4.

Converting to Wildlife: Claiming rights to land-use and ownership in the Karoo

Adapt or perish, now as ever, is nature’s inexorable imperative.

*H.G. Wells*

This quote is found in a hunting brochure from a Karoo trophy-hunting farm. It might represent the state of mind of the hunting farmer in post-apartheid South Africa. He currently experiences a battle for survival in the commercial farming landscape; indeed a matter of adapt or perish, or survival of the fittest. A sense of insecurity has been instilled by global competition, deregulated agricultural markets, and potential land reforms. Economic and political transformations over the past decades have crumbled the world of sheep farming in the Karoo. Farm conversions to trophy hunting are one response, or adaptation, to this agricultural as well as existential crisis. Through interpreting and analyzing the farm conversion process different established and outsiders categories emerge as constantly shifting and overlapping in the re-configuration of power in the Karoo.

The ways in which game farmers re-assert their sense of belonging and power in the Karoo are described in this chapter. The first section illustrates how farmers are re-configuring spatial relations through farm conversion processes to wildlife farming. It shows how farmers are turning once again to nature in order to regain a sense of belonging in the countryside. They adapt to contemporary demands of society by claiming that the conversions provide job opportunities for the rural landless population, but evidence from the Karoo hunting farms does not support this claim. On the contrary, the farm conversions contribute in different ways to the retrenchment and displacement of farm workers; a
movement that started during the 1970s when agriculture started modernizing. The second section connects hunting as land use choice with farmers’ politics of belonging. Trophy-hunting means more than an economic survival strategy; it represents an imaginative appropriation of the landscape that produces a particular racial formation on the farms. The imaginative appropriation is consolidated in texts and narratives on hunting and commercial farming in the Karoo. Some examples of this are provided in this section. The final section probes the cultural imaginaries and racial formation associated with the trophy-hunting landscape. On the hunting farms colonial images are guiding farmer’s designs of the hunting lodge, staff composition, and the hunting practices. These images are also employed as marketing tools as becomes evident from their promotion materials. Finally, the images are consolidated in a course provided by a game farmers’ association that converts farm workers to game-farm workers.

The farm conversion process: re-configuring spatial relations

The established trophy-hunting operations in the Karoo are the result of gradual farm conversion process that started as far back as the 1970s. The Karoo trophy-hunting farmers consist mainly of descendants of British settlers, Afrikaners and a family of Chinese descent. All family histories have been tied to land ownership and commercial farming activities in the region. This section illustrates the physical and social aspects of the conversion process to illustrate how game farmers re-configure spatial and social relations, how they exert their sovereignty (Mbembe, 2003) by erecting and removing infrastructure on their properties, by imagining pristine landscapes without people, by exploiting different categories of labour and through harvesting wildlife resources. Trophy-hunting also manufactures particular cultural imaginaries of different categories of people with different rights and purposes on the game farm (ibid, 25-26). The creation of stereotypical images of the black worker is discussed later in this chapter. First a detailed description of a conversion process is presented that illustrates the particularities and characteristics of the transformation to wildlife farming.
The following elaboration on a conversion process was reconstructed through the memories of farmer John Smith. His grandfather, a British settler, arrived in the Cradock region during the 1870s and started farming in colony as 12 year old boy. John’s father continued farming and the family farm was inherited by John’s elder brother. To avoid competitive tensions with his brothers John started farming for himself in another district. As bachelor farmer during the 1960s, he experienced Karoo sheep farming as challenging and exciting. He “worked from sun rise to sun set, reading books at night by candle light as there was no electricity on the farms yet”. He remembers himself during this time as “being independent”. While he worked the farm cooking and cleaning were taken care of by black women and weekends were spent with his parents at the family farm. John sounds nostalgic as he narrates his past set in the uncompromising Karoo dessert that turned him into a man. He portrays farming as hard work under difficult conditions such as droughts, travelling long distances, and the absence of technology. Travelling happened on horseback and there were no mobile phones or bakkies (pick-up trucks) yet to compress time and distance on the vast Karoo plains. The emphasis on the farmer’s bravery is as striking as the silences on the presence and roles of black South Africans in his past. They are mentioned in the margins of John’s memoirs, as part of the Karoo background, as part of nature. Some of the farm workers stayed far out in the mountains and communication was only possible via a telephone line that was connected between the main house and the outpost. The presence of farm workers on the farm was simply a fact of life, like the sheep grazing in the veld or purple sunsets in the mountains. This image of social stability contrasts John’s contemporary narrative on farm workers. After 40 years of farming he exclaims “there was a day I could say no worker left me for 20 years and in the last two weeks they almost all went!”

