and Trautrim (2019), it was found that from an employee perspective, fair employment practices including worker compensation and health and safety are important and highly correlated constituents of social sustainability (Staniškienė & Stankevičiūtė, 2018).

## **2.4 Migrant workers; the vulnerable and exploitable workforce**

Internationally, Preibisch & Santamaría, (2016) write that the migration of workers on a global scale is believed to be responsible for about 100 million workers, which represent 3 per cent of the global workforce over national borders. In Namibia, labour migration has seen the increased mobility of workers from rural to urban areas, the increase in labour migration was perpetuated by freedom of movement that came with the country's independence (Likuwa & Shiweda, 2017).

These workers move from their place of origin or from where they were settled to another in search of jobs that will allow them to make a better income. However, the biggest issue remains that migrant workers are almost always limited because of their status and especially those who migrate from a foreign nation as opposed to the ones who migrate from within that country (Cohen & Hjalmarson, 2018). It is even worse for temporary/seasonal workers who are at the mercy of their employer, who at any moment can dispose of them when they are dissatisfied with the performance and much more when they take part in overt resistance.

In many cases, migrant workers are prone to abusive and exploitative work environments. Authors argue that conditions for temporary migrant workers are even worse. This could be because they only work there during a certain time in a year because of this limited time of stay, they are unable to fight for rights or speak out against exploitation.

Not only does exploitation take away humanity but it degrades individuals that are exposed to these conditions. Neither is exploitation about low wages but also the labour and living conditions in which these employees are found and whether what is stated in the agreement or contract is being fulfilled.

## **2.5 Farmworkers' condition**

The exploitation of farm workers has attracted a lot of attention globally and especially in countries like South Africa (Muwoki, 2017). Although there are laws and regulations on the issues of farm workers, exploitation towards farm workers remains persistent. Below, matters about the exploitation of farm workers in Namibia and South Africa suggest similar histories between the two countries. The commonalities between Namibia and South Africa could be attributed to the fact that they share a similar history (colonialization and apartheid). This section is thus going to give an overview of similarities using international and local examples.

There are reports that grape farm workers in South Africa benefit very little, mostly because they are subject to exploitative conditions and human rights abuses (Cordes & Baldwin, 2011). These abusive practices, which occur to varying degrees on a wide array of farms, are perpetrated by farm owners or farm managers. Farmworkers resist conditions such as low wages, poor living conditions and abuse of their rights (ibid).

Apart from the working and the living conditions as well as wages, farmworkers in South Africa are said to be exposed to certain tasks that narrow their expertise and exclude them from the way farms function on a larger scale (Moseley, 2008). In 2012 and 2013, grape farm workers in Western Cape, South Africa held an uprising against the living and working conditions (Wilderman, 2015). The uprising resulted in the passing of a law to increase the wages by 52 per cent however, studies suggest that some of the farm workers do not know the new minimum wage (Devereux, 2019).

Another concern is occupational health and safety in the vineyards especially for women in particular who are more susceptible to safety-related issues. Devereux (2019) reported that the

vineyards in the Western and Northern Cape are mostly not equipped with washing facilities and toilets on the farms and these women are forced to make use of the bushes and they often do so in groups to avoid being harassed sexually or being raped. The entire situation is worse when these women are menstruating, not only is this unhygienic but poses other health threats.

The conditions found in the Western Cape (South Africa) and Aussenkehr (Namibia) are very similar. The rate at which the workers are paid is one of the biggest atrocities against humanity, a clear indicator that exploitation is indeed taking place in both settings. The workers in the Western Cape, for example, are paid R18 per hour (Agriculture News Network, 2019) whilst the amount paid to the workers in Aussenkehr is not known.

However, according to the Namibian Labour Act, 11 of 2007 workers should at least earn N\$3.70 per hour. This is still extremely low for individuals who seek to have a decent standard of living and cater to other needs as they may arise. The point overall is that the resistance by the farmworkers in the Western Cape is more visible after they openly protested the ill-treatment. As in the case of Aussenkehr, strikes and resistance are not often observed but it was reported in September 2019 that workers did not receive their salaries for two months and engaged in overt resistance (Cloete, 2019).

Secondly, the major underlying issue would be housing for workers in both settlements, respectively. In the case of the Western Cape (South Africa) vineyards the workers face illegal eviction and through their representative union, the workers have been demanding decent housing since 2014. This is a major issue because after these workers are evicted, they are forced to live in makeshift houses in informal settlements where they have to make do without water or electricity.

The housing situation in Aussenkehr is as dire as the one in the Western. Although they live on the land donated to them by the owner and landlord (Cloete, 2019), there seems to be a slow response from the government to addressing the housing situation in the community. Similar conditions are observed in the grape farms to the grape in the Western Cape, the workers at Aussenkehr live in make-shift houses made of reeds which they collect at the river or in corrugated iron houses.

Thirdly, the workers in the Western Cape, South Africa have complained about not having protective gear when fumigating the vineyards for pests, this poses risk to their health of which they already cannot afford to put at risk (Agriculture News Network, 2019). As in the case of Aussenkehr, there have not been reports on a similar situation in Aussenkehr yet. Considering the above argument, it is easy to understand why the workers in the Western Cape have decided to take the more conventional approach of resistance as opposed to taking on everyday resistance as opposed to the workers at Aussenkehr where not many reports on overt resistance have been reported and thus warranted this research.

In summary, this literature seems to highlight how exploitation is taking place with many similarities in both settings.

## **2.6 The law and the reality**

Compared to other workers in different sectors, farm workers are said to be the ones who are least protected by the law, as such they are susceptible to exploitation this is because they work at the mercy of whoever employs them (International Labour Organisation et al., 2007). The exploitation of farm workers is not only limited to developing countries, the problem is also widely pronounced in developed countries. The exploitation of farmworkers seems to exist

because workers have little awareness of their rights and are therefore dependent on informal contacts from their community to arrange not just their work but often also accommodation, food, transport, or health care (Scott, Craig & Geddes, 2012). This leaves workers exposed, vulnerable and susceptible to such conditions.

For example, one of the major risks associated with working in the agricultural sector is the fact that often the workers do not receive contracts which they can hold their employers accountable like in the case of unfair dismissal or delayed wage payments (International Labour Organisation et al., 2007). It is also imperative to note that exploitation is most prominent amongst the workers who are not aware of their rights and wage policies in place.

The exploitation of farm workers is a global phenomenon. There is evidence that farm workers are being exploited, something that has existed for centuries and in countries such as South Africa (and Namibia), these remain as part of a colonial legacy (Muwoki, 2017). The extent to which these farm workers are being exploited may vary according to the laws and extend to which protection for the farm workers is provided. The wages paid to workers is one of the prominent features of many labour laws.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) which Namibia is a member state also makes provision extensively on labour laws which is found in the protocol on employment and labour. The protocol begins by stating all the objectives however for this thesis the focus will be on articles 6 to 12. Article 6 speaks to the freedom of associations with trade unions who have the right to agree on and conclude agreements. This means that workers can join trade unions which can represent and fight for them when the need arises. In the case where an issue goes unresolved, the workers are allowed to strike and a solution is found following the law of that particular nation. The protocol then continues to the component of equal treatment under article

7 which states that all laws and policies should ensure everyone is provided with equal protection before the law. Secondly, each state party is required to do away with discrimination of any form and advocate for equal employment opportunities regardless of sex, race, gender, nationality, language etc. Another important aspect under this act is gender equity and equality for both men and women in terms of access to employment and wages of equal value, working conditions and career development. The article further states that legislative and other measures should remove all workplace segregation and discrimination. Article 8 speaks on employment and payment, which states that everyone should be free to choose any occupation and they should be given, and opportunities should be fair for all in the promotion of decent work. In article 9, matters of improvement of working and living conditions are outlined and this aspect is very important to this study. It is stated in the protocol that there should be equitable basic and living conditions, they should be provided minimum periods of rest, annual leave, compassionate leave and maternity leave, occupational health, and safety protection. Furthermore, it states that every worker in every region has a right to weekly rest and annual paid leave. Article 12 speaks to occupational health and safety which states that all workers have the right to be safe and all-party states should put measures in place that prevents, recognises, detect, and compensate any injuries or illnesses related to work and job security after the injury. Conclusively, it can be seen that the protocol has made extensive provision for the workforce for all member states than is mentioned above. Some of these laws are practised and others not, as such this raises questions on the effectiveness of the protocol arises.

The Namibian law also makes extensive provision for those in the labour market. In Namibia, the first Labour Act was promulgated in 1992, which has now been replaced by the current Labour Act, Act 11 of 2007. In January 2003 the first agreement for the minimum wages of farm

workers was gazetted and implemented in Namibia (Nakale, 2019). According to The Labour Act, No 11 of 2007, Agricultural workers are supposed to receive a minimum wage and this wage is supposed to “curb and prevent exploitation of agricultural workers”. The Labour Act, No 11 of 2007 states that agricultural employees earn a minimum of N\$3.70 per hour (Republic of Namibia 2014) and it is also stipulated that workers must receive payment for workers done overtime on Sundays and public holidays. On the other hand, the Collective Agreement on Minimum Wage in the Agricultural Sector agreed on the minimum wage at N\$4.46 per hour for agricultural employees in 2017. The Act further states that “An employer must pay to an employee any monetary remuneration to which the employee is entitled” no date later than what is stipulated in the contract. Workers may not be subjected to any form of discrimination because of their political and social orientation, their membership in unions, complaining against employers violating rights and agreements according to the Labour Act, No 11 of 2007. The protection of the health and lives of workers in the workplaces should be enforced by ensuring that workers who operate in hazardous working environments have the necessary skills, equipment, and protective gear this is implied in the Labour Act, No 11 of 2007.

The Namibian Labour Act, No 11 of 2007 pronounces itself on the prohibition of forced labour and it states that “A person must not directly or indirectly cause, permit or require any individual to perform forced labour (the Republic of Namibia, 2014). In the case where workers are employed and are not happy with the conditions in which they find themselves they have the right to strike as according to the Act provided that the intention to strike has gone through the necessary institutions.

The reality, however, in some cases as observed by Muwoki (2017) is that farm owners are now opting to hire temporary or seasonal workers as opposed to permanent workers to avoid having

more people living on the farms and having to cover other expenses while exploiting the temporary “undocumented” temporary workers. The above practice is regarded as labour flexibilization which refers to changing the way work is practised whereby organisations or employers do not always offer permanent but rather seek “flexible employment relations that permit them to increase or diminish their workforce, and reassign and redeploy employees with ease” (Stone, 2005). This would mean that one does not have job security because employers would sometimes change their workforce to fit their current need or where tension would be growing, or demands are made from workers. For farm workers, this could be even worse with their current status quo, with job security topping the list. These practices make it difficult for the law to be enforced because workers are and can be easily disposed of.

Some of the farm owners who hire permanent workers opt to compensate their workers by providing accommodation, giving them food (which according to the Namibian law should come along with the wages) or alcohol as opposed to wages which in turn keeps these farm workers in poverty (Moseley, 2008). However, the question that may arise is whether these workers did not have any form of accommodation before working on these farms or any other forms of livelihood that could cause workers to rather adapt to the life that comes with working on these farms. Although agriculture is believed to play an important economic function, these works of literature seem to suggest that agricultural workers are the least paid worldwide.

Job security is another aspect that is key when it comes to workers resisting exploitation. Despite what the international and national laws state, farm workers are often dismissed when airing their grievances however, the International labour organisation ILO (2002) outlined that workers may not be dismissed because of their political and social orientation, their membership to unions, complaining against employers violating rights and agreements etc. Regardless of what the laws

say, many farm owners do not seem to be adhering to these laws. Temporary jobs or labour have become popular amongst workers over the years, which is said to be the most preferred options by employers because they spend less than they would if they had permanent staff as well as the fact that they can be hired and fired as per the employer's preference (Tucker, 1993).

The final facet explored in this section is occupational health and safety. This phenomenon is widely stressed in both the International labour standards and Namibia's labour law, the extent to which it is enforced in certain settings remains questionable. The protection of the health and lives of farm workers in the workplaces should be enforced by ensuring that workers who operate in hazardous working environments have the necessary skills, equipment and protective gear (Humblet et al., 2002).

## **2.7 Conceptualising Resistance**

Historically, resistance was only viewed as resistance when it was visible. As such overt resistance has received a considerable amount of attention in academic literature, news reporting and related discourses. However, the concept of everyday resistance as coined by Scott (1985), has paved the way for other studies on covert (everyday) resistance. That said, it is important to have a general understanding of what resistance is. Hollander and Einwohner, (2004) define resistance as any behaviour that involves an active effort to oppose people, organisations or institutions that are seemingly oppressive. For instance, workers forming a strike calling for better wages. The focus of this study is on everyday resistance, the unseen, unheard forms that go unnoticed but are happening.

Lilja, (2009) stated that everyday resistance is rather under-researched and that practices of resistance were formulated from two prerequisites, which are: the construction of power and the

construction of discourse. The focus, however, will be on the construction of power which the workers are seemingly challenging through everyday resistance to having demands met.

It is important to understand resistance from different perspectives, however, this thesis focuses on resistance towards exploitation which includes all the forms of resistance. To bring perspective to this, when one resists there is action involved this can be verbally, physically or cognitively and this is done in hostility to something or someone (Hynes, 2013). Hynes (2013) further states that many authors argue that for resistance to exist or be recognised it should be noticeable. This brings us to the next point, the difference between what many recognise as resistance and everyday resistance. Overt resistance is when people openly go against someone or something they are oppressed by while everyday resistance is an act that is done silently which somewhat goes unnoticed but the aim of both is to bring change. An example of overt resistance would be workers going on strike after trying to resolve an issue to no avail, so resorting to a strike like the farm workers in the Western Cape (Wilderman, 2015). An example of covert resistance could be people choosing to remain silent when they are being spoken as opposed to reacting (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

Apart from the strike that took place at Aussenkehr as reported in the New Era newspaper in 2006, the only time workers had openly resisted out was in 2019 over delayed salaries where they threatened to take action. The question that arises from this is whether these farm workers are engaged in other forms of resistance, those that go unnoticed and unrecognised.

Some may argue that because it is not reported it does not exist or because it is covert it does not qualify as resistance. Thus, it is important to note that in many communities it is observed that people seldom live in isolation from one another, this is especially the case when they try to achieve a common goal. Solidarity is important if everyday resistance is going to succeed. In the

case of Aussenkehr, they can be categorised within both organic and mechanical solidarity. As with organic solidarity, individuals depend on one another and form social cohesion even though there exist diverse dynamics amongst the members (Schiemer, 2014). Schiemer (2014) further continues to argue that for mechanical solidarity, there somehow exist links between the members that allows for cohesion and integration. This link can be based on religion, education, and other things that these members have in common or find significant to their social setting. As such, people are often compelled by circumstances to work together to achieve that goal. This goes to say that people do not work in isolation from one another but instead form a social bond to which they conform and act in solidarity with each other. Therefore, the emphasis is on the link between likeness and cohesion between the people/communities involved as such, members of the close-knit assembly show some form of solidarity (Thijssen, 2012). However, if differences become apparent that are not approved by these social groups, the existing order of things or grouping will be changed or removed by the members of these groups to maintain the status quo in which these communities thrive.

On the other hand, organic solidarity places emphasis on the diversity that exists between solidarity parties. Therefore, the distinct functions that individuals play in the division of labour make them interesting to each other, where they do not merely exist as trading partners but ultimately also as fellow individuals. However, the exact type of solidarity that may exist between the different members of the communities in Aussenkehr is not as vivid. Essentially, recognition of the value of otherness may be significant to successfully integrate individuals into an organic whole. (Durkheim, 1969 as cited by Schiemer, 2014)

Otherwise, it is understood that by its nature everyday resistance may appear subtle and hidden and is often misinterpreted. Despite these general trends, Holmes (2009), points out that, the

exact nature of the constraints to open rebellion is dependent on local, political, economic and social circumstances. This is further expanded by Neumann, (2004), whose argument seems to suggest that the rationale of everyday resistance is aimed at testing the limits to practices and customs, instead of looking at large-scale change, in this case, subordinate and dominant groups are constantly trying to seize the advantage of everyday relations.

