In medical anthropology it is often argued that a belonging to a community or group can act to support an individual, improve wellness and productive functioning. The relationship between individual and community is nevertheless complex: it can be fraught, as well as supportive. This was brought home to me in 1992-3, when I worked on three wine farms, Sukses, Dieprivier and Bergwater, in the Breederiver valley in the Western Cape, South Africa. At the time work-, power- and social relations on these farms were shaped and articulated in terms of discourses and practices of paternalism: it constructed the farmer and his employees, who also lived on the farms, as a family, i.e. in terms of a relationship of quasi-kinship between parent (farmer) and child (worker) (Murray, 1993; Waldman, 1995, 1993; Van Onselen, 1991). Paternalism involved power, control and privileges, as well as duties, commitments and responsibilities as part of an implied moral contract subscribed to both by workers and farmer (Du Toit, 1992, p. 325; Du Toit and Robins, 1995, p. 12, 13; Gibson, 1996b). It represented farmer and workers as a community of interest (Murray, 1993, p. 2), closely linked by economic interdependence and shared interests in the welfare of the farm (Gibson, 1995a). Paternalism formed the grid against which the farmer’s and employees’ rights and obligations were subscribed to, claimed and countered. Its ideology, beliefs and practices were complex, ambiguous and often contradictory.

The origins of paternalism are embedded in colonialism and the practice of slavery in the Western Cape (Ross, 1983, p. 219; Scully, 1989). The latter was abolished some 170 years ago and paternalism was in a process of flux and change. On the farms I worked, the notion of ‘family’, and the rights and obligations they entailed was complex and often contradictory (Gibson, 1995b). It was also manipulated by both the farmers and the workers (Waldman, 1995, p. 31).

The dark underside of paternalism, its racism and possibilities of abuse lay in the farmer’s power of ownership of the farm and the ability to employ or discharge workers, who would then also be evicted from the farm and their homes. When a husband, who was usually the registered head of the

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**Paternalism, gender and violence on wine farms**

The Western Cape, South Africa in the early 1990’s

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household and the main employee, was dismissed, his whole family’s livelihood was in jeopardy. The farmer-employer expected a commitment from her/his workers-family to work for the good of the business, and the workers-dependents expected a *quid pro quo*. The farmer, ideally, was required to help them when they had personal problems, had to ‘develop’ and ‘uplift’ them, to give jobs to their kin, and provide them with housing, free water, financial aid, transport and assistance in medical – and other emergencies, and to care for them in their old age (see also Du Toit, 1992; Gibson, 1996b). The employer’s commitment was expected to relate not only to individuals, but to extend to both husband and wife, and often to their adult children as well, who were employed on the farm (Ibid).

The farmer’s power over his workers was mediated through gender relations and the moral co-responsibility of members of his own family. For example, the farmer’s wife often interceded on behalf of especially female employees. The intergenerational nature of households on wine farms also protected workers. On the farms on which I did my research at least one of the male workers, who was also the registered head of the household, was dismissed for drunkenness at work. He, his wife and their baby subsequently left the farm, but his mother and two sisters, who had been living with him, were given the house instead.

Thus, despite its overt power, its rootedness in colonialism and apartheid and its consequent authority and possibilities for abuse, paternalistic practices and discourses did not encompass and pervade everything and everywhere. Relations, discourses and practices of paternalistic power were ambiguous, contradictory and fragmented.

The complexities of violence

The intermingling of violence and paternalism was demonstrated to me one Sunday afternoon, when I had packed up to return to Cape Town. I walked to the house of the farm manager to inform him of my departure. Only his aged mother, Mrs Myburgh, was at home. We heard a woman and child wailing outside. I looked through the window and saw Netta and Jamie Galant, Netta’s twelve year old brother and the Galant’s little boy, Jerome.

Netta and Jamie were covered in blood. Netta struggled to keep her husband standing up; she cried and begged him not to pass out. Jerome was crying, he clutched Netta’s dress and had some blood smeared over his face. Mrs M called the ambulance. I went outside. Jamie had collapsed on the ground under a tree. Netta, a tiny woman, struggled to pull him up into a
sitting position, while also trying not to knock Jerome over. He clung to her legs and wailed. The moment I came, Netta turned to me and said: ‘It’s okay Jamie, Misses Diana is here.’ Although I insisted that farm workers call me by my first name, Netta’s response signaled that, coming out of the manager’s house, I had crossed the threshold into the relations of paternalism. In lieu of the manager or his wife, and by my presence in his house, I became the ‘white’ woman and the parent with everything which it entailed. Without even knowing whether I had anything to offer, Netta surrendered all control and authority to me. I was there, it would be okay, I would deal with it.