After some years of bachelor farming an opportunity arose mid 1960s to take over a property of a farmer who could not sustain the farm financially. John negotiated a favourable transaction that allowed him to both take over the farm and reduce his debt. Together with nine out of the twenty-three workers from the old farm he travelled four days to the new farm, herding the flock of sheep through the Karoo landscape. After settling on the new property it would only take a few years for the first game animals to arrive at the farm.
Land consolidation, infrastructural destruction, and reducing labour needs

Early 1970s John felt that on the new farm they were “not going anywhere with the sheep farming” and he started diversifying his farming activities by introducing game animals on the farm. Game farmers from Cradock mention often that back in the 1970s it was economically attractive to invest in game farming, in particular due to the prospective of low maintenance requirements and long-term profitability of game and hunting.

There is low staff; low overheads; limited theft because theft is a big thing in this areas; but you need the money to do it…It was possible because at that time there was surplus money; those were good economic times\(^\text{39}\).

The emergence of farm conversions to wildlife occurs in the context of an increasingly liberalising and competitive agricultural economy that favours well-capitalised farmers able to expand their operations. Over a period of 20 years John incorporated neighbouring properties into his land and erected a perimeter high fence around the game farm now extended to over 10,000 hectares. The amalgamation of farming units contributes to increasing land concentration in the Karoo. With the extension of the farm’s boundaries John introduced more species of game and slowly reduced the number of domestic animals. The last sheep and goats departed during the early 1990s when the mixed farming operation was changed to trophy-hunting activities only.

The map below visualises the conversion process of John’s farm from 1970 to 2009. Significant spatial and infrastructural alterations mark the conversion process. The farm property at the right bottom of the map was bought by John during the 1960s. From there fences have been dropped (dotted lines) and high fences erected (straight lines) as adjacent farms were included in the territory. Some of the roads that connected farms have been closed to the public because the farmer is worried about poachers who might have too easy access from the road side to his valuable game species. As the map shows, almost all the internal fences (but not all) have been removed to create one large wilderness space for the various species of hunting game.

\(^{39}\) Interview game farmer, 26 Nov 2009.
Map of farm conversion process: Persieskraal (drawn by author and farmer)
The conversion process creates new boundaries and spaces on the one hand, and on the other hand it destructs old boundaries and infrastructure on the farm. As a Karoo sheep farmer explained:

First the domestic animals are removed. Then the old fences go down and the old infrastructure is removed; windmills, staff houses, sheds etc. Then the game fences go up and the game comes in. And then the Lodge is build and new roads are made. The thing is that once you start game farming, you can never reverse back! And politically once the old farm infrastructure is out it becomes difficult to give the farm away to someone who wants to farm there. It is impossible to get this capital back and it is things the old government paid for.