On the basis of the foregoing, it appears clear that what everyday forms of resistance share with the more dramatic public confrontation is of course that they are intended to mitigate or deny claims made by superordinate classes or to advance claims of those superordinate classes.

Conversely, some may see everyday resistance as small-scale techniques that are relatively safe, and which promise vital material gain and that requires little to no formal coordination (Baaz, Vinthagen & Lilja, 2017). This is where the issue of solidarity is observed that people do not live in isolation with one another but rather work together to achieve a common goal. In such settings, people come together to discuss similar problems they may be facing and before anything is formalised, they organise and strategies amongst themselves how they will carry out their resistance. Furthermore, everyday resistance should be understood as a different kind of resistance that is linked to other forms of resistance. Therefore, it constitutes an initial, off stage, or later stage activity concerning other more sustained, organised and conventional political forms of resistance (Baaz et al., 2017). Indeed, these actors are not passive receptors, they must however be analysed as adopting a proactive explicit behaviour that may succeed in taking normative constraints and pervert them into a more positive outcome that may serve their lives (Marques, n.d). The source of diversity is the direction or goals or resistance. For instance, Hollander & Einwohner (2004), recognised that even though resistance is most frequently

understood to be aimed at achieving some sort of change, in some cases, the behaviour described as resistance curtail change.

Notably, resistance is multi-faceted, and it is found in the narratives of conservation, as described by Holmes (2009), where he argued that resistance has shown the brutality and often deadly violence used in the enforcement of conservation regimes, while Neumann (2004) argues that conservation is justifying and using unprecedented levels of violence. This, therefore, means a very different type of constraint, as rather than having resistance limited by constant surveillance and a personal relationship with someone who controls their livelihood, where for example Neumann (2004), posit that conservation's neighbours have to deal with decision-makers they can rarely reach. It became apparent from these diversities of resistance that what counts as resistance is mostly known to the individual actor. This seems to suggest that resistance by the actors is well calculated and the salient nature of resistance is determined by the communities involved. Similarly, Neumann (2004) insists that resistance is specific to the political, social and cultural context in which it takes place, and thus to recommend specific steps for developing new approaches to resistance is not all that easy. It is therefore important to note that the context in which resistance takes place in Aussenkehr is not known.

Moreover, Willems (2010), argued that resistance should not strictly be understood as referring to physical and material protests in the streets but should rather be defined as the broader set of practices used by the dominated to contest those who make attempts to dominate them. Departing from this observation, it is noteworthy that relatively few scholars have so far elaborated on the inter-linkage of shifting forms of resistance in general terms and how this entangled in more organised forms of resistance.

## **2.8 Resistance to exploitative working conditions**

Resistance emerged prominently and exists in people's self-identification and their descriptions of how they navigate power and violence (McGee, 2017). For example, overt resistance in Zimbabwe became difficult to a certain extent when Mugabe took over Mutekwe (2019). In the event where people would strike or even suspected of wanting to strike, they would be charged and killed. Workers had no other option but to take on alternative forms of resistance which are "unofficial and unknown" which is not spoken about often but are said to help the workers achieve what they are striving for. Resistance towards whatever power is being fought is influenced by the structure and consequences.

Many scholars assume that only mass street protests can force a government, industries, and farm owners out of power and that everyday forms of resistance are unable to bring about a change in power relations. More of the same, resistance is beyond the material and physical, many authors have described resistance that is accomplished through talk and other symbolic behaviour, while other authors also suggest that silence can be a form of resistance, for example, people can

remain silent during a police raid but, this may not imply the absence of resistance (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

### **2.8.1 Everyday Resistance**

Exploring response to everyday resistance activities is challenging in many ways, a fact compounded by the lack of empirical data, particularly in Namibia. As such, there has been a growing need to explore responses of different forms of resistance, intending to understand society's attitude and consciousness to everyday resistance in an attempt to express their grievances.

That said, it is argued that there exist different forms of everyday resistance on a "sliding scale" meaning different forms, where for example "withdrawal" and "silence" are observed and or understood in connection to other forms of resistance that follow thereto, (Baaz et al., 2017). Everyday resistances exhibit alternative forms of resistance, one that is less dramatic and visible, compared to the more visible forms such as rebellions, riots, civil wars, demonstrations and other organised forms of resistance (Scott, 1985), as cited by Lilja, et al, 2017).

Thus, the actions and positions of resistance differ in form and resist a range of different things: the dominant development ideology including its emphasis on mainstream, modern, urban and livelihood strategies (Heredia, 2017). These may become visible when examined from the everyday practices of the actors involved. This means that the focus on everyday resistance has identified a variety of practices ranging from violent responses, protests and boycotts to acts of non-compliance and unintended actions with subversive outcomes (Sivaramakrishnan, 2005).

In a nutshell, the everyday framework of resistance does not offer a type of standardised scope to ascertain unambiguously which acts constitute resistance and which ones do not. However, it

offers a framework to understand patterns of actions in a particular relationship (de Heredia, 2017). This can therefore suggest that everyday resistance is ultimately carried out in the safety of anonymity and at the lowest risk of repression.

As Haynes and Prakash (1992) have argued, power and resistance are intricately entangled with each other. Resistance is shaped by both restrictions forced by those in power and consistently provokes power to react. The response that is sometimes received from those in power does not necessarily yield the results which the resisters would have liked, and this sometimes brings about negative consequences. Sinwell (2012) who writes on resistance in post-Apartheid South Africa has an opposing view, who stated that the weapons of the weak are collective and noticeable by the public.

### **2.8.2 Everyday forms of resistance**

While there are different forms of resistance, authors such as (Mutekwe, 2019), (Baaz et al., 2017), (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013) who write on everyday resistance show that there are quite many similarities on how everyday resistance occurs also posing differing views on the concept. Everyday resistance is said to be a practice of how people act or behave in their everyday lives to challenge power and bring about the change they desire to see or have their demands met. That said, Vinthagen & Johansson (2013) argued that it is highly unlikely for people to notice that resistance is taking place until change happens and many people do not recognise everyday resistance as resistance because it is not done in a conventional way such as protests or other forms of rebellious acts. They also further argue that everyday resistance becomes a part of one's life socially even though the acts of resistance do not seem overt. The fact that these forms of resistance are covert makes them more significant because they are

considered to be the “bedrock”, “grass-root” and “genuine” as they express what workers truly feel (R. Cohen, 2007).

More so, the argument also remains that one of the shortcomings of everyday resistance is that people end up labelling too many other expressions as resistance even those that are not necessarily meant as resistance but rather people trying to express their differences and individual perceptions.

These narratives seem to suggest the dispersed and disguised nature of everyday resistance, or otherwise, it is seemingly invisible. In support of the foregoing, Vinthagen & Johansson (2013), states that everyday resistance appears to be “quiet, dispersed, disguised or otherwise seemingly invisible”.

## **2.9 Theoretical framework**

Theories about resistance are not usually the same but they seem to agree that resistance is an act of opposition where it is observed that everyday resistance is a practice which is historically embedded in power relations which are not “separated, dichotomous or independent” of both individual and collective level (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Furthermore, there has been growing concern with the farmworkers’ resistance question. More specifically, studies such as one by Schneider and Neirderle (2010), have been concerned with the forms of (individual and collective) resistance undertaken by farmworkers as a response to the pressures created by the exploitative dominant socio-technological regime in the agricultural sector. Exploitation is of many forms, and in the context of this study, exploitation is a form of modern slavery where victims of labour exploitation are forced to work for nothing, low wages or a wage that is kept by their "owner". Therefore, the exploitation of farmworkers seems to be observed in many parts of

Africa. In South Africa for instances, it is reported that wages earned by farmhands and labourers are widely regarded as low relative to what workers require to sustain a decent standard of living (Visser & Ferrer, 2015).

The proposed study is framed in the theory of resistance - weapons of the weak as coined by Scott, (1985). According to Scott (1985), the weapons of the weak are manifested through everyday resistance to exploitation which may include "foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage" amongst many others. It is noteworthy to mention that the 'weapons of the weak' are organised as a collective but rather on an individual basis which seemingly does not uproot power and "class dynamics" (Mutekwe, 2019). He further mentions a couple of other forms used by the Zimplats mine workers such as absenteeism, name-calling, desertions and resignations.

Furthermore, Scott's conceptualization of the weapons of the weak speaks of a form of class struggle because they require unstated cooperation among different marginalised groups, where this loose coordination relies on popular cultures of resistance (Tassadiq, 2018). To understand this more, we again refer back to Scott, (1985) conceptualisation of everyday resistance where, in his narratives, he seemed to argue that everyday resistance happens in other spaces and times or other relations. In this sense, it appears as silent, mundane, and ordinary acts that are normalized, in the sense of subordinate's acts that might undermine the power of those seen as the oppressor.

Notably, the conceptualisation of resistance is arguably found in Scott, (1987) narratives, where it is explicitly found that resistance forms an integral part of social life and therefore accepted as a norm. Because of the peasantry status of these workers who are highly under remunerated for their labour and exploited in other forms resistance thus becomes inevitable. In this case,

resistance should not strictly be seen as referring to physical and material protests in the streets but must be understood as the broader set of practices used by the dominated to contest those who make attempts to dominate them rising from an individual to a collective level (Willems, 2010). Not only are the circumstances that favour large-scale peasant uprisings comparatively rare, but when they do appear the revolts that develop are nearly always crushed unceremoniously (Scott, 1985). In this case, Scott's theory of the weapons of the weak seem to speak to the conditions of the farmworkers at Aussenkehr, these farmworkers form part of the marginalised group who do not own and control the means of production but offer their labour in maximising the profits for the capitalists.

For all these reasons, it occurred from the literature that most of the forms of resistance these workers take, stop well short of collective outright defiance (Scott, 1985). This, therefore, refers to the ordinary weapons of the relatively powerless group. Hence, this literature speaks to the marginalised nature of the Aussenkehr farmworkers whose value is only important as long as production is concerned. In addition, it has been objectively argued that the activities grouped under the term everyday resistance hardly merit attention, this may be because these acts represent trivial coping mechanisms that are either non-political forms of self-help or at best pre-political (Scott, 1985). Likewise, the diversity of form of resistance at Aussenkehr is not at all visible, as such it is hard to make out the form of resistance these communities take. It is important to note that although these workers at Aussenkehr may to a certain extent be poor they are not peasants even though in the medieval times' agricultural workers were considered to be poor but also that a peasant was considered "robbers, villain and looter" (Edelman, 2013 pg. 3). Although Scott (1985) may be referring to the weapons of the weak being mostly for completely powerless peasants, the workers at Aussenkehr are not peasants because they do earn an income

that is a certain threshold in terms of being able to afford some basic need but does endure poverty by not being able to afford to pay for all the basic needs. Therefore, understanding everyday forms of resistance without reference to the intentions, ideas, and language of those human beings who practice it may not always be an easy task, (Scott, 1985), everyday resistance acts are hard to capture since they rely on contextual tactics, opportunities, individual choices, temporality and it is shifting, moving and transient. Otherwise, the nature of resistance is greatly influenced by the existing forms of labour control and by beliefs about the probability and severity of retaliation.

“The weapons of the weak are invariably quiet, disguised and anonymous.” (O’Brien & Li, 2006), using these weapons allow them to go unnoticed, they, by all means, try to avoid attracting attention to themselves and at the same time, the weak try to bring change to their situations. It is further noted that everyday resistance does no damage to powerful figurative formations as would overt resistance, everything is kept the way it was found (McGee, 2017). How does everyday resistance bring about change if it is unnoticed? Well, the answer lies within to what extent these everyday resisters ‘challenge’ power by using their weapons daily and see to what those in power react, which in turn calls for a change in tactic (McGee, 2017).

## **2.10 Chapter Summary**

Firstly, the issues of exploitation and how it unfolds was discussed using Marx and various authors to express why exploitation exists in today’s societies as it does. Wolff (1999) argued that exploitation is not as Marx presents it, rather it is individuals who have exploitable conditions, and Marx presents exploitation in a different light. The forms in which exploitation

takes place is also presented above. Secondly, the governing laws on workers and farmworkers are also presented, these include laws on wages, occupational health, and safety, living and working conditions etc. Thirdly, resistance is also presented, this includes the different forms of resistance, how and why it takes place and a justification on the use of everyday resistance. These are some of the main themes from which the sub-themes were deduced. The review of the literature further points to a relationship between exploitation and the forms of resistance and their overall relations to the living and working conditions of workers. Based on the foregoing, it is right to argue that the literature on the working and living conditions of workers highlights the types of exploitative mechanism which these workers are exposed to in their different spaces.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The study was conducted at Aussenkehr farm situated along the banks of the Orange River, which form the boundaries between Namibia and South Africa. Aussenkehr is in the Karasburg constituency of the !Karas Region in southern Namibia. In this study, a total of 29 participants were interviewed. During the research more males (17) participated in the study, compared to females (12). The existence of the farm has created employment for an estimated 11,500 farmworkers (The Namibian, 2019). It has an estimated area of 3000 ha and is home to approximately 20,000 inhabitants (Bosman, Botha & Brunette, 2018). The population has increased over the past few years. Where in 2012 the population of Aussenkehr was estimated to range between 5000 and 15 000 respectively (Munyika, Kongo & Kimwaga, 2014), and more people were expected to migrate to the area due to new irrigation development, the potential for job creation. The research was qualitative and made use of a case study.

### **3.2 Research design**

This study used a qualitative methodology and a case study design. A case study was useful to the research because it provided more realistic responses which gave an in-depth insight into the daily lives and experiences of the workers. In contrast, results cannot be generalised to the entire population because the experiences vary according to the positions and different companies where one works, the experiences did not vary to a very large extent. For example, one would find that a grape farmworker who occupies a higher rank and makes more money lives in the

same dire situation as those who make less. The case study involved observations of the working and living conditions of the workers at Aussenkehr and semi-structured interviews with the workers. The research was only conducted in the settlement and not within the farms themselves, as permission was not granted. One of the managers for one of the farms stated “that they do not want to create competition for their farm as such they were not comfortable engaging permitting the researcher inside the farms.

### **3.3 Population**

A population is an entire group of which some of the information is required to be ascertained (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). The population for a research study may comprise groups of people defined in many ways, for example, coal mine workers, farm workers or university students. That said, the population for this study consisted of both permanent and seasonal farmworkers at Aussenkehr. According to the 2011 population census, the population of Aussenkehr is 4522 (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2011). However, the total population of the workers at Aussenkehr varies every year and at different times of the year. According to (Seibeb & Ndalaon, 2019), the total population of the workers could reach a total of 11 500, consisting of both permanent and seasonal workers during the harvest season. The population is said to grow annually as some of the workers interviewed mentioned that the population could be between 35 000 and 50 000.

### **3.4 Sample and sampling techniques**

Sampling is the segment of the population that is selected to be part of the research or otherwise referred to as a subset or representation of the population (Bryman, 2012). The total sample for this research was 29 workers, of which 16 were permanent (9 males and 7 females) and 13 seasonal workers (8 males and 5 females). Accessing the permanent workers was difficult mostly because they had occupied higher ranks and were not able to speak freely as the casual workers did. This was also the case for many female participants who sometimes held back during the interviews. Regardless of the aforementioned, this sample size the study reached saturation and hence there were repetitions. The researcher made use of clustered sampling technique, this sampling technique was used to cluster the workers according to the company (seeing as there are 9 companies) they work for and convenience sampling was employed from each cluster. Cluster sampling allows the identification of clusters of participants representing the population and their inclusion in the sample group, on the other hand, convenience sampling allows the researcher to select participants based on availability (Bryman, 2016). For this study, the participants were selected based on availability and willingness to participate.

### **3.5 Research instruments**

Two instruments were used to conduct this research which are interview guides and an observation guide.

### **3.6 Procedure**

The first step was to identify the appropriate setting where the interviews will take place and how observation will be undertaken. The interviews took approximately 1 hour at the research

participant's most preferred site. At the end of each day, all interviews and observation notes were transcribed and coded to generate new reflections for the additional questions of the subsequent day.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

The research made use of thematic analysis to make sense of the data. The thematic analysis identifies patterns and themes which seem complex and simplifies and explains them. Through thematic analysis, the data was organised into themes for better management and presentation. The researcher transcribed and descriptively coded all the data collected in the field, for analysis. Atlas Ti. qualitative software was used to analyse the data.

