This thesis tracks how private farm conversions to wildlife production shift the balance of power in the South African commercial farming landscape. It investigates the ways notions of belonging and mobilities are shaped in the context of increasing farm conversions to game farming in the Eastern Cape. Femke Brandt provides an ethnographic account of the experiences and positions of black farm dwellers in trophy-hunting landscapes in the Karoo where they have been present under highly insecure tenure arrangements for generations. Her approach includes the perspectives of game farm owners and managers to explore the relational and emotional dynamics in reconfiguring power and belonging.

Tracking an Invisible Great Trek offers timely insights into complex local transformation processes in rural spaces where all residents seek ways to belong in uncertain post-apartheid conditions. The establishment of the Karoo trophy-hunting farms accelerates land concentration and transforms rural labour markets in a way that conflicts with South Africa’s promises for social change and land reform. Trophy-hunting landscapes confirm and reinforce the power of rural elites to determine the environment in which they can belong at the cost of such possibilities for an increasingly impoverished working class who have worked the land throughout their mobile lives.

Femke Brandt obtained her Master’s degree in Social and Cultural Sciences from VU University Amsterdam. She has worked as a lecturer at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at VU University Amsterdam. She will continue her research work on processes of power and belonging in South Africa.