The sheep farmer’s assumption about the political implication of farm conversions to game farming is that these properties become less liable for land reform. He also asserts that farmers don’t destroy their own capital investments, but the apartheid subsidies for agriculture which raises questions about the accountability of commercial farmers towards the state. Hunting farmer John retains houses on some of the properties to accommodate staff members who look after water pipes and fences on isolated parts of the game farms far away from the hunting lodge. Furthermore, John’s family re-writes the landscape through capital accumulated in other family businesses that support the ongoing expansion of the hunting farm. Often conversion processes are facilitated through capital accumulated elsewhere or through (foreign) investors. To reverse a hunting property back to traditional livestock farming requires enormous capital investments. This makes game farms unattractive for land redistribution purposes. Ironically, the hunting landscape buries a particular version of the past by ‘rehabilitating’ the land to create ‘pristine’ nature representing an era prior to colonial occupation. Game farmers such as John re-configure the landscape by erasing traces of colonial occupation and dispossession, as well as pre-colonial land use practices.

A contradiction exists between the empirical findings on the process of farm conversions to game farming and the narratives of the conversion process generated by the wildlife sector. Successive reports from a study into Private Game Reserves (PGR) in the Eastern Cape argue that game farms focusing on eco-tourism contribute significantly to job creation in rural areas and that
workers in game reserves earn higher wages than farm workers on other farms. The self-administered survey among PGR farm managers presents PGRs as tools for social upliftment and rural development (Langholz & Kerley, 2006). This claim contrasts the motives mentioned by Karoo farmers to start farming wildlife, namely the ability to reduce labour needs. Possibly, this is a difference between eco-tourism and hunting operations as hunting requires less labour than the luxury farms accommodating greater number of tourists per year. Contrary to PGRs the Karoo hunting farms did not have corporate responsibility programmes and they did not market activities focused on rural or social development. It is probable that PGRs do generate at least more jobs than hunting farms, but there are a few aspects of the conversion process that researchers like Langholz and Kerley did not take into account. Nothing is mentioned about job losses as result of farm amalgamations to create the reserves. It is unclear where farm worker families of the incorporated properties go when land is transferred to a new owner. Furthermore, it is questionable whether the PGRs provide jobs for people who previously worked as farm labourers, or whether skilled jobs attract educated people from urban areas. The place and opportunities for poorly educated farm workers on game farms and game reserves has been critically questioned by academic scholars (Griffiths & Dowling, 2011) who observed that the composition of game-farm employees does not reflect the local labour supply and promotes an influx of “new often young, pro-conservation, white people with the requisite skills’ to the area” (2011:180). It seems that reports from the wildlife sector obscure the outcomes of processes linked to farm conversions to game habitats such as land concentration and displacement of farm dwellers.

The impression from the Karoo is that the departure of farm workers from the commercial farms started in the 1970s and that farm conversions to game farming accelerate this trend which I refer to as an Invisible Great Trek. This is partly due to general processes of agrarian change and particularly the result of the ways hunting fields are imagined by their creators. Trophy-hunting landscapes are typically imagined without local inhabitants in them and the infrastructural destruction encourages people to leave. Departing the farm is an inevitable consequence of the spatial restructuring, and the change of land use that requires few resident workers. A typical game farmer’s answer to the
questions what happens with farm dwellers in the process of conversion is comparable to what this farm manager had to say about it: 40

All the farm houses are gone, we have taken everything away. I think the former owner of the incorporated property took his staff with him to his other farms. My boss does not like fences and houses that are falling down. I think we are the only farm with no internal fencing at all.

Farmers present the departure of farm dwellers as a ‘natural’ part of the conversion process that lies beyond their own choices and actions. The language of change in the Karoo is everything but political. Conversions are technical and economic processes instead of social or political strategies available to landowners and users. Contrary to the idea that game farming generates work, there were many stories of farm workers leaving converted or incorporated properties. Especially during transfers of farm ownership, new owners do not take over the paternalistic responsibilities of the old owner by providing work and/or social welfare for other residents on the farm.

[Were there other people staying on the farm when you left?] Yes, when I started there were 10 families and when I left there were 4 families. And the new landowner was quite worried about that. He wanted to know if they must be paid or what. [What happened to them?] They all left, I think one of the guys went back. Most of them went to Karoo town; one went to another Karoo town 41.