### **3.8 Research Ethics**

The researcher sought ethical clearance from the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Committee before conducting the research. Additionally, participants' confidentiality was protected by using coding and they were granted the right to withdraw from the interview at any time with no negative consequences. No participants were forced into the study, permission and consent was requested from the participants. To protect their jobs, the participants were engaged outside of their work environment (at a non-disclosed location, away from the farm) or in their homes, in the settlement. The interviews did in no way interfere with the workers working schedules as all interviews were scheduled during their free time and outside their workspace either in the settlement or 10 kilometres outside the farm. By doing so, it means that their identity remains anonymous by applying the above-mentioned strict measure. The lack of

interest from the side of the managers has warranted their exclusion from the study. In the end, the research data will be kept in a locked safe for safe-keeping for five years and will be destroyed (shredded) after that period. When using a recorder, the researcher sought permission from the participants and/or resort to note-taking if participants are not comfortable with recording. All primary and secondary sources will be acknowledged to avoid plagiarism.

### **3.9 Chapter Summary**

Chapter Three focused on the research methodology that this study employed. A qualitative design and case study approach were used. The population and sample size of this study were explicitly stipulated. This chapter also speaks of the instruments that were used to collect data. Interview guides were used to collect data in the semi-structured interviews. All the secondary data was taken from books, journal articles, research reports and newspaper articles where no academic literature was available. Data analysis techniques that were employed to analyse the data has also been clearly stated.

## **Chapter 4: Results and Discussions**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with the presentation and analysis of the results. The data is presented in descriptive narrations. Primarily, the results show the in-depth characteristics of Aussenkehr of how the available amenities/ social services provided are perceived by the workers and identifying the different forms of exploitation that exist. This chapter further presents an overview of how the workers resist exploitative conditions as well as the different resistance strategies used by the workers towards exploitative conditions. The roles of social institutions (church, family) in fostering resistance were also assessed. Based on the demographics presented in the results section, two obvious observations can be made. Firstly, male participants outnumber the female ones, this is because of a lack of willingness from the side of the women to participate in the study mostly because of the fear of losing their jobs but also because male workers are more than female workers. This is explained by the type of work that is done on the farm which is described by several workers as being a heavy job. The only work that is bearable for the women is that which is done during harvesting, either packing, stock taking or folding boxes.

Another clear indication of the demographics is that most of the workers are migrants from other parts of the country who make up most of the workforce on the grape farm. The NAMAs [sic], despite them being from the south, seem to represent a small portion of the workforce. In the results section, the issue of affiliation as per origin of one's clan was one of the issues that came

out strongly. As much as the participants who are from the NAMA [sic] ethnic group complained of tribalism [sic] other participants state that the reason why they are often excluded even though they are originally from /Karas is because of alcoholism. It has been stated that after the people from this ethnic group get paid, they do not show up to work for at least one week because of the overuse of alcohol. These above-mentioned issues have led to solidarity amongst workers but also segregation. Belonging to a certain ethnic group could mean two things; one you are guaranteed to get a job and two the chances of you getting a job are slim. The aspect of solidarity comes in when one fellow worker helps their unemployed friend to secure a job at the farm however this practice is done along with ethnic groupings. In later sections, the reader will be able to see how this occurs that management puts a certain ethnic group in charge who can be loyal to the management and monitor the other workers. In turn, other ethnic groups miss out on the opportunity of getting a job. There are issues of ethnic segregation that need to be addressed.

The results further show that most of the participants have not gone beyond grade 10 level, with only two that have attained tertiary qualification. Notably, acquiring a job on the grape farm was not determined by the level of education, this is because the work is very general and thus qualification was not a prerequisite to employment. The study also found that those who originate from Okavango make up most people working on the grape farm, occupying managerial and other leadership positions.

Description of the study area

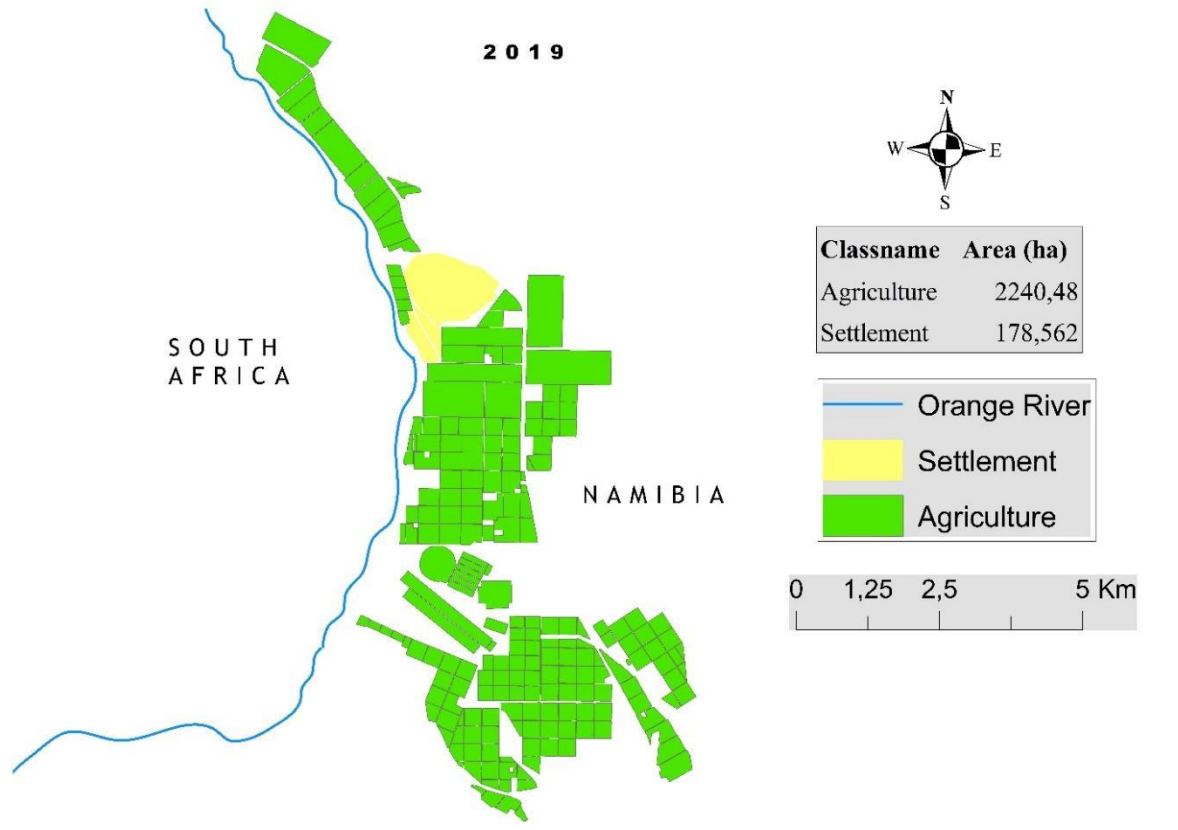


Figure 1. Map of Aussenkehr and settlement (Source: Nangolo, 2019).

From afar, the view of Aussenkehr seems to suggest a rather moderate type of settlement. However, the reality of life struck sharply upon the arrival of the researcher. The landscape of what is known as Aussenkehr is encroached by a variety of makeshift houses made of reeds, upon enquiry it was discovered that the reeds are collected on the banks of the Orange River. These reeds' houses make up most of the housing structures in Aussenkehr. The housing setup did not seem to follow any form of town or village planning. More observation led to the conclusion that the settlement resembles what looks like a remote area with a typical informal setup. However, only a few houses were made of corrugated iron sheets. These makeshift houses are surrounded by the many grape farm companies covering large tracts of land. The settlement covers 178,562 ha and the agricultural covers 2240.48 ha of land. The terrain did not

favour the type of housing structure, as this did not present stability, many of the houses were constructed on steep slopes and looked like they would collapse should any natural disaster occur.

The settlement lacks sanitation facilities and people make use of every available space to help themselves. Despite the global call to address water supply and sanitation, Aussenkehr is still one of the places in Namibia that is least developed, this is even though the area is a grape production hub. The lack of sanitation and poor water supply, does not only expose the people working on the farms to various viruses, but the young children are more at risk of being affected, this is because their daily social activities are around the areas blanketed by faeces and other unsanitary deposits. Those who play do not necessarily take the precaution of where they play and end up playing in dumping sites and waste islands found around the community which poses a serious health hazard. Furthermore, the water provided is not purified and is supplied from the Orange River. This can cause waterborne diseases.



*Figure 2 Figure 2. Tractor with trailer used to transport workers to the farms (Source: Tjitombo, 2020).*

The figure above shows the mode of transport for some workers of selected companies. However, many of the workers were observed walking to work every morning as early as 06:00 and every evening after work at 17h00 returning from work. Despite this observation, it has been established that most companies provide transportation for their employees.

In the settlement, there is a shopping centre with a few shops that seem to serve the needs of the people who reside in the area. There is a sub-police station however, the main police station is found in Karasburg, a town located about 192 km northeast of Aussenkehr. There is also a primary school, a clinic with about six nurses and a social worker, and a few churches. It was further observed that the clinic is always very full. One morning, the researcher observed that patients seeking medical attention at the clinic are issued with numbers, and those who are unfortunate enough to not be attended to that day will have to come back another day and still be issued with a waiting number. If patients wanted assistance they would have to be at the clinic as early as 5 am to join the long lines, if they are to be assisted that day.

There are also a few local trading businesses such as bars and small convenient shops, other trades include the sales of dried beans, spinach, and mopanes worms all of which are products from northern Namibia. Most of the farmworkers originate from northern Namibia and bring along edible goods for sale to complement their income/livelihoods.

It has been found that not everyone in Aussenkehr works on the grape farms, some are unemployed and are involved in informal fishing in the Orange River, with a hope of a successful catch to make a living. More so, every morning, job seekers gather in front of the

different grape farms hoping to be employed, sometimes the grape farm owners come to the shopping centre seeking to recruit extra casual workers and if you are lucky that day, you will be picked and taken to the grape farm to start work.

Poverty is evident in the settlement, at the time of data collection many household members complained of hunger, and at many households that were visited, there was no evidence of cooking. This may explain why many people complained of hunger.

The community is diverse and mainly comprises those from the central north and northeastern part of Namibia. This diversity is not without its challenges, and there seems to be a conflict between the different ethnic groups, the major contributing factor to this conflict is due to favouritism around employment. With the most dominant ethnic group in the company having more influence on which ethnic group stands a better chance of being employed. On the other hand, transport to Aussenkehr is not cheap either, the bus operators found there said, the transport cost from Northern Namibia for example to Aussenkehr is about N\$1000 one way.

The settlement is divided into two locations known as area 5 and area 6. While Area 5 is predominantly occupied by the workers who originate from the north-eastern region, Area 6 is predominantly occupied by workers from the central northern part of Namibia. It is found that the workers from the northeastern part of the country were the first to arrive in Aussenkehr and they settled in area 5, it has since been associated with them. The other workers came a bit later and settled in area 6. There are differences between the two areas, while area 5 is much more organised and cleaner and dominated by reed houses, area 6 is unorganised, dominated by houses made of corrugated iron, has more people doing business and owning shops, and is largely on hilltops with unfavourable terrain. The living arrangement can also be observed concerning the type of employment. Getting a job in one of the grape companies is determined by who you

know and what ethnic group you come from. If for example, the management is made mostly of Damara/ Nama [sic] ethnic groups then most of the recruits will be from that ethnic group. Majority if not all of the workforce that works on the vineyard are black Namibians and the management is mostly made of a different race. Whoever the issue of race has not had major implications as did the ethnic segregation amongst the workers who work on the vineyards.

#### **4.2 Aussenkehr community**



Aussenkehr is a settlement of grape farms with workers having migrated from different parts of the country. The community consists of diverse groups from different parts of the country. The settlement is uniform as the construction of the homes are the same but there exist social and ethnic divisions in the Aussenkehr community. This can only be found through observation and living in the community. Apart from the division in the settlement, many of the workers in leadership and management positions mostly originate from the Northeastern part of Namibia, followed by the ethnic group from the central northern part of Namibia. In their response, the research participants stress the lack of social cohesion within the community. The lack of social cohesion and ethnic tension could be linked to competition for jobs. The research found that there is a lack of trust amongst the community members. As evidence of limited social cohesion, one of the research participants shared that:

*“We do not communicate well as a community; you are just on your own and you do not get a job if someone does not help you. Everything here is just a problem” (Participant 17,2020,*

*September 21).*

Some research participants have indicated that they have not seen significant changes in the settlement for the years they have lived there. They view the service providers in the area as below standard. Participants also express their lack of satisfaction regarding the state of Aussenkehr. They are of the view that the settlement has been neglected, isolated, and excluded from development that unlike other parts of the country. The participants' highlighted the lack of satisfaction with the poor state of the settlement. Two of the research participants shared that:

*“Concerning the change, when I was here before, the place was not really up to standard so, there is a little bit of change here” (Participant 15, 2020, September 19)*

*“If you go countrywide people do not know what Aussenkehr is, it is like an isolated place. It is like an island on its own in terms of development and government intervention. At least there are employment opportunities, and it feeds the whole world” (Participant 8, 17 September 2020)*

When it comes to land ownership, farmworkers' tenure is not secured as they live on the land temporarily, and they could be told to evacuate the place at any time. The land tenure issue for these farmworkers is not only exclusive to Namibia, In South Africa for example there are reports of farm owners resorting to illegal tactics to force farm worker's dwellers out of the land, this includes cutting off water and electricity (Visser & Ferrer, 2015). More so, some of the participants say they have not seen any changes in the conditions in the area, this explains the types of housing structures in which many of the farmworkers live. Although more reed houses have emerged over time. Some of the participants got used to the conditions and instead of complaining, they focus on making an income. They indicated that the situation is bad, but they

just live with it. Some have indicated that, due to the nature of employment, they are forced to build only temporary structures with reeds from the riverbeds, this explains how the use of silence or accommodation is strategies against exploitation. Similarly, writings by Hollander and Einwohner (2004) indicated that silence can be a form of resistance or otherwise the workers or those that feel oppressed or exploited may choose not to take any action, a form of resistance referred to as accommodation. As a result, the workers are forced to rent in the reed houses, while others are lucky enough to stay with their families.

The participants also expressed a lack of adequate health facilities in the settlement. The available health facilities do not meet the demand from the ever-increasing population. Some research participants express that lack of space to build a housing structure has led them to live with relatives. Below are some of the narrations from some of the research participants on the living conditions at the settlement who stated that:

*“Here, things are just like that, is not like life is good anyways is just that we are here to make the small that we can” (Participant 9, 2020, September 18)*

*“I do not have my own space but, it is okay there where I stay. The reason we live in these housing structures is that we cannot build permanent structures because we are not sure if you will lose your job or not, but we live in these conditions” (Participant 26, 2020, September 22).*

*“I am renting here. The rental fee is N\$300.00 per month but you find those that cost” N\$250.00 per month” (Participant 5, 2020, September 17).*

*“I am staying with my uncle. It is not easy to get your own space to build but I can try”*

*(Participant 22, 2020, September 20).*

These quotes from the participants explain the struggle of living and working in Aussenkehr stressing the lack of land tenure ship. These conditions are also reported in other countries with similar occurrences. For example, Visser & Ferrer (2015) reports that Off-farm housing presents a different set of challenges for farmworkers, including the challenge of safely commuting to and from work, and further suggesting the poor-quality housing quality of the farmworkers.





*Figure 4 The type of housing structures in the settlement- Area 5 (Source: Tjitombo, 2020).*



*Figure 5. The type of housing structures in the settlement in area 6 (Source: Tjitombo, 2020).*

### **4.3 Farm setup and owner interaction with workers**

Aussenkehr is divided into what seems like three parts, the informal settlement, this is where the majority of the settlers live, in makeshift housing constructed out of reeds, the semi formalised setup is mostly comprised of corrugated iron sheet houses, this is also where many of the employees live, the formal setup with appropriate housing, and in this part, there live permanently employed people mostly the managers, the nurses, and some police officers. Otherwise, most parts of the area are reserved for grape farming and production and the different farms. Several grape-producing companies are renting on these farms. Some of the grape production companies are government-owned, otherwise, the majority of the grape production is privately owned.