A cursory inspection of Netta and Jerome, showed that the former had a deep cut in her arm and a bruise on her face. When I asked, she said she was ‘okay’. Jamie had been stabbed in his head, above or in his right eye, in his chest and his back. He had difficulty breathing, and the area around his mouth seemed somewhat grayish. Netta had a blood soaked cloth with which she was trying to wipe the blood from Jamie’s eye. I took the cloth and pressed it to the hole in his chest, then told Netta to press it tightly to the wound. Jamie was losing consciousness. He was very pale and his head lolled on his chest. Only his wife’s and her small brother’s support kept him from slipping down completely. His head wound was bleeding profusely and it seemed to me as if it had penetrated his eye. I wanted to get some bandages from Mrs Myburgh. I told Netta’s brother to wash his hands and then to press the edges of Jamie’s back wound together to try and staunch the flow of blood. He hesitated, but Netta told him sharply to ‘do as Misses Diana says’. Inside the house Mrs Myburgh was relieved that I had ‘taken charge’. Jamie looked terrible. He was grey, gasping and unresponsive. I decided to fetch my car, to drive them to Worcester. When I drove up the ambulance had arrived.

I picked up bits and pieces of what had happened. Jamie and his half-brother, Koos, had been drinking and playing dominoes together. One accused the other of cheating. A fight broke out, and they stabbed each other. Their wives, Netta and Kitty, were drawn into the altercation and were beaten or cut.

Both the Galant brothers were skilled workers and had positions of relative authority. Koos’ wife, Kitty, was a strong, forceful woman. Yet, suddenly she had a black eye, and other less visible bruises. Netta had a bruised face and cut in her arm. Everything they had built up was potentially in jeopardy. Assaulting another worker was a serious offence and a cause for immediate dismissal. The whole family could, as a result, also lose their house.

A few years before, one worker had stabbed another to death on Sukses. He was immediately fired and his family had to leave the farm as well. Yet
the Galant brothers were not dismissed. The relations of paternalism were complex and could be manipulated. The farmer, as well as the foreman, insisted that workers only come to their homes in case of a ‘real’ emergency, i.e. not one brought about by fighting at home or domestic violence. Jamie was hospitalised, but he called it an accident and never laid a complaint against his half-brother. The farmer could pretend not to know about the assault. Jamie stayed in hospital for two months and eventually lost the use of his eye. While the ‘incident’ was apparently known to everyone, it was not publicly recognized as violence.

My own actions had almost disturbed this precarious balance and could have tipped the balance of scrutiny, to the formal disciplinary gaze of the farmer. I only realized this when I returned to the farm later and saw Jamie. He had lost weight and his face was so scared that I did not immediately recognize him. He was sitting under a tree, close to where I had parked, and raised his hand in an almost surreptitious greeting, then very pertinently turned his back on me. I was nonplussed, but he was so obviously not going to recognize me publicly that I walked away. Over the next few days I came across him frequently and each time he gave me a kind of hidden sign of greeting, but when I moved closer he pointedly moved away. Once, I came very close and asked him about his eye, but he seemed afraid of me. He stared to tremble; his whole skin was somehow shivering. Alarmed and perplexed, I retreated.

A week later, I took my children in the late afternoon to swim in an irrigation dam. Jamie suddenly appeared, opened and closed some of the taps and then sat down some distance away. He suddenly said softly: ‘I’m okay, its okay.’ I told him I was sorry about his eye, he stood up and walked away. It was then I realized that Jamie Galant had been afraid that I might make public what had been treated as covert. When the manager’s wife subsequently obliquely referred to the incident, she called it ‘when Jamie was in hospital with his chest’ and told me how the farmer’s wife had to fight with the hospital to have x-rays taken.

What had happened here? Taking their cue from the workers, the manager, farmer and their wives discursively reconstructed the event. It had not happened ‘officially’, it did not impact on work-relations (Jamie took sick leave), it thus remained hidden. I was the (threatened) catalyst who could expose it as violence and thereby trigger the threatened disciplinary action and all it would entail. The farmer was aware of the events but only referred to it obliquely during his weekly meeting with the manager and foremen. Speaking about an upcoming long weekend he said very pertinently: ‘Koos, there will be no transport available if anyone gets stabbed.
You get the ambulance and you pay for it.’ Everyone looked at Koos, who gave an embarrassed laugh.

Koos’ wife, Kitty, was the only person who openly revolted against this silencing. Koos had beaten Kitty, assaulted and stabbed Netta. Kitty took her young daughter and left the farm the day after the stabbing. I subsequently found her on another farm, where she had started to work and lived with her cousin. Kitty was adamant that she would not return. About four months later, Koos nevertheless went to fetch Kitty home, after he had heard from friends and family that she was pregnant. Mrs Myburgh subsequently told me with obvious satisfaction that Koos had done the ‘right thing, a woman’s place is with her husband’. Through an unspoken communal agreement a veil of silence had been pulled over the assault two male workers had perpetrated on each other. The assault on the women was never an issue, it was of no consequence. Kitty was pregnant, she was dependent, and she had to be in her place.