This seemingly inevitable they all left suggests that there are no forced evictions or deliberate displacements during farm conversion processes that are reminiscent of colonial and apartheid spatial engineering. The logic of the (job) market appears to legitimise the spatial formations resulting from processes of land consolidation, infrastructural destruction, and the re-organization of farm labour.

40 Interview 12 May 2009.
41 Interview 27 November 2009.
Claims of belonging and a sense of loss

Karoo farmers are making sense of South Africa’s political transformation and rapidly changing countryside by re-asserting their place in it. From the road winding through the commercial farming landscape John points out the empty farm houses that used to be home to his colleagues and friends. He explicates how some farmers bought up more farms “to survive” in the competitive global market and how others gave up farming, sold or leased out their properties and moved elsewhere. John calls the departure of farmers the “depopulation” of the countryside. Local forms of social organization among farmers slowly disappeared. We pass by the building of the old tennis club along one of the gravel roads that looks deserted and leaves a sad scar in the landscape reminding John of the days when the farming community used to come together on Sundays and share leisure time. Another social institution that is changing is the local farmers’ association. In the 1970s John’s association consisted of 15 farmers, now they remained with only 5 members who still farm in the area. Despite the decline of the local farming community John feels that the increase of large-scale agriculture is an irreversible trend and more sustainable than alternative agricultural models based on small-scale production. On several occasions he emphasized: “we cannot go back to subsistence farming, subsistence farmers will not make it in this area”. Implicitly he meant that if land would be redistributed to black people they would not produce for the commercial market. This assumption is derived from a common-held belief under white commercial farmers that black farmers only engage in subsistence farming. For farmers like John potential land reforms are perceived as turning back a time when colonists had not modernized farming in the Karoo; land redistribution would destroy their civilized image of the countryside. Moreover, another reason why Xhosa are not entitled more than settler descendants to farm the area is that the land was “originally” inhabited by Khoi and San people who are considered the true natives in the region. White farmers’ conception of the regional history of dispossession liberates them from being the single group of historical land invaders. This legitimizes their ‘right’ to own and design the landscape and this is how they claim belonging to this area.
Karoo Game farmer walking on his property
Game farmers’ claims of belonging are diverse as they are not a homogeneous group, both at local and national levels. The personal meanings of game farming are shaped through different life histories in particular places. The general image of game farmers is that they are white South African males, but of course there are exceptions. In the Karoo there is a woman and a Chinese man who are running trophy-hunting establishments; nationally there is a famous black politician and businessman who started breeding rare game species since it is considered an attractive investment choice. The following three website fragments of Karoo trophy-hunting farms show how the farmers do claim belonging to the land. The farmers present personal and particular connections to the land.

**Website fragments Karoo trophy-hunting farms**

**Fragment 1:** For the past 5 generations my family have lived off the land in this unique part of Africa, overcoming the fierce hardships of this once frontier and adapting constantly to the many changes of our nation's periodically turbulent past.

**Fragment 2:** A dream was born some 106 years ago to practice a wise, sustainable utilization legacy and this dream is being passed down through generations...Aloe Safaris do solemnly declare that the family run company will continue to protect their natural resources, their future livelihood and all their wildlife to ensure that the future generations will enjoy their precious, sustainable heritage on the land that is loved and protected.

**Fragment 3:** The Du Toit family have resided on this same reserve for 5 generations. My entire life has been spent in nature. Since childhood I have enjoyed hunting.

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43 (Website visited 2 March 2011).

44 (Website visited 2 March 2011 / 27 July 2012).