During field interviews, information recorded from the participants suggests inconsistencies with regards to the numbers of grape farm companies on the farms are in Aussenkehr, some say there are 10 farms, others say there are 7 and some just know of five farms. During data collection, the following farms have been referred to by the research participants, Black power, Frontier, Cape Orchard Company (COC), Silverland, Namibia Development Cooperation (NDC), ORVI, Solar, and Exotic. In terms of governance structure at the farm, it has been found that there are general managers, managers, foremen, supervisors, and lastly team leaders.

Some participants indicated that they have never met the owners of the company, while others said they have met with the production manager but never communicated to them. Some have never met the farm owner but have heard about him. One of the participants stated that the owner of the farm only speaks to the management and does not engage the workers. Those workers who are part of leadership sometimes could meet and engage with the owner of the farm. In regards to

interaction with farm owners and senior management of the farms, some of the participants shared that

*“I have only met the head manager, the white man, but I have never been in communication with him” (Participant 15, 2020, September 21).*

*“I have never met them, we only see the production managers sometimes” (Participant 21, 2020, September 20).*

*“They normally just come to check how their business is running and they go to the office or the management to have a meeting and once they are done, they just turn back and leave. They never talk to their people just to see how they are doing; they just drive by” (Participant 3, 2020, September 16).*

To a lesser extent, some farmworkers communicate with the farm owner on a personal level as well as on a personal level. However, this is only limited to the workers in management positions.

One of the research participants who represent the workers when there are management meetings narrated that

*“We talk to him in the community and even in the meetings because I am part of the leadership” (Participant 23, 2020, September 21).*

#### **4.3.1 Available social institutions**

The table below shows the number of social institutions available at the settlement.

1	Clinic
2	Police station
3	Churches (Roman Catholic, ELCIN, AGS and Seventh-day Adventist)
4	Primary school

*Table 1: Social institutions in Aussenkehr (Source: Tjitombo, 2020).*

Although there are several social institutions in Aussenkehr, the farmworkers feel that these available social institutions do not provide sufficient services to the community. One of the participants for example stated that

*“No! The clinic is small, slow attention to patients, the police are also just there, they do not do anything. But the church is helpful” (Participant 2, 2020, September 16).*



*Figure 6. Clinic at Aussenkehr (Source: Tjitombo, 2020).*

#### **4.3.2 Access to health, sanitation, and services**

The researcher observed the lack of clean drinking water in the area, the water is pumped directly from the river into the pipelines for these residences to consume. Another important observation was how completely dark the place becomes after the sun has gone down. There is no electricity in the settlement except for at the police station, clinic, and shopping centre and as a result, most people make use of firewood for energy, to heat, and cook. The use of fire as an alternative to any other form of energy is the occurrence of frequent fires which burn to ashes sometimes up to 30 houses at once because of how sensitive reeds are to fire.

#### **4.4 Social services and housing**

Some say when they first came things were bad because there were no services in the settlement. They spoke on how they would travel to Noordoewer, a small settlement, 50 km south of

Aussenkehr to access social services. Some feel the place is becoming better as there are now a few social services available. Housing in Aussenkehr is not easily accessible because the workers are on a private farm but at least the farm owner gave them land on which they can build and live.

*“When I first came here, there was no clinic or health institution only in Noordoewer, there was no tarred road in terms of public transport one used to move on Thursday and Friday. When we wanted to come here the transport only used to stop in Keetmanshoop from there you need to get hike from a truck up to Noordoewer” Participant 10, 2020, September 18).*

*“Yes, there are many things that became better, if you go that side you will see what they call a town. That situation is coming [sic] when we make a meeting to develop at Aussenkehr. We are the ones mobilising for the people to coming [sic] together to write a letter to the Boer”*

*(Participant 23, 2020, September 21).*

Some participants have indicated that the area has some basic services such as the clinic and police station. Many of the participants stressed how the available institutions cannot provide sufficient services and apart from the available social services, there is a lack of other basics such as water and sanitation. Although many participants stated that the development found where they live was brought about by them, it is the responsibility of the farm owner to provide basic services because the farm belongs to him. The participants stated that the farm is under the control of the farm owner and any development on the farm must be approved by him and there is a need for the farm owner to work with the government so that these provisions are made. The quotes below speak to research participants’ perceptions of the available services.

*“Here we have a police station, a clinic there, and a small primary school. One thing here is that you will only see the police when there is an incident of a man who beat up a woman, otherwise, they are not active at all. With regards to the clinic, they help with the limited capacity that they have. We do not have an ambulance” (Participant 19, 2020, September 20).*

*“Everything we have here we build it on our own, we develop our property by ourselves. We do not have a toilet; we must go behind the mountain to help ourselves. Even the taps that we have here was brought by our company, it is not everyone or every company that provides water for their workers” (Participant 28, 2020 September 24)*

*“Here we have very few services, like that small clinic, a police station, and a primary school. We have a security office there as well. The offices here are controlled by the farm owner, he decides what must be and what must not be” (Participant 29, 2020, September 24).*

*“One thing I must tell you is that you see those tapes right there that is dirty water straight from the river. Oh! The government and the companies must work together to bring about the change here. This is a struggle, as you see there is no electricity, and there are no toilets. But I think it is the government, even Minister of Land, Utoni Nujoma was here” (Participant 26, 2020, September 22).*

The issue of social service delivery in Aussenkehr has been going on for as long as the farm has existed and the call for government intervention is ongoing. Earlier in 2020 the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation, Utoni Nujoma visited the settlement and engaged stakeholders at Aussenkehr (Cloete, 2020). During the minister’s visit, workers aired all their concerns, expressing how they feel about the overall conditions on the farm. The provision

of social services is a basic human need, which acts as a social safety net for people living in any settlement. The lack of these social services impedes development at the very basic level as well as affects health and livelihood. In this study, the results showed that the grape farmworkers lack the appropriate service provision. These grape farmworkers live in some of the harshest environments and are sheltered in makeshift housing, mostly made of reeds without electricity, clean drinking water, and sanitation, these findings are concurrent to those reported by Hamutenya, (2018), whose observation suggest that workers at Aussenkehr are languishing in poverty and live-in makeshift houses (reed houses) without decent sanitation. The reason for this poor provision of services can be explained by several factors.

Even though some companies provide tractors to take water to their employee's homes daily, some of these employees do not get water because the water is brought when they are at work. The only option is for them to stay without water until the weekend when they are home or walk to the community tap that is far for some. In regards to water, some of the participants' state that

*“I want to emphasise the suffering of people in this place. We have water issues here where the water is available but the water that we are supplied with from the farm owners is very bad, we get sick from using this water. There is no peace here, we hate each other so I do not think there is any change at all here. Here people are being abused, everything you hear is work, work, work, and work! Tribalism is high here” (Participant 19, 2020, September 20).*

The study found that the settlement emerged as a result of grape production along the Orange River, providing jobs for many migrant workers from all corners of the country. The results show that the desperation to live and work in Aussenkehr has resulted in many people building

temporary shelters because they could not afford to build appropriate housing and may also have strained the possibility of government extensions and the farm owner to provide appropriate services.

More so, the study found that both the government and the owner of the farm fails to provide the required social services. These findings are supported by Cloete, (2019), who highlighted the slow response from the government to addressing the housing situation in communities. This failure is due in part, to the fact that the farm is under private ownership, which therefore makes it difficult for the government to provide development to the people in the settlement.

Other factors that are found to hinder the provision of social service to the settlement are because the farm owner controls whatever happens on the farm, and any development envisioned to take place on settlement needs his approval for it to be realised. This is an observation that leads to the conclusion that these grape farmworkers are socially segregated and this is explained by the living conditions of these workers. A function of exploitation, the condition further explains how these workers are exploited. Despite the grape production industry attracting international markets and generating considerable income, the findings of this study showed that the companies and the farm owner care less about the welfare of the grape farmworkers.

The results showed that the farmworkers have shared a rather negative outlook of the social services in Aussenkehr. In their response, they have shown overwhelming concern regarding the hygiene and sanitation in Aussenkehr. The concern is attributed to the fact that these farmworkers have no access to toilets, clean running water, and sanitation, frequently making use of the available spaces around their makeshift houses as toilet facilities. Similar reports by Devereux (2019), also found grape farmworkers to experience poor hygienic environments and lack of sanitary provision. In many cases the use of toilets was only possible at night, to avoid

being seen by other people since the area is an open space. However, this poses a threat to women, who fear sexual harassment, these findings are further supported by Devereux (2019), who found that women who use the bush are at risk of sexual harassment or worse, and for this reason, they try to walk in groups when they need to use the bush. In Aussenkehr, the issue of hygiene and sanitary provision is visible throughout the surroundings, which suggests that the need for social services provision needs no further emphasis. This highlights the fact that farm workers' needs are seldom addressed and indicates the overall ill-treatment of these farmworkers by their employers and lack of supporting institutions.

Even though some government institutions, like the police, the clinic, and public primary school are providing social services to the people, their presence in the community is less impactful. This study found that the clinic cannot provide sufficient healthcare to a growing Aussenkehr population, it is further found that the provision of education services is only limited to a primary school. However, the police are found to only serve its mandate of providing safety and security, the role of the police is limited in that the company security guards enjoy more respect than the police. On the contrary, the study found that there are other social amenities in Aussenkehr found in the newly built shopping centre, however, the convenience shop (spar) is too expensive, and many people are not able to afford to buy from the shop.

In the context of social services and housing, the study proved that workers in Aussenkehr lack access to basic social services. This proves a challenge to a community that is ever-growing as more migrant workers flock to the settlement in search of opportunity. Lastly, the study proved that low wages and land tenure issues meant that people live in makeshift housing, suggesting that the housing conundrum is due to two reasons, (1) job insecurity, has pushed the people to only construct temporary shelter, (2) Land tenure ship, the complications on land ownership

present uncertainty for these farmworkers as they fear eviction at the discretion of the farm owner. These factors are what make the housing situation in Aussenkehr unsustainable.

#### **4.5 Job specialisation, education, and job training**

Although grape farm work is a complex process, many of the casual and permanent workers have indicated that the work is quite general for them. The participant also indicated that there is no need for special skills to do the work as they received minimal training because the type of work they do is very simple. Some have even stated that they have not received any training at all, but they can attend to the tasks assigned to them. Most of the workers stated that they are general workers who do not specialise, they can do all types of work required of them. Two participants stated that

*“The training received is very general, it is mainly about the type of activity you are doing in the field. If it is to cut grapes, they will show you how to cut the grapes, if it is to be pruned, they will show you how to prune it.” Participant 19, 2020 September, 20).*

*“There is no specialisation, you just do the work that you are given. It is very much general work, there no need for training” Participant 21, 2020, September 20).*

One of the aspects that came out strongly is that the job does not require any form of qualification unless you work in the office. There is no discrimination of what their level of education is. Some participants described how it is easy to be employed, stating that

*“This job does not require qualification or experience, because it is just general work. So, what they do is they make you sign a contract” (Participant 15, 2020, September 21).*

*“We do everything, even we the permanent workers we also do the general work, we can pick stones, water the trees we can do everything” (Participant 4, 2020, September 16).*

On the aspect of education, some participants narrated that the company they work for has capacity development programmes, where employees can complete their studies and the company would cover the cost, however, the time to do so remains a challenge as there are no institutions for higher learning close to Aussenkehr and it would be impossible to stay away for work to pursue studies. One of the participants stated that.

*“We had a development programme in our company where you study on your own and when you finish the company will refund you after you finish” (Participant 10, 2020, September 18).*

In terms of the level of education, most of the research participants have secondary education, and only a few had primary school level of education and two had no formal education at all, while two had tertiary education. This is against reports that suggest that education levels amongst farmworkers are low, which means that many farmworkers have completed relatively few years of formal schooling (NAU, 2019). Most of the research participants come from the four central north regions of Omusati, Ohangwena, Oshikoto, and Oshana. The other regions with a high number of representations in terms of the farmworkers are the Kavango East and Kavango West. Erongo and Kunene are also represented. While the farm is located in !Karas region, workers from the region are less represented.

#### **4.6 Conceptualising exploitation**

Globally, the agricultural workforce is drawn mostly from the poorest groups in the society and this includes migrant workers who do not have the protection of the law. These commercial

capitalist practices in agriculture made their way during the twentieth century through methodological force to persuade the black Africans to do away with their way of living and go into wage labour which is low-paying (Hall, Wisborg, Shirinda & Zamchiya, 2013). In terms of methodological force, it is important to understand that wage labour came as a result of the call to end the slave trade and in turn introduce a system that allowed Africans to exchange their labour for whatever the colonial powers were will pay (Cooper, 1989). Cooper (1989) further speaks to the European indictment that was opposed by antislavery publicists which paved the way for the introduction of wage labour as “making labour-power, not the person of the labourer, into a marketable commodity meant more than abolishing a legal category or status, but creating new cultural and social forms, tasks that involved a level of intimate involvement in African communities that British and French bureaucracies could not attain.” (p. 745 -746). The following section speaks to the different forms of exploitation of the workers at Aussenkehr, below and exploitation spectrum which summarises these are presented in order of severity.

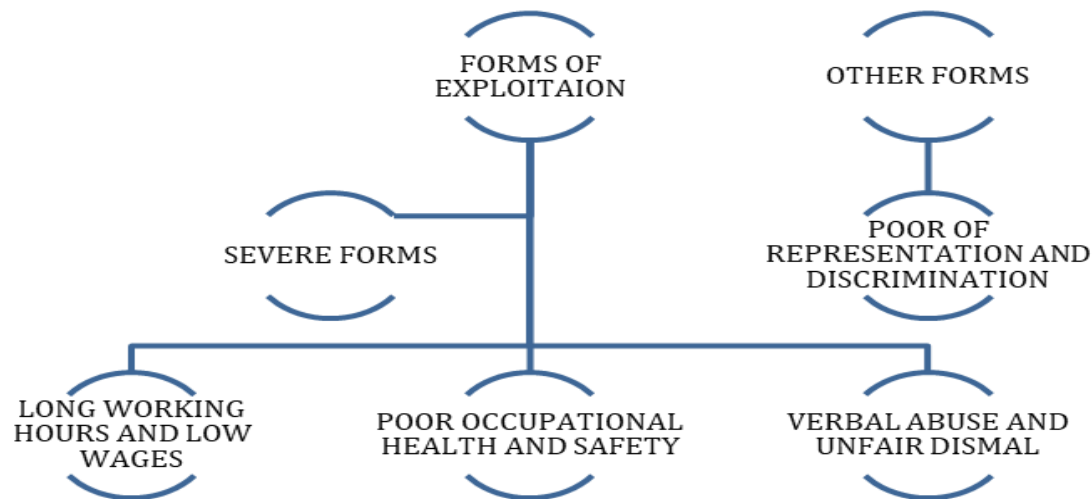


Figure 7. Exploitation spectrum (Source: Tjitombo, 2020).

The forms of exploitation are varied and experienced in different depending on the situation and context. The working poor is the most vulnerable to different forms of exploitation mostly at the hands of their employers. In this study, the following different forms of exploitation have been documented.

#### **4.7 Different forms of exploitation of farmworkers**

The exploitation of workers is a global concern. In Namibia and South Africa, farmworkers constitute one of the most exploited and neglected categories of the working poor. This study looked at how grape farm workers in Aussenkehr experience the different forms of exploitation as they may exist. The study found that grape farmworkers have experienced and continue to experience various forms of exploitation, ranging from abuse, low wages and long working hours, lack of representation, control, and poor living conditions amongst other things. This finding is consistent with those by eBaron and Gore (2020), who found that workers experience four primary forms of exploitation, such as Illegal low income, indebtedness, and economic coercion, further stating that workers report threats of dismissal and financial penalties. It is important to note that not every dismissal or financial is exploitative, it only becomes exploitative when workers are forced to do something they do not want, and they rebel which in turn causes management to threaten the worker. Similarly, when workers want to negotiate for better wages and management refuses while opting to hire new workers instead. Financial penalties should only apply in the case where workers purposely damage workplace properties otherwise paying fines for being late is exploitative especially in the case of Aussenkehr farmworkers who sometimes must walk to work. This study found that threat to dismissal was one of the main forms of exploitation that the workers faced at their workstations. Some of the participants interviewed narrated the suffering of people in the settlement. They stated that

service provision is very poor. They highlight how they are supplied with unclean water from the river. They also express their anger towards the abuse of farmworkers by the farm owners.