Farm women nevertheless struggled against, subverted and tried to renegotiate oppressive paternalistic practices on the farm. Paternalism had both feminine and masculine aspects (Waldman, 1995). While the farmer was portrayed as the ‘father’ of the farm family, his wife was constructed as the ‘mother’. The farmer’s wife, as well as female workers, had certain gendered responsibilities, but also subtle forms of power to manipulate. In the case of physical violence, women responded in many ways, they endured, briefly retaliated or tried to put themselves out of harm’s way. Well knowing that she would be beaten afterwards, Driena Barends, a black farm woman who was a domestic worker in the farmer’s house, sometimes struck pre-emptively:

Sometimes ... when he was really drunk, I would hit him. With the pan, or a piece of wood, once I broke a jug on his head. But when he was sober again he would know and I knew he would repay me.

Rather than allowing her husbands’ drinking to escalate into a situation of physical threat, another farm woman said that she took her children and spent the night with other family members when her husband became violent. Kariena Vasvat sounded adamant when she said:

[I] will not allow a man to lay a hand on me. If I see he becomes like that (threatening/abusive) I trick him into the room and I lock the door. He shouts and screams and swears and threatens to kill me, but I take my child and I leave him like that until he is sober again.
In the case of Driena Barends, the circle of violence was finally broken by her own actions as well as by the involvement of another woman, the farmer’s wife. According to Driena Barends (Gibson, 1996b, p. 17):

I was cooking outside on the fire that night. There had been a power failure. That evening he came home and shouted .... He started to chase me, but I hid in somebody’s house. Later when I thought he had gone I returned to the fire. And suddenly he was there, he had a knife. He kicked the food from the fire. I could not even save it, the cats just came out of the dark and grabbed the meat and ran away. Then I got angry. I thought: Stab me tonight and I will kill you. When he reached over the fire to stab me, I threw a pot of boiling water on him. That was it. After that the boss said he must leave. They (the farmer and his wife) said I must decide whether I wanted to go with him. If I wanted to stay, I could get the house. I did not go with him.

Estelle Berg, the farmer’s wife on Dieprivier, was the driving force behind the decision to dismiss and evict Driena’s lover. He had been drunk, had had previous warnings about drunkenness at work and his own violence had hurt another worker (Driena). Domestic violence had spilled into the workplace and the conspiracy of ignorance could not be upheld anymore. Driena’s lover was dismissed. Driena appealed to the underlying notion of family and especially petitioned Estelle Berg, the farmer’s wife and ‘mother’ in this paternalistic system, concerning the negative impact which an eviction would have on her children. As a result Driena was able to retain the house. The fact that Driena did the domestic work in the Berg household had made her an even closer member of the farm family, an aspect which she successfully used to her advantage.

Like female workers, Estelle’s responsibilities and identity was constructed within the paternalistic ideology as relating to the moral, nurturing, reproductive and domestic domains of farm life (see also Waldman, 1993). Estelle adopted a development or moralistic discourse of excessive drinking as an individual malfunctioning and a threat to the harmony and welfare of the family (Gibson, 1996b). Her efforts to curb especially women’s drinking became intertwined with discourses about ‘community development’, ‘upliftment’ and women’s role in the household and as mothers. One of the reasons given for this was that in the past many of the women had given birth to babies with foetal alcohol syndrome. Estelle had long tried to eradicate drinking among women on their farms. Like other women on
the farms, Estelle’s narratives about the unacceptability of drinking were imbued with notions of women’s identities and moral responsibilities.

Some final comments

When Dina Voorman, a female worker became pregnant, Estelle went to see her and urged her to stop drinking. Dina’s youngest son had foetal alcohol syndrome and had already failed a standard at school three times. Voorman said:

She [Estelle Berg] talked to me and said, No, you must stop this drinking. It is bad for your baby, you can not go on like this. You have a responsibility now. How can you help yourself and your baby if you drink so much. If you drink you waste your money and you will never be able to go forward. Neither will your children.

Women’s identities as the guardians of family morality and spirituality were often stressed in men’s and women’s narratives. Women should at least not drink in public and preferably not drink at all. For Kariena Vasvat, another black woman who worked on the farm, female sobriety also had undertones of morality, motherhood and religion. This was demonstrated during a church service which I attended. The service was led by Katryn Jacobs, a farm worker and elder in the church, who said during the course of her service:

How many of you (men) sit here in church today, and when you go home you adore drink like gods while they destroy your families. You waste your money on the bottle and you ignore the tears, the crying, the begging of your wives and children. When the devil drink is in you, you have no mercy, your wives, on their knees, beg you for mercy, you make their blood flow with their tears. But God hears their prayers.

After the service one of the ‘brothers’, still reeking of alcohol, came to see Katryn and asked her to come to his house for a special prayer meeting. He said: ‘I want the people in my house to hear your message, sister.’ To this Katryn sternly responded:

God will not allow Himself to be mocked brother. First remove the mote from your own eye (haal die balk uit jou eie oog).
Church services, prayer meetings and parish calls (huisbesoeke) were spaces where woman displayed roles of public authority, where alcoholism and family violence was denounced and men publicly shamed. For farm women relations of paternalisms were complex and difficult to negotiate, yet they found ways to do so and to promote the physical and spiritual health of their families and themselves.

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