#### **4.7.1 The implications of exploitation**

The exploitation of the farmworkers has resulted in hate and competition amongst the farmworkers and other community members. They highlight how exploitation has removed peace from the community. Notably, some participants described how the black workers in leadership positions are also abusing others.

*“The fellow black supervisors are the ones that are causing tribalism in this area, the whites have no problem” Participant 20, 2020 September 19).*

During interviews, participants described their working experiences at different companies, including their feelings towards them. In their descriptions, the participants spoke of the ill-treatment by the employers. Several other participants agreed, further describing how they receive low wages, they are also concerned about the wage differences between the different companies. More of the same, others described the working conditions as abusive but are forced to work because they must make a living. Farmworkers are being exploited and they are aware of it. It is something they discuss among themselves, to their superiors, to the government, and at times over the radio intending to effect change. To the exploitative working conditions, some of the research participants stated that

*“The condition here is [sic] very bad, but you cannot leave work because you have a child in school. But sometimes the work is so much but the income is so low” (Participant 7, 2020 September 17).*

*“The companies pay different rates per day, the amount varies and some even pay much more than others” Participant 19, 2020 September 20).*

*“The conditions here are not good but, one has to live with it because there is nothing you can do. Aussenkehr is a small place and it allows people to be employed, but the employed [sic] comes with a lot of abuse” Participant 21, 2020 September 20).*

Some have worked in the grape farm for more than ten (10) years and they have never been promoted from casual to a permanent worker. While some respondents have lived in Aussenkehr for more than seven (7) years. And some have indicated that they have lived in the area for less than a year. And some of the participants have worked in Aussenkehr for twenty (20) years. About lack of upward mobility and change of employment status, one of the research participants stated that

*“I have been working here for 15 years. I am a casual worker I just used to come here for a season after that I close and go back to Erongo. For the last year two years I have been working continuously” (Participant 18, 2020, September 19).*

The forms of exploitation are varied and each person working at different companies experiences different types of exploitations. However, there was no significant difference in the response towards exploitation. Some of the participants felt they were subjected to longer working a process they described as a form of exploitation. Participants further expressed that they were

denied the right to a voice, and see this as a form of exploitation, further describing that the workers who stand up and influence others may lose their jobs. The workers also mentioned that they feel oppressed because they do not understand or know their rights thus making them susceptible to exploitation. Detailing the forms of exploitative conditions, some of the research participants stated that

*“The working conditions are different on every farm. There are some team leaders who speak bad words to the workers” (Participant 1, 2020 September 16).*

*“Even if you complain, nothing and they will tell you that you have signed already. If you complain, you will complain this year and then the other year they will blacklist you”  
(Participant 2, 2020 September 16).*

*“We are not satisfied with the working hours, because they do not care, if the work is not done or the work is a lot you just have to continue” (Participant 4, 2020, September 16).*

*“The hours are 9 sometimes we say it is okay but other times we say it is not okay because the law from the companies is bad. We start early and there is no breakfast because we work from 7 to 12 and then you have 30 minutes for lunch and you work again from 12 to 17h00 standing the whole day” Participant 23, 2020 September 21).*

*“Here even if you can see that you are being exploited, you have no choice but to work because where will you find some bread, you will just work and live with it” (Participant 9, 2020, September 18).*

In summary of the forms of exploitation as described by the workers above, one can categorise these forms as follows:

#### **4.7.2 Long working hours**

The workers who are exploited are required to work for a period of 9 to 11 hours and they are given only 30 minutes for their lunch break.

*“If you start at 7 am then you will knock off at 6 pm and if you start at 5:45 am. You will knock off at 4 pm. Sometimes you can work for 11 hours” (Participant 7, 2020, September 17).*

This study found that one of the exploitative mechanisms employed by the employers is longer working hours without appropriate breaks in between. This form of exploitation suggests that the employers have less regard for the workers' wellbeing and are only concerned about the capital they generate through the exploitation of the workers. Similarly, other studies have also recorded that workers are being exposed to longer working hours and viewed this a type of exploitation as physically draining the workers. Amnesty International (2014) reports that workers are required to work 10 hours a day and 28 days a month, sometimes with low wages, and experience poor health for being overworked.

Most of the workers are seasonal workers, and this study found that the seasonal workers are the ones most vulnerable to exploitation, they are forced to work as many hours as possible because they fear losing their source of income. In other studies, it has been found that conditions for seasonal workers are even worse Cohen and Hjalmarson, (2018) because these workers fear losing their jobs and they do not know their rights, they allow themselves to be exploited just to make a living.

More so, the form of exploitation goes beyond long working hours. This research found that although these workers are forced to work long hours, they are not remunerated per hour, but

they are paid a fixed fee per day, therefore workers receive low wages compared to the numbers of hours worked per day. This is heavily supported by Marx's (2007), the definition of exploitation, which stated that there exists exploitation when there is an unequal exchange for labour for the good. In this study, the results showed that workers are unable to afford anything with the income they earn meaning they work for a very minimum wage compared to the labour they put into making the product. This, therefore, translates into a very serious form of exploitation. Workers experiencing working and living in poor condition is not a new phenomenon, Likuwa (2014), writes of the hardships that these farmworkers go through including poor shelter, low and irregular wages, and long working hours.

Furthermore, because these grape companies were very much concerned with increased surplus-value, they needed to reduce the number of permanent workers and increase the number of casual workers, on whom they can exert control and easily exploit. This statement is supported by Milonakis (1993) who writes that Slave-owners increased the surplus product by increasing the exploitation of the slaves already in their possession. Although this study was not about slaves, the treatment of these grape farm workers could be linked to the historical slave trade. Notably, wages of unskilled workers in Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and other African countries have remained consistently low (Labour Resource and Research Institute, 2005).

Moreover, this study found that the workers' lack of education also contributed to them being exploited because they lack understanding with regards to labour law and their rights. This lack of education by the workers meant that employers could take advantage of desperate job seekers and decided how much they should earn. Similarly, Likuwa and Shiweda (2017), writes that workers had no right to decide on the type of employment or negotiate their salary. This lack of ability by the workers to negotiate their terms meant that the employers could exploit them.

### 4.7.3 Low wages

More so, the form of exploitation goes beyond long working hours. This research found that although these workers are forced to work long hours, they are not remunerated per hour, but they are paid a fixed fee per day, therefore workers receive low wages compared to the numbers of hours worked per day. This is heavily supported by Marx's (2007), the definition of exploitation, which stated that there exists exploitation when there is an unequal exchange for labour for the good. In this study, the results showed that workers are unable to afford anything with the income they earn meaning they work for a very minimum wage compared to the labour they put into making the product. This, therefore, translates into a serious form of exploitation.

Low wages were one of the components that came out strongly during the engagement with the workers. One of the participants said they are not consulted about the increment rates; they are just informed when presented with their new contracts. Workers complain that the management receives increment, but they are not involved in the hard physical work as demanded in the production sites, this is done by the workers who are poorly paid. The increment fluctuates between their salary and overtime payments. Companies also alternate in terms of how much they pay their workers, and they believe this is discussed among the different management, say some of the research participants. In regards to payments and salary increments, some of the research participants stated that

*“No, I do not know, at our company, we have different parts, they just pay us how they feel.*

*When it is time for increment, they do not tell you how much you are going to get, they just meet and decide, and then when they come to you with the contract you will see how it is written. In*

*this time the Boers also get but they do not do any work, we are the ones working very hard, if they decide its 10% it is just like that, if they give you an increment, the overtime salary becomes less. If the overtime money goes up, the increment on our salaries goes less” (Participant 5, 2020, September 17).*

*“No, not really, if for example, one company pays its workers more this year, the next year they will not, I think other companies will talk to him to reduce his payments” (Participant 7, 2020, September 17).*

#### **4.7.4 No appropriate occupational Health and safety measures**

Exploitation at the workplace goes beyond long working hours, low wages, verbal abuse, and lack of union representation, workers are forced to work without the provision of safety gear while operating under unsafe working environments. Some of the farmworkers have expressed concern about the health and safety at the workplace, stressing that the safety regulations at the companies are not fully implemented, in many cases, the workers operate without safety gears, which the company has failed to provide. They are only provided with gloves and goggles to cover their eyes. Otherwise, some stressed that they are only provided with safety gear during the harvest season, because a lot of inspections take place during harvest season, but apart from that they wear anything that they have. Sharing their experiences in terms of safety at the workplace, some research participants stated that

*“Yes, we have safety measures in the company. They will not give you gears though; you work with your own clothes” (Participant 29, 2020, September 24).*

*“You wear your own clothes there is no uniform” (Participant 3, 2020, September 16).*

*“Yes, what we get gloves and googles and scissors otherwise, we do not really get anything from these guys, we are just told to wear appropriate clothing and everything” (Participant 20, 2020, September 19).*

*“We wear anything we have. We only receive clothing during the harvest season when we work in the factories and storage units because during this time there is a lot of inspection that takes place, so we have to look good during this time” (Participant 1, 2020, September 16).*

It has been discovered by the researcher that seasonal workers experience the most difficult working conditions, not only are they working long hours with low wages, but they also work without gloves, overalls, and eye protection for all those hours. This, therefore, translates into exploitation; these workers are subjected to these unsafe working environments because they do not have a voice and they lack knowledge about law especially with regards to health and safety.

Some of the permanent workers receive special treatment; they are always provided with safety gears. Some expressed concerns when working with pesticides without the provision of appropriate safety gears. They expressed their concern about the health risks of working without safety gears. Further describing the working environment to be unsafe. The issue of safety is further narrated below, that participants stated that

*“We do not get anything, not even gloves when we are working with those grapes trees that have chemicals. A lot of us just have to wear what we have, and the uniform is only given to the permanent workers” Participant 11, 2020, September 18).*

*“We are not provided with anything; imagine you are working with chemicals, but you do not have protective clothing. Or you are working and then in the vineyards there is water all over and sometimes you are wet, and it gets cold” (Participant 14, 2020 September 21).*

*“We are not given any safety clothes here, only the permanent people” (Participant 17, 2020 September 19)*

There seem to be differential treatments between seasonal and permanent workers. The farms' companies seem to have invested better in the permanent workers as opposes to the seasonal worker

The study also portrayed how the companies do not care about the wellbeing of the workers but are only concerned about production. If one worker falls ill or is unable to work, which in many cases could have arisen from a poor working environment, that worker is easily replaced with another seasonal worker and production continues. The severity of the working conditions highlights the extent to which these workers are exploited. Labour exploitation of workers in Namibia dates back to the colonial and Apartheid period, from as far back as the 1900s (Botes,2013). Although labour exploitation stems from the colonial and apartheid era, this process remains unaddressed and the consequences continue to be felt today.

#### **4.7.5 Neglecting of workers**

Neglecting of workers is common on the farms not only in terms of the state in which workers live but also in terms of workplace injuries and unfair dismissal by a co-worker

without the approval of management. One of the workers complained of neglect from the management whenever she tried to reach out when an injury occurred at work, they did not provide medical attention and were forced to go to work with the same injury the next day. This participant forgot their medication, they were required to walk back home to collect the medication and walk back to work. Two participants stated that

*“Last week Thursday I was sick, I wrote a message to my foreman, the lady in the office, my boss and his wife but none of them responded so I went to the clinic and I got tablets. When I went back to work the next day, I forgot my medication at home so I informed the lady in the office, but she told me she cannot do anything because the boss is on lunch and the car cannot leave the gate without his permission. So, I had to foot from there, you were supposed to see how I was walking like a drunk person what if anything could have happened to me along the road. That day they told me I only worked half day. They only respect some and some they do not respect” (Participant 5, 2020, September 17).*

In many responses it was picked up that lack of employment has forced people to work in difficult working conditions. Some participants described how they are forced to work with pesticides, without safety gears and working long hours under the scorching sun, or when pesticides are being sprayed on one side they are required to continue working on the other side and they inevitably come into contact with these pesticides most times.

*“We come from far so we just force ourselves to work in those conditions, we are at least supposed to have safety because they are spraying something on the roots and that chemical is strong that kills the insect and the shoes, we are wearing are not strong you could find that the block where you are working was just watered and you walk there those chemicals could get in and you could be harmed” (Participant 11, .2020).*

*“I am not happy with working and living here, we are not given appropriate gear, some of these safety gears that they give us are torn, and for some of us who work with water, sometimes we get wet, or we are exposed to chemicals” (Participant 26, September 2020).*

*“Sometimes you are working in the sun, it is burning you and it may be that people are fertilizing they force you to work on one side and sometimes the wind is blowing so the chemicals will just blow to your side” (Participant 3, September 2020).*

Some of the workers wish to have protection when working in the farms to make the exposure to pesticides minimal.

#### **4.7.6 Workers representation**

##### **Trade Unions**

Trade unions in Namibia date back to 1986 and during this time they were representing workers and fighting for their rights more radically and actively as opposed to today (Jauch, 2018) The permanent workers at Aussenkehr are part of the Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU). Other organisations tried to help workers, but such unions were rejected by the companies because according to the workers, the management did not agree out of fear that

workers will be properly defended, workers then became afraid to join because of the fear of job loss. To this, some of the research participants stated that.

*“Many people used to come here saying they want to help us but when they come here, they used to go straight to the management first. The management will first check to see if the thing will affect them and then they will try to defend [sic] us from joining and most of the people here are blind. People are scared that if they join, they will be chased away from the work” (Participant 11, 2020, September 18).*

From the above one can deduce two aspects, one being that there are other competent representatives which have been kept away from the workers to avoid trouble being caused for the companies. Secondly, even though workers are aware that there is potential for better representation, they hold back because of the possible effect it could have on them.

The official and recognised representative union has been said to cause dissatisfaction among some of the workers as some of the workers stated that their representative union does not discuss with them but rather makes decisions on their behalf and the workers are notified of the decision afterwards.

*“No here I think they just have an agreement with NAFAU, how much they should pay. Even if they negotiate with the company for increment, they do not consult us. They only come to tell us what they have agreed with the company” (Participant 9, 2020, September 18).*

One reflected on a time when their representative union came in and put pressure on the management and the management caused confusion between the workers and the union which made the workers withdraw from the union and since that day workers live in fear to take action against their companies. One of the workers strongly believes that workers do not know their

rights and that is why it is easy for them to be taken advantage of. Most of the participants are not aware of what the laws say in terms of their salaries and other benefits and this makes it difficult for them to try and stand up for their rights as such one of the participants believes that the unions have to teach them their rights because the available social services cannot do anything about the abuse they endure at work. The research participant further stated that because workers do not know their rights, they do whatever they are told to do even if it is not their duty. Furthermore, it becomes easy for the management to threaten workers because of the lack of knowledge. One of the research participants stated that.

*“The only people who are supposed to help us is NAFAU, the police have nothing to do regarding abuse at work. NAFAU must come and teach us our rights because this [sic] people of us do not know their rights of where they must start and where they must end as long as they are told to do something even when they know they are not supposed to them will just do because they do not know their rights. They threaten us that if we do not want to work just leave there are people in the location who will come and work” (Participant 18, 2020 September 19).*

In their response, the participants described their dissatisfaction with the trade unions, stressing that the trade unions do not represent the workers' rights. They further describe the lack of communication from the trade unions. Some participants further describe how the trade unions side with the companies and how the trade unions do not consult them on issues of wages and other agreements they make with the companies. They have all identified Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU) as the trade union that is supposed to represent them, however, there are also questions whether their contribution fee to the trade unions is worthwhile. Some participants say they are not aware of any formal organisations represent workers' rights. Like some of the research participants stated

*“I do not know if there is anything, I hear of NAFAU but those guys they don’t care about us”*

*(Participant 24, 2020, September 21).*

*“We have NAFAU here but, they do not attend to our problems at all, they are just there as a name. They deduct us to pay them [sic] but, they do nothing” (Participant 28, 2020 September 24).*

*“Yes, actually there is this NAFAU, they use to come here but, then when they come here, they do not give us the services that we need, sometimes we complain that we are not getting the amount that we are supposed to get, they do not make decisions in our favour. We are paying this organisation for nothing because we cannot [sic] benefit from it” (Participant 15, 2020, September 19).*

*“We pay trade union fees to NAFAU. I remember there was a time we had a strike, we called them, but they never came. And we were not even paid for the days that we were on strike, but we were striking because of ill treatment and low wages. But we are paying for them to help us” (Participant 7, 2020, September 17).*

*“We have NAFAU, but for example if you are dismissed unfairly, you will not get any help from NAFAU. I think we just pay them for free” (Participant 9, 2020, September 18).*

One narrates that if you work at the grape farm you will be exploited and do nothing about it because of the threats received. One of the participants stated that the government has ignored their pleas for help at the farm and does not come to their aid. One of the participants narrated that they have given up on trying to get a response to the situation from the government who have time and time again visited the area, but no change was affected. Two of the participants stated that

*“Even if you give the complaints to the government, nothing is done. From 2009 I was in leadership calling to the government and we call them to come” (Participant 23, 2020, September 21).*

*“I cannot say anything because we are tired of talking, we just leave everything. The government came here they saw everything even now Uutoni Nujoma was here and he saw the area and how we are living but nothing happened” (Participant 6, 2020, September 17).*

Worker’s representation is very important, this helps the labour law institutions to make sure that workers are not unfairly treated and share an equal working environment. However, in many respects, this study found that workers at Aussenkehr farm live and work in the most gruesome conditions. This is supported by Anderson and Rogaly (2009), who argues that workers are punished in many ways if found to violate the previously made agreements, therefore restriction of movement and confinement (to the workplace or a limited area), debt bondage, and withholding wages or making excessive reductions are some of the punishments a worker expect. In many cases, the results point to the fact that workers are not represented appropriately, workers are denied freedom of speech, are discriminated against, and are more often dismissed unfairly. This is because workers in forced labour situations have no choice, but their choices are severely limited by the actions of those who seek to exploit them for profit (Straus, 2012).

The issue of workers’ underrepresentation cannot be overemphasised. In this study, the results showed that trade unions have not been effective in fighting for the rights of the workers. In many cases, the workers highlighted a lack of representation by legal bodies who should speak for their rights. Although the participants recognised NAFAU as the only trade union that could help them with labour disputes, this union is found ineffective and seldom aids the workers.

Despite the workers, both (seasonal and permanent) were forced to make contributions towards trade union fees. A notable, ineffective trade union is not a new thing, as these trends of the weak trade union can be traced back to the colonial and apartheid period (Botes, 2013).

The study further found that, workers' discrimination was high and that most workers were dismissed unfairly. In this case, when the most outspoken workers stood up for the rights of other workers, they are a threat to the company, and they are dismissed without warning or are even subjected to various types of discrimination. Some scholars such as Scott, Craig, and Geddes, (2012), argued that these types of exploitation mechanisms seem to exist because of workers' lack of awareness of their rights and dependence on informal contacts from their community for accommodation, food, transport, or health care.

Furthermore, the lack of labour representation meant that workers are not able to express themselves regarding the working conditions. Once workers express themselves, they will end up losing their jobs. This lack of freedom of speech is a result of poor trade unions and enabling law labour law institutions' interventions. Even though the right to join or form trade unions within the wider right to freedom of association is protected by the Constitutional Bill of Rights in Namibia (Parker, 2012). Workers in Aussenkehr are denied the very same rights to freedom of speech and representation. On the other hand, the lack of representation from the constituency counsellor also plays a role with regards to the persistent exploitation of workers by these farm owners.

In many cases, workers faced verbal abuse by their superiors, and any retaliation to the abuse results in loss of job, workers who question the way they or others are treated are usually victimised and eventually dismissed. A similar observation is found in Zawojkska (2016) who states that workers in many parts of the world are experiencing poor working conditions, unfair

wages, and even violence from their recruiters, employers, supervisors. In Aussenkehr farm, workers are experiencing all types of exploitation imaginable in an independent Namibia. This type of treatment means that the workers are at the mercy of their employer, with no right and no say. There has been a call Storm (2007), to regulate labour markets as a means to ensure workers will be able to bargain for better wages and avoid employers from exploiting them.

This study has learned that the exploitation of these grape farm workers has created some form of hate or resentment towards one another. A strategy that seems to favour the employers as they will not be the ones creating this type of conflict. The black workers in supervisory positions are creating hate amongst the workers, this is a type of favouritism where supervisors only employ those from their tribes in the different companies, and this has created hate amongst the workers.

#### **4.7.7 No freedom of speech**

The workers describe how they are denied the freedom to express their grievances, such that those that chose to express their grievances will end up losing their jobs. Sometimes workers are threatened by their supervisors and when they take the complaints higher or they are not taken seriously, and they end up being fired so they are forced by the circumstances to not say anything. Some of the research participants stated that

*“It is worse because we do not have the freedom of talking and they make a decision without consulting us, but we cannot do anything or you will be told to go home and the job will be given to your friend and you will sit at home with no work” (Participant 11, 2020, September 18).*

*“Sometimes you are being threatened if you don’t do this or talk, you cannot even talk so say maybe the team leader was to say something bad to me and I report to the manager, the manager will come to me and say I do not see a problem you are the problem then you will be stopped” (Participant 17, 2020, September 21).*

It is important to note that when the workers are working on the farms, they have team leaders who are responsible for overseeing the work being on the ground throughout the day. One of the participants stated that they do not have rights so they are forced to keep whatever pain they may be going through on the inside even though they work hard. They also feel as though their neighbouring town, Noordoewer is benefiting more than they are even though there is not much production taking place there like at Aussenkehr. Further on lack of freedom of speech, one of the research participants stated that

*“Like here in Aussenkehr, all the companies use the same types of rules. Here they do not like activist-like-people, they do not like you if they think you are opening up the eyes of the fellow workers. They will chase you away. Here even if you can see that you are being exploited, you have no choice but to work because where will you find some bread, you will just work and live with it.” (Participant 9, 2020, September 18)*

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#### **4.7.8 Unfair dismissal and verbal abuse**

Research participants describe a strategy used to get rid of the workers that are no longer needed. The bosses would take workers back to the basic stage, which is a nursery where they deal with seedlings which the workers believe are used to frustrate them until they quit the job. Workers are easily dismissed based on their ability to stand up for themselves. Those who engage in any form of organising resistance, engaging in resistance, or have the potential to have others engage in any form of resistance. The bosses seek out those who have some sort of knowledge of their rights. Two of the research participants for instance stated that

*“So, when they wanted to get rid of you, they take you to the nursery. People used to get frustrated because they worked so hard and they were taken to a place where there was no development” Participant 10, 2020, September 18).*

*Like in our company this year most of the people are not working, because we had a strike last year and they were blacklisted. And all those people who were talking, they are not working this year (Participant 2, 2020, September 16).*

Research participants reported on the occurrence of verbal abuse against the workers. One participant explains how there once was a strike at one of the companies and the moment management found out who organised and mobilised the workers, the organisers were left to deal with the consequences of being dismissed and suspended or blacklisted for a certain period. It is difficult for workers to resist simple things such as being shouted at or aggressive behaviour from superiors because it would end in job loss. To this one of the research, participants shared that

*There are a lot of such instances, sometimes the supervisor is rude and aggressive and if you respond, they will try to have you fired (Participant 9, 2020, September 18).*

#### **4.7.9 Discrimination, and unfair distribution of benefits**

During the interviews, the researchers discovered that there are some benefits for the permanent workers. Housing seems to be topping the list followed by clean running water and proper sanitation facilities. The permanent workers are also said to earn more than the seasonal workers, but this is determined by the position the permanent worker holds. For example, the supervisors who oversee ensuring workers do the job right by receiving reports from the team leaders get paid more than the team leaders who work in the vineyards while directing and instructing the workers. Team leaders are also paid more than other permanent workers who do not have any management positions.

However, some permanent workers feel excluded especially from housing benefits, while there are good houses on the farms that are intended for the permanent workers. Furthermore, some explain how they do not understand why they have not been made permanent workers while they have worked on the farms for over 10 years. They also expressed that they cannot do business because there is no electricity, and these workers are to do business on the farm, tax should be paid to the farm owner. In terms of starting a business, one participant stated that

*“If you want to start a business you have to ask permission from him, he controls everything here it is his farm. The farm belongs to him, but his children are the ones running it” (Participant 5, 2020, September 17)*

*“It is just as the way you see it; the permanent people are here without a house or electricity and you cannot do anything, you have your bar and business with your fridge, but you cannot do anything because there is no electricity. If you go to other farms you will see that they are building houses there” (Participant 6, 2020, September 17*

In the workplace, a poor working environment is not only limited to lack of appropriate health and safety, long working hours but, division amongst the workers is also seen as one of the things that constitute exploitation. One of the participants stated that the bosses appoint those who can oppress their fellow black workers.

In context, the distinction between permanent workers and seasonal workers is clear. Thus, the benefits accrued to the permanent workers are much better compared to the seasonal workers. Most of the permanent workers are provided with appropriate housing, while the seasonal workers, who are the majority workers live in makeshift housing, in his writing Blazek (2015), argues that labour exploitation is often experienced along with other forms of violence, whether in parallel or as their direct component. Many of the workers are exposed to poor sanitation and lack of clean drinking water. This situation is attributed to the fact that; these workers are not valued by the employers. However, not all permanent workers are provided with appropriate housing, some complaint of unfair treatment and discrimination with regards to housing benefits. This is in line with Blazek (2015) found that labour exploitation is not just limited to issues of work but covers the broader configurations of labourers lives from the arena of intimate privacy to their positionality in wider state structures.

This observation highlights the prolonged abuse of human beings at the hands of employers. This because exploitation is a global problem and needs to be addressed. It is important to uncover the cause of persistent exploitation to address poor working and living conditions (Arslan, 2018).

#### **4.8 Resistance to Exploitative conditions**

Resistance in Namibia is not a new phenomenon. The first-ever form of resistance can be traced back to 1893 when workers went on strike for better wages and then in 1904 under the imperial German occupation in Namibia. This resistance was in overt form and came because of Namibians rejecting exploitation. According to Melber (1983) even though workers wanted to resist in the past there were laws like the South African Wage and Industrial Conciliation Ordinance, No. 35 Of 1952 which did not allow any inventiveness, trade unions by black people, or even taking part in strikes because they would be running the risk being deported to reserves. Similarly, this study also found that workers at Aussenkehr farms seldom organise strikes, fearing they will lose their jobs, more particularly in adherence to the conditions of their employment contracts which prohibit them to strike. Consequently, participation or organising of any strike could lead to dismal or even worse, deportation from the farm area.

Notably, it is important to keep in mind that several companies are leasing on the farm including those belonging to the Namibian government. From the interviews, it seems as though all farms use the same rules and regulations which seem to be an extension of colonialization and apartheid in independent Namibia. The exploitation of the workers at Aussenkehr farms could be shaped by the imperialist regime that existed before 1990 when Namibia got its independence.

Because not much had been changed after independence, the way these forms of exploitation and resistance are manifesting themselves can be likened.

More so, Melber (1983) asserts that everyday forms of resistance in Namibia also existed in a time before now. This came as a result of the restriction by the law and conditions attached to the conventional forms of resistance as such workers did engage in some sort of informal forms of resistances -for example, “breaking contracts, passively refusing to work, or even minor sabotage” (p. 154).

Organisations such as the South-West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) formerly Known as Ovambo People's Organisation (OPO) were the first to take initiative to establish a national organisation for workers in 1957 with the main aim of doing away with contract labour, later the demands became more and OPO became a liberation movement (Melber, 1983). The formation of these organisations was seen as a response to exploitation and strikes were frequently effective. For example, the nationwide strike that took place in December 1971 to January 1972 When I 5-20,000 contract-workers all over Namibia went on an “indefinite” (p. 156) this strike was said to have crippled the whole economy for a couple of weeks (Melber, 1983). Even though workers did not entirely get what they were seeking during that strike they proved their strength, importance, and power as labourers to the economy.

An exploitative working environment is a means of dehumanising and violating human rights. When workers are exposed to exploitative conditions, they are bound to respond. The response to exploitative conditions is multi-dimensional, thus workers resist exploitation in many ways. The study questioned the participants on how they resist exploitative conditions. In their description, the participants have described the unbearable nature of their living conditions and further expressed how they are oppressed. The study found that resistance to exploitation was not

always easy but the workers use resistance strategies that did not expose them to their employers, the fear of discrimination and dismissal was what led the workers to be less open about how they resist exploitation.

The participants describe how it is difficult for workers to resist simple things such as being shouted at or aggressive behaviour from superiors because it would end in job loss. The biggest challenge faced by these workers is the suppression of resistance, even if the workers want to resist exploitation, they are forced to accept the conditions because of the clause in their employment contracts that prohibit them from resisting. Below are quotes of some participants describing how they are suppressed and state that

*“Even if you are tired or just cannot take it anymore, there is just no other way, you will lose your job if you try to do something and we are here for a job” (Participant 21, 2020, September 20).*

*“There are a lot of such instances, sometimes the supervisor is rude and aggressive and if you respond, they will try to have you fired” (Participant 9, 2020 September 18).*

*“I remember it happened at black power once and once you are caught like you are the one who started they will fire you and suspend you for a couple of years from working on the farms” (Participant 13, 2020 September 18).*

*“Here in Aussenkehr as long as you work in the grape company you will be abused and you cannot do anything, because if you do, you will end up losing your job. Here people threaten you with your job. You must keep quiet, now if you talk too much and they see you, you will lose your job” (Participant 25, 2020, September 22).*

*“Here you must work and do what they want, even if you do not want to do that. And one thing is that you already warned in advance about s strike, and you have to sign the form, and if you strike you will be dismissed” (Participant 21, 2020 September 20).*

In the context of exploitation, the study proved that there is evidence of exploitation. For many parts of this study’s results, the evidence points to the fact that the farm owners use many tactics to exploit their workers. The command-and-control mechanism employed by the farmworkers meant that the workers were dehumanised. More certainty, the workers were exposed to longer working hours for low wages. The study has also proved that the extent of exploitation goes beyond long working hours but includes limited freedom of speech and lack of representation. Because the workers were denied the right to express themselves, this proved an exploitative mechanism coupled with emotional abuse.

#### **4.8.1 Everyday forms of resistance**

Creating a culture within the workplace and the type of resistance that workers will engage in takes many forms and is often not limited or planned but it just happens. Through interviews with the workers at Aussenkehr, one could pick up what type of resistance workers engage even if according to them it does not exist. Mutekwe (2018) like Scott (1985) also notes that subterranean forms of workers include “mindless labour, deliberate wastefulness, slowdowns, fake illness, self-inflicted injuries, sabotage, drug abuse, absenteeism, desertions and loafing” (p. 247). It is important to remember that since workers engage in resistance under suppressive

conditions that are not collectively organised but happen individually and they often do not oppose existing authority or class (Mutekwe, 2018). Otherwise, Sinwell (2012) has a differing opinion that everyday forms of resistance are public and done in a collective and this can be said to be true for the workers of Aussenkehr who say they meet after work to discuss what happens at work. It is somewhat safe to assume that they speak to each other about how they ought to respond, or how they would respond if it were to happen to them. This creates like-mindedness among the workers which can be termed unplanned or unconscious collective engagement. Some of them came out strongly and are discussed below.

#### **4.8.2 Different resistance strategies towards exploitative conditions**

The forms of resistance are varied and complex, in this study several forms of resistance were recorded from the responses of the participant. Below is a description of the resistance strategies employed by the farmworkers in response to exploitation. The different resistance strategies include name-calling, speaking in native languages, calling on government intervention, constantly calling on Union intervention, feigning illness, holding strikes, campaigning, not responding to instructions, going to work while under the influence/ while hungover, and sabotage.

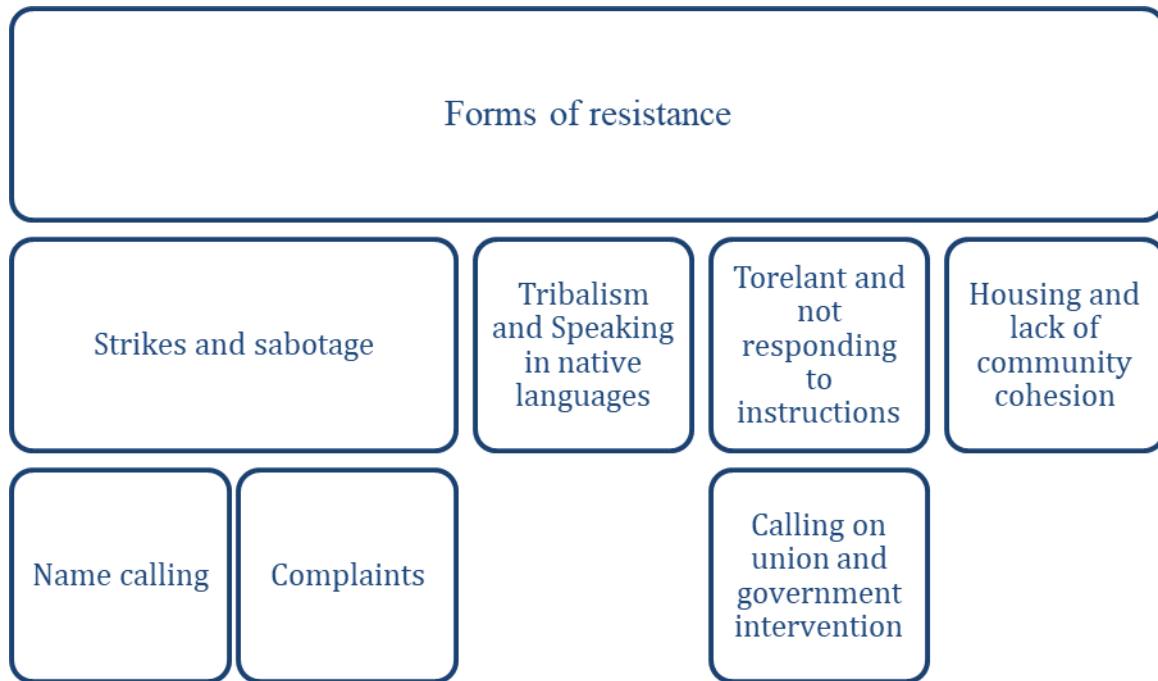


Figure 8. Different kinds of resistance strategies (Source: Tjitombo, 2020).

### 4.8.3 Name Calling

In their responses, the participants reported that in the context of resistance to exploitation, the workers often resort to name-calling, referring to the managers as Boers, a term used to refer to white bosses. One participant in their response state that

*“I do not know what they spoke with the Bores they only told us that the Boers only gave us 3% then from there they bring the corona which comes to affect everything, so they also used that as an excuse” Participant 18, 2020, September 20)*

*“We are free to talk but you cannot use or phone or listen to music because if those Boers catch you will be in a problem” (Participant 23, 2020 September 21)*

Generally, any individual who feels subjected to any form of abuse and in this case exploitation exhibits an instinct to resist any form of exploitation. Having said that, in this study, it was a challenge to capture and record the different resistance strategies from the participants. Nonetheless, one of the resistance strategies that came out of the interviews was that of name-calling. This type of resistance strategy arises because of workers' response to ill-treatment by the employers. In this case, the workers would refer to the white farm manager or supervisor as okambulu or Boer, (a name referred to a white farmer) this is a name that was workers used during apartheid when the farmworkers in those days felt oppressed, they will have referred to the Afrikaner as a Boer, this is said with frustration and utter rage. Considering this, a review by Hollander and Einwohner, (2004), writes that resistance is accomplished through talks and other symbolic behaviour.

Therefore, name-calling is one of the types of resistance achieved through talks and symbolic behaviour and represents a meaning to the actor. Although name-calling is not a common form of resistance, or at least has not been documented, it involves some active behaviour whether that is verbal and cognitive. In their review Hollander and Einwohner, (2004), also stated that resistance may involve some active behaviour whether verbal, cognitive and or even physical. Mutekwe (2012) believes that name-calling and the use of unique language allow workers to get through their day at work because even though this form of resistance is documented widely it is said to be too difficult to pick up.

#### **4.8.4 Speaking in Native language and group dynamic**

In many instances workers who feel oppressed find peace and solitude in working in groups, in the case of farmworkers at Aussenkehr, group dynamics comprises workers of the same tribes, this allows the workers to speak to each other in their native language and express their grievances. Therefore, the use of group dynamics represents a resistance strategy. This is so because the workers see working in groups as a relief. More so, working in groups further presents some kind of comfort to other workers who seek comfort in others when they are mistreated, thus participants describe how they use crying as a resistance strategy. In the quotes below the participant state that

*“We work in groups where we talk and we feel much safer working together”*

*(Participant 16, 2020 September 19)*

*“Some people just cry, other destroy one another and influence others to do badness*

*and things become worse” (Participant 23, 2020 September 21)*

In a nutshell, speaking in a native language is one of many key resistance strategies that have been captured from the participants, where it was recorded that workers may resolve to speak in their native languages as a response mechanism to exploitation. These findings are similar to those by Hollander and Einwohner, (2004), who writes that in response to exploitation workers spoke in their native language. More of the same, Cohen (2007) makes an interesting observation in the aspect of how workers resist in a manner that is ignored “In-jokes, private linguistic codes, wall slogans” (p. 17), and this is said to be the most common. The use of name-calling and speaking in a native language is seen as resistance strategies that show that the farmworkers feel oppressed and are not happy about the way they are oppressed. Although this type of action is conscious and involves collective action, they do not involve a direct challenge to structural power.

#### **4.8.5 Lack of community cohesion**

While the use of verbal cues, such as name-calling and speaking in the native language seems to suggest that there is cohesion within the community of Aussenkehr, this is however not the case. The study found that the community of Aussenkehr lacks unity, and it is overwhelmed with division. In Aussenkehr, the community is composed of many local ethnic groups, with those originating from the North-central and North-eastern part of Namibia making up the majority of the population. While those originating from the south and eastern parts of Namibia make up the minority of the population. As a result, those originating from the North-central and North-eastern part of Namibia have more representation in the managerial and supervisory ranks. While in these positions, they are responsible for recruiting other job seekers. The study uncovered that; they recruit people based on tribe. Equally, Hollander and Einwohner, (2004), note that resistance takes many forms, and the behaviours of those resisting in many cases are only known to them. Just like the result of this study, the explanation for tribalism was not easy to understand, but the act is perpetrated by the workers feeling oppressed by other workers because of their tribal advantage, this, therefore, results in community breakdown and shifts the attention from fighting the common enemy. Sinwell (2012) makes an interesting observation that resistance may affect the poor and cause competition among them and opposed to the those in power whom they are fighting. This is exactly what tribalism in Aussenkehr is doing to the workers, it is destroying them and delaying their progress as a collective. It is believed that the elite are the ones who have incited tribalism by giving management positions to one tribe to oppress others by giving jobs to their own, making it difficult for them to engage in any form of resistance by shutting it down before it starts.

The resistance strategies are not always overt and in many cases passive the participants make sure that they employ the resisting strategies without them risking their jobs. Exploitation has resulted in a social breakdown. People use social division as a resistance strategy. Other participants expressed that they resort to borrowing money from the cash loan so that they can survive. On rare occasions, the workers resort to sabotage, the participant describes that sometimes they will down tools and block the roadways with large rocks to prevent work from going. Some participants expressed that the community is not only divided but they are tired because they have lost hope and no longer operate as one.

*“People in this settlement are not at peace at all” (Participant 14, 2020, September 21)*

*“The community are tire of complaining and they have just accepted it as a normal living condition” (Participant 10, 2020, September 18)*

*“Some people go to cash loans, and the cash loan guys will make you pay back with interest” (Participant 26, 2020, September 22)*

In response to exploitation, workers see each other as competitors, which has created division amongst workers. The social division is seen to arise from two things, (1) clan tension and lack of trust amongst the workers. Workers no longer see each other as a community but as an individual.

#### **4.8.6 Sabotage**

Generally, the workers at Aussenkehr subconsciously explore many forms of resistance strategies, one of them is sabotage. With this strategy, the aim is to attract attention by slowing down production and it is not so much about an increase in wages as it is about bringing down inequality by reducing the profits made and it is very much linked to other forms of resistance

(R. Cohen, 2007). The aspect of sabotage would often be planned for a certain season which is critical for the farmers at Aussenkehr. During harvest, season workers would put their tools down at a certain time and will not continue to work until their demands are met. This could fall under what Cohen (2007) terms “Desertion” (p. 13). This could also be used to explain the high number of employees that come from Northern and North-eastern Namibia where people work far from home because it is believed that one cannot run a farm with the majority of the workforce being native to that area. After all, resistance is most likely to be a common successful occurrence (R. Cohen, 2007). Mutekwe (2012) it is used to gain control of the labour process and not so much aimed at having demands met. Otherwise, employees can sabotage their employers in ways that do not involve physical damage to property (Tucker, 1993). Almost invariably this represents a form of psychological resistance but social quiescence by workers. Drugs tended to be used as means of 'ironing out' emotional peaks and troughs. as food substitutes and simply to keep going, but more often 'downers' like alcohol and cannabis are simply used as a means of relaxation and enjoyment - a form of compensation for an unrewarding work experience so provides a form of companionship and solidarity.

#### **4.8.7 Strikes**

In many responses to many forms of exploitation, the workers constantly call for union representation. This shows that they are not happy with the working conditions. Therefore, calling on union intervention is seen as a resistance strategy that is intended to make the situation better. This is even though union representation was quite weak and seldom came to the aid of the suffering workers. In a similar vein, Hollander and Einwohner (2004), who state that resistance involves opposition to something or someone. In this case, the workers' plea for unions intervention is seen as opposing the poor working conditions.

More of the same, the study found that workers also engage in strikes as a form of resistance, however many of the strikes are not successful and those who participate in strikes usually end up losing their jobs. However, the study also found that workers have a signed pre-agreement in their employment contracts that prohibit them from participating in any strike at all.

Moreover, workers also use the radio platform to register their complaints. The act of complaint is seen as a desperate attempt by these farmworkers to seek outside intervention in what seems persistent exploitation. Although many organisations did not have formal complaint platforms, workers go as far as the radio or the trade union to register their grievances. In his writing, Tucker (1993) stated that it is very common for organisations to have very weak compliant platforms.

Lastly, the study found that firstly the workers are prohibited from taking part in any strike, the contracts they sign prohibits them from strikes. Workers have however on occasion engaged in strikes, but the consequence is always that those who organised and are seen partaking are laid off and removed from the farm by the securities. Engaging in strikes has been proven risky for the labourers who although would like to see justice being served would also like to keep their jobs which put the bare minimum on their tables. Thus, the unconscious alternatives of resistance are employed. Mutekwe (2019) also states that strikes are important because they give a voice to the voiceless, and it is an indication to the oppressors that the workers are not happy either with their wages or working conditions. However, he said that riots and strikes say little about the lasting class conflicts (Mutekwe, 2019).

More results showed that strikes are frequent, however participating in a strike could lead to loss of jobs or if the worker is lucky, they could be furnished with a warning. Some participants expressed that, when they feel mistreated, they organise a strike. A strike is one of the common

resistance strategies used to fight exploitation. However, a strike may result in some consequences, one participant expressed, that they were deducted from their wages for taking part in the strike. Otherwise, one participant described that strikes do yield positive results, the use of this resistance strategy led to some farm owners addressing the workers' needs because the company feared losing money through strikes. In terms of the strikes, some of the participants stated that

*“Yes, we have strikes, it usually happens when these managers treat other people like they are not human” (Participant 29, 2020, September 24)*

*“Yes, strikes are common because people are not happy. You know what these guys are clever, what they do is they will make you sign an agreement that restricts you from any form of the strike” (Participant 7, 2020, September 17)*

*“We have strikes because we are not happy with conditions. So, these guys have to give in to the workers because they cannot afford to lose money” (Participant 10, 2020, September 18)*

*“At another company where people strike because they were not treated equally”  
(Participant 15, 2020, September 19)*

#### **4.8.8 Gossiping**

Generally, grouping and talking about issues that affect workers' lives is a very common thing, in this case, workers use gossiping as a resistance. The study found that many of the workers engage in gossip, usually in groups of the same tribe, they do this to make jokes and to talk about ill-treatment they receive from their employers. This is supported by literature, which suggests that gossiping is usually the first step taken by employees where they seek others and share their

problems (Tucker, 1993). Although gossiping is not intended for confrontation with the managers but is merely a discussion of the problem at length and does not go beyond gossip. This action is usually where employees talk with others to reinforce their position before they take other actions (Tucker, 1993).

During the social gathering, to drink on weekends with friends where they sit and discuss what they go through and they ensure that they go to work smelling like alcohol as a way to show the bosses that they can see they were drinking the previous day, showing up at work with an alcoholic hangover. Gossiping and laughing to show their team leaders and foremen that despite the treatment they can still be happy, this is one of the ways they frustrate the ones who want to see them unhappy. In terms of gossip, the participants stated that

*“All we can do is gossip about the supervisors, some come to work smelling like alcohol or say “mxxm” [sic] (Participant 4, 2020, September 16)*

Even more, gossip and tribalism be some of the resistance strategies used by the worker simultaneously in response to exploitation. One of the participants expressed how earning a job is determined by the tribe dominant in the company, describing how the Okavango (one of the tribes) are at the forefront of tribalism and can have other workers lose their jobs, while only employing those from their tribes. Some participants expressed that some people use black magic to keep their job. On the other hand, some participants expressed how they resort to gossip instead, a strategy they used in response to exploitation. One of the participants described that they gossip about their supervisor or go to work intoxicated or after heavy drinking the previous day.

*“The problem is also when these Okavango are the managers and supervisors, those can just make you lose your job, because you are not their tribe” Participant 21, 2020, September 20)*

*“There is not much you can do because there is so much tribalism and black magic that is being used” (Participant 23, 2020, September 21).*

*“We can only gossip or I go to the bar and drink to make myself feel better. if the foreman at that company is an Okavango than most of the people working there will be Okavango’s. The Okavango’s are dominating everything” (Participant 5, 2020, September 17)*

*and you know the problem here is tribalism, like if the person who is in charge at a certain company is a Wambo [sic], he will only employ fellow Wambos[sic] and the same with other tribes” (Participant 15, 2020, September 19).*

#### **4.8.9 Call on government for intervention and complaint**

Furthermore, the results show more resistance strategies employed by the workers, in response to exploitation they call on the government for intervention. One participant expresses they want the government to come to their aid. Some have expressed how they direct their complaints to the Ministry of Labour. While others describe how they have taken the farm owner/ manager to court, but the act failed to yield any positive outcome. Two participants stated that

*“The government should check up on us, they used to come and see how we are doing here in Aussenkehr” (Participant 3, 2020, September 16)*

*“The ministry of labour that is where workers can go and air their complaints, sometimes the ministry staff come here” (Participant 10, 2020, September 18)*

Other resistance strategies are complaints, some of the participants expressed that they make use of the Oshiwambo national radio programme titled the people’s parliament to air their complaints, even though their efforts do not translate into any positive outcome. Other participants air their complaints to the committee in their workplace and to the farm owner. This farm owner is also accused of being the reason why the government fails to assist the farmworkers. Further expressing that, the farm owner controls everything that happens on the farm. Research participants stated that

*“What we do is we call and report at the people’s parliament or at the Oshiwambo radio but normally no changes take place” (Participant 13, 2020 September 18)*

*‘We take all the complaints to the committee, but I do not know now, we also spoke to the owner of the farm Dusan, but we do not know if there is something between him and the government’ (Participant 6, 2020 September 17)*

*‘The farm owner is the main problem, because these conditions will not persist if it was not for him, who is controlling everything here’ (Participant 28, 2020 September 24)*

That said, workers finding ways to communicate to the government and launching complaints is a strong indication of the way they feel about the exploitation conditions. Although very little attention is given to them by the government and other agencies, they continued to complain through radio platforms. The constant complaints by the workers highlight the extent to which

these workers are oppressed at the hands of their employers. Therefore, these observations cannot be overlooked.

#### **4.8.10 Not responding to instruction or toleration**

In many instances' workers chose to say nothing at all and keep their grievances unheard, this strategy is one of the strategies used by the workers, to avoid any form of confrontation or when in fear of losing their jobs, this type of strategy is very common. In his writings, Tucker (1993), states that some grievances are never expressed in an outward manner, instead the aggrieved party would often take no action. In this study, it was picked up that workers live in fear or work in fear and they seldom question the ill-treatment they experience. Tolerance is arguably more prevalent and workers and workers tolerate what they considered deviant behaviours on the part of others (Tucker, 1993), similarly this study also found that workers chose to act intolerant to those who impose deviant behaviour on them. Otherwise, some workers chose to ignore instructions from their supervisors, this is done to indicate to the supervisors that they are not happy with the conditions under which they work.

#### **4.9 The roles of social institutions (church, family) in fostering resistance**

Communities rely on social institutions to foster resistance to any form of social injustice. However, the expression of participants in this study described how the available social institutions fail to help them fight any form of exploitation. Social institutions are central in the development of complex social organisation and interaction particularly for rights implementation which can efficiently guide behaviour and frame choices. The absence of social

institutions such as the legislation could mean that the workers lack legal awareness and may lack appropriate guidance considering persistent exploitation.

The other participant describes that they have no one to turn to and they feel they lack a voice to represent their plight. This is in line with Fraser (2019) who writes that while legislation can be sufficient to guarantee a particular right to people, it can also be insufficient to or incapable in the protection of the rights and this is due to a lack of awareness of the law and poor enforcement because of limited resources. In this case, the workers at Aussenkehr farms lack legal awareness, and the lack of legal enforcement to help fight exploitation in the area is one of the reasons why the workers are continuously exploited.

Although social institutions like religious organisations and kinship groups are known to fulfil State-like functions in many places long before the State became involved (Fraser, 2019). This does not seem to be the case at Aussenkehr. Even with the presence of many religious institutions (churches), they play a minimal role in fostering resistance. In terms of the availability of social institutions in fostering resistance, the participants stated that

*“There is nothing you can do here; we have no one to turn to. We are just in the air. We don’t have a voice” (Participant 28, 2020, September 24).*

*“We are being treated like animals. And no one does anything about it. These institutions here are not doing anything for us when it comes to being exploited*

*“(Participant 19, 2020, September 20).*

More of the same, another participant expressed their annoyance towards the conditions, further how the available social institutions cannot provide any help or even play a role in fostering resistance. Furthermore, another participant described how they receive inhumane treatment at

the hands of their employers. Some say, despite the presence of the police station on the farm, they hardly do anything to fight exploitation. There have been many journalistic reports about the living and working conditions of the farmworkers at Aussenkehr farms. Reports by Namibia (2013), highlight the exploitation of workers at the hands of their employer, despite these numerous media reports the situation has not gathered the attention for appropriate intervention. Hence the continued call for constituency councillor's office, stressing that the absence of the councillor's impedes development and the community lacks a voice. In terms of the roles of social institutions, the participants stated that

*“The police are also just there; they do not do anything. But the church is helpful”*

*(Participant 2, 2020, September 16)*

*“There is no organisation helping us here people are always crying about that especially when you come to work people used to work more hours, but the pay is less”*

*(Participant 11, 2020, September 18)*

*“Nothing what can you do here, we need a constituency counsellor here because any development is possible with a counsellor” (Participant 9, 2020, September)*

The following pictures show the alternative forms used by some of the farmworkers to make an income that is used to substitute what they earn. Retail was one of the most occurring where shoes, clothing, and food would be sold. Gardening was the second most occurring activity used by the families to ensure they always had enough to eat.

The study proved that, despite persistent exploitation by the farmworkers and the farm managers. Workers deployed various mechanisms to rebel against the exploitative condition. The study

proved that most of the resistance strategies deployed by the workers were non-overt, the reason for this is that the workers feared losing their jobs if they engaged in overt resistance. However, the resistance strategies deployed by the workers in response to exploitation did not translate into any significant change, and at the time of data collection, the evil sight of exploitation was still persistent.



*Figure 9. Entrepreneurial activities on the farm (Source: Tjitombo, 2020).*

To supplement their low wages, some of the workers are involved in the small trading business. These types of informal business activities cater to many farmworkers who are not able to buy clothing from the available shops because of the high prices. On the other hand, some of the informal business owners do not work on the grape farms but live solely off their small businesses. The image above (Figure 9) and the one below (figure 10), show the type of informal business activity found in the area.



*Figure 10. Retail shop (Source: Tjitombo, 2020).*



*Figure 11. A garden by one of the workers (Source: Tjitombo, 2020).*

Moreover, some of the farmworkers have small gardens to supplement their diet, and they sell the surplus to fellow workers in the community. The image (figure 11) above shows a typical small garden found in the community.

#### **4.10 Chapter summary**

This chapter presented the results from the research which was carried out along with an in-depth discussion for each section. The study found that the farmworkers at Aussenkehr are indeed exploited. Many are aware that they are being exploited but do not necessarily engage in resistance as working on the farm allows them to make an income though not sufficient, they can sustain themselves and their families. One of the major issues that came out strongly was the workers wanting proper housing, sanitation, and clean running water which has been a concern from the time the farm was set up. The second major issue was that workers felt that the working environment was not desirable not only because they are time and again exposed to harmful substances, but they are required to work alone and apart from each, they do not receive enough break time, they are not allowed to speak while working and women are also required to do the toughest tasks. In terms of resistance, workers do unconsciously engage in resistance such as name-calling, sabotage, and feigning illness. These are some of the forms of covert or everyday resistance

Scott (1985) writes on.



## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study aimed at addressing several objectives, one the objectives of the study was to identify the different forms of exploitation that exist at Aussenkehr. With this objective, the study found that workers in Aussenkehr experience different types of exploitation. The forms of exploitation range from, threats, long working hours, low wages to neglect with no government intervention or social protection. Because the farm is private and under the jurisdiction of the private firms, employees are subject to harsh and inhumane treatments. This indicates that workers at the grape farms are not valued for the hard work they put into making grape farming in Namibia successful but rather their labour-power is all the capitalists seek to extract.

The study concludes that the identified forms of exploitation portray the negligence from the farm owners and the government agency who need to help improve the lives of the grape farm workers at Aussenkehr. These workers reside in poorly constructed makeshift housing on the periphery of the grape farms. The study further concludes that lack of service provision was a deliberate attempt to continue exploiting people so that they can remain under their control. The study also concludes that lack of representation by the trade union is just another highlight of the magnitude of exploitation of workers in Aussenkehr. These workers have in many respects been denied all necessary human rights including freedom of speech and social protection.

The lack of provision for social services cannot be overemphasised, as this study concludes that the control by the farm owner makes it possible for other institutions to provide services to the people working and living in Aussenkehr.

Even though resistance has not been easy to identify, it is clear that workers partake in subterranean resistance. Some of them are aware of what they are doing and others not. These forms of resistance can be said to manifest themselves in ways that are divided along with the understanding of each other such as language and the level of social interaction.

The study identified several resistance strategies that workers use; these include strikes, name-calling, sabotage, a tolerant, formal complaint to gossip. The study concludes that; the workers use these strategies to resist the persistent exploitation condition.

The study also concluded that workers engage in overt resistance which many are not conscious of. This alternative form of resistance is done because they fear losing their jobs or being discriminated against. Even more, workers seldom hold strikes or demonstrations, but they rather complain about the radio and call on the government and trade unions to come to their aid. However, these strategies never seem to work as exploitation continues. This goes without saying that exploitation is a global problem and in Namibia, workers at Aussenkehr seem to experience some of the worst working and living conditions. This is despite the fact the grape industry generates a huge amount of income for the owners.

Deducing lessons from the literature used in this study, one can tell that there is a trend where when workers resist it is often, if not always about better wages, improved living and working conditions and ending all other forms of abuse among African agricultural workers. This issue runs across many southern African states which mean the capitalists operating within these states ignore the SADC protocol and national laws of that state.

The study has thus conclusively demonstrated that the working and living conditions of the farmworkers at Aussenkehr is an extension of the persistent colonial legacy deeply rooted in how

the nation transitioned after independence through the policy of national reconciliation. The policy of national reconciliation left the ownership of resources and expropriated land in the hands of the former colonisers and much of the colonial structure did not change. What happened in colonial Namibia continues to happen in independent Namibia, not very different and somehow, we allow this to persist.

Moreover, forms of exploitation at the hands of the employers are testament to weak labour laws and weak social institutions as well as lack of government intervention. If left unaddressed, the extent of exploitation of workers by their employers could lead to social and economic problems.

One of the most effective everyday forms of resistance were sabotage, where workers would work slowly, cutting the grapes wrongly or packaging the wrong grapes during the harvest season which is the most crucial season. The management would then raise the salaries of the workers to motivate them to work better.

## **5.2 Recommendation**

The following recommendations need to be taken into serious consideration if the conditions of the farmworkers at Aussenkehr are to change or improve because as it stands, through the evidence presented it seems to be getting worse.

Firstly, the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment creation need to urgently look into the unconstitutional and inhumane labour practices at Aussenkehr farm and formulate a new policy around the regulations of how farmworkers wages, benefits and other similar requirements that will ensure humane working and living conditions.

Secondly, the issue around workers not having access to their contracts needs to be addressed as well as the content especially that which states the workers are not allowed to strike even when they are unhappy with the conditions.

The land was donated to the government which was intended for the construction of houses for the workers where water and sanitation would also be available. With how fast the population in the area is growing the government should start with the process of building houses and providing other services as soon as possible to mitigate further possible constraints on the community. However, the government should not have to bear the responsibility of providing basic services alone or even a larger portion but rather there needs to reach an agreement with the farm owner, as to how this responsibility will be shared

There is also an urgent need for the construction of proper social institutions that can cater for the entire population efficiently. A hospital is one of the most urgent institutions needed in this community where workers come in direct contact with chemicals and children are said to also be affected.

The government needs to intervene in how and what is stated in the contract of the workers because as it stands the contract is used to seal the deal of exploiting the workers. This speaks to how the justice system in Namibia fails to protect its citizens and how it is denying them the privileges that come with an independent Namibia. There needs to be a detailed policy by the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform (MAWLR) and the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation (MLIREC) on the guidelines for setting up commercial farms in Namibia concerning the accommodation, sanitation and other basic services needed for a community to thrive

It appears that Aussenkehr rights only belong to those who can afford them because workers have taken farm managers to court and their cases are always dismissed even when they have a valid case with evidence. Workers need to be educated on their rights and be reminded constantly of the value they are adding to the product because without them grape production in Namibia would not exist.

Lastly, this study recommends that future studies in this regard researchers must engage all stakeholder and find a way to gain access into farms for observation, speak to management as well as the government to investigate whether or not there is any form of cohesion between the stakeholders and how an exploitative practice can thrive in a place where it is condemned and illegal. This study recommends that future studies look at whether the lack of coordination between the government agencies and relevant stakeholders encourage the persistent exploitation of farmworkers.

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# APPENDICES

**S1 Ethical clearance certificate**



### ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

**Ethical Clearance Reference Number: FOHM/005/2020**

**Date: 30-04-2020**

This Ethical Clearance Certificate is issued by the University of Namibia Research Ethics Committee (UREC) in accordance with the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Policy and Guidelines. Ethical approval is given in respect of undertakings contained in the Research Project outlined below. This Certificate is issued on the recommendations of the ethical evaluation done by the Faculty/Centre/Campus Research & Publications Committee sitting with the Postgraduate Studies Committee.

**Title of Project: FARM WORKERS' RESISTANCE TO EXPLOITATION: A CASE OF THE WORKERS AT AUSSENKEHR KARAS REGION, NAMIBIA**

**Nature/Level of Project: MASTERS STUDY-HON-HEALTH**

**Researcher: Gloria Tjitombo**

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**Faculty: FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**

**Supervisors: Dr. A. Nhemachena (Main Supervisor) & R. Nghitevelekwa (Co-Supervisor)**

**Take note of the following:**

- (a) Any significant changes in the conditions or undertakings outlined in the approved Proposal must be communicated to the UREC. An application to make amendments may be necessary.
- (b) Any breaches of ethical undertakings or practices that have an impact on ethical conduct of the research must be reported to the UREC.
- (c) The Principal Researcher must report issues of ethical compliance to the UREC (through the Chairperson of the Faculty/Centre/Campus Research & Publications Committee) at the end of the Project or as may be requested by UREC.
- (d) The UREC retains the right to:
  - (i) Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance if any unethical practices (as outlined in the Research Ethics Policy) have been detected or suspected,
  - (ii) Request for an ethical compliance report at any point during the course of the research.

REC wishes you the best in your research.

REC Chairperson

Prof CJ Wilders

(Signature)

## **S2 Research instrument- Interview guide**

### **Interview guide for farm workers**

#### Questions

#### **Opening questions**

1. From which part of the country are you from originally?
2. How long have you been working and living here?
3. How is Aussenkehr like as a community?
4. What is the process like to get a space to build your house?
5. Do you know who is responsible for distributing land for people to build their houses?
6. What is your level of education?
7. What were the procedures like when you were first contracted, in terms of application and skills requirement?
8. Do you specialise in anything or are you a general worker?
9. If you specialise, can you explain to me the daily process you go through?
10. What is the daily process of the general workers?
11. Have you received training before you started working?
12. What type of training (if any) have you received, to enable you to work on the vineyards?
13. What changes have taken place at Aussenkehr since you started working here?

#### **Farm set-up/structure**

14. Can you briefly tell me how many farms are there?
15. Do you have any knowledge on who owns these farms?
16. What days and or months do you meet the owner of the vineyard?

17. For what purpose do you meet them?

### **Social services and workplace safety**

18. What kind of social institution and services are available?

19. When were some of these social institutions and services that are available set up?

20. Are the social institutions and service that are available sufficient?

21. What are the roles of these social institutions in fighting exploitation (abuse)?

22. Who do you think is responsible for providing basic services for you, your employer, or the government?

23. What is the workplace safety measures in place?

24. When working in the vineyards are you provided with safety gear?

25. What do you uniform (if any) do you wear to work that is given to you, especially when it is time to spray for pests?

### **Exploitation**

26. Do you think the working conditions at the farm you work are better or worse than the other farmworkers work on?

27. What make the condition better/worse?

28. How are the working hours/shifts on the farm that you work on?

29. How satisfied are you with these working hours?

30. Personally, what are the working conditions like for you?

31. Do you think the workers on the different farms get paid different amount to yours?

32. If yes, can you explain how they decided how much to pay workers?

33. Why do you think they are paid that way?

34. Do you know how much farm workers should get paid according to the law?
35. If yes, is that what you get paid?
36. Are you part of any legal/formal organisations that fight for workers' rights?

**Resistance**

37. Tell me about the living and working conditions, are you happy with them?
38. How do you respond to these conditions?
39. What are you doing to make your living and working conditions better?
40. Have you or your colleagues ever challenged your supervisors when they mistreat you?
41. What are the ways in which you or your fellow workers challenge any form of ill treatment?
42. Are you aware of any social institutions that help you launch complaints?
43. Is there anything else regarding your working and living conditions I might have left out that you would like to share?

**S3**

**Observation guide**

<b>Observation</b>			
<b>Site location:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Start time:</b>	<b>Stop time:</b>
<b>Research Issue</b>			
Farm Workers' Resistance to Exploitation: A Case of the Workers at Aussenkehr far, Karas Region, Namibia.			

<b>Areas of Observations</b>	<b>What:</b>	<b>By Whom:</b>	<b>Where:</b>
Attitude towards work			
Behaviour at home/Social institutions			
Activities done outside of work			
General Attitude towards the work and the environment			
Types of discussions at home			
Group formation.			
The general mood at home			
Types of the house structure and set-up			
Food Consumed/ livelihoods			
Other Areas of observation			

Reflexive comment			
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