45 (Website Visited 2 March 2011).
The website fragments demonstrate emphasis on farmers’ ‘rootedness’ in the landscape as they lived there for generations. A particular and personal connection to nature, wildlife and hunting is made to convince potential hunting clients of the farmers’ undisputable knowledge of the area so crucial for hunting activities. One farmer expresses “pride” to have persevered in the frontier despite unstable circumstances during colonial wars. This attachment is rooted in the past and extended into the future by “protecting” this “heritage”. These references imply a strong sense of belonging with an almost spiritual touch: as if it is farmers’ destiny to be here, a *dream is being passed down through generations*. The farmers are selective in their representation of history as there is no mention of how they got to occupy the land 5 generations back and who was deprived of that land in the process. The family histories start with the arrival of their great grandfathers to an “empty land” waiting for them to plant their flag. This claim of establishedness re-asserts and legitimises the trophy-hunting activities on the land. Among white commercial farmers and game farmers the most profound difference is their mother tongue; English or Afrikaans.

Most trophy-hunting farmers in the Karoo are English-speaking South Africans. The longstanding mixed presence (and mixed marriages) of English and Afrikaans commercial farmers never resolved the deep sense of mistrust of each other which sprung from the various conflicts between British and Boer during the 19th and 20th century. Nevertheless, (game) farmers socialize and meet each other during local meetings of farmers’ associations, the Men’s Club, several sports clubs or events in town. The British-Afrikaner tensions resonate in a plethora of jokes and stereotypes in which the two caricature and ridicule the other. An Afrikaner typically describes the English farmer as unreliable; “he will tell you one thing and do another thing behind your back”. The English farmer will say of the Afrikaner farmer that he is a conservative “real” racist who is “very strict, almost brutal with their staff”. These stereotypes have a direct link to the confrontations between the two groups during times colonial conquest when British colonizers introduced new laws (including the abolition of slavery)

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46 At the start of 2011, Karoo farmers managed to negotiate a moratorium on fracking by Dutch Royal Shell with the South-African government. This is a clear demonstration of the power they have to determine what happens on the land.
that should regulate power relations among settlers and natives in the colony. English farmers still perceive themselves as more “liberal” in terms of their attitude towards black South Africans. An English Karoo widow said to me that if her husband would know their son married an Afrikaner girl “he would turn around in his grave”.

In the Karoo British settlers were an entrepreneurial group that at times felt marginalised by Afrikaner political dominance, especially under the Nationalist Party that ruled the country and the agricultural economy until the early 1990s. Their British and Afrikaner farmers shaped particular established and outsiders dynamics that are reflected in distinctive social behaviours. The hunting behaviour of Afrikaners and British settler descendants in South Africa is distinctly different. A common division is made between biltong and trophy hunters that hunt on private land. Biltong hunting contributes more economic revenues to the hunting industry than trophy hunting. Biltong hunting is defined by Van der Merwe et al. (2010: 62) as “a cultural activity where wildlife is hunted by means of a rifle, bow or similar weapon for the usage of a variety of meat (venison) products, such as biltong and salami”. This type of hunting is typically associated with Afrikaners and findings from a national survey confirm this association. Almost 80% of national biltong hunters are Afrikaans speaking males though the category “high spenders” consists of English-speaking hunters from Kwa-Zulu Natal (ibid, 78). Afrikaners and English settler descendants generally engage in different hunting practices and attribute different meanings to hunting. On the Karoo trophy-hunting farms it was indeed an Afrikaans farm manager that engaged in biltong production on the farm whereas the English farmers did not engage in this activity.

British settlers once were the sheep farming pioneers in the Karoo. Nowadays their descendants, like John pointing out the deserted farm houses around his farm, experience rapid changes in the agricultural economy and the community of farmers sustaining it. This transformation inspired a Karoo farmer who published a nostalgic poem that represents a longing for the past sheep-farming society that constituted a “perfect world”.

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Transition in the Karoo47 - by Andrew McNaughton

Was that era of Merino and Angora goat a blip,
A passing phase, a moment gone, all for nothing?
It was supposed to last forever – the dominion of the sheep
A permanent economy, wool farming in the Karoo.
The stacks of bales of hard-earned sweat and wool,
The whistle and screeching and the puffing down the Kendrew line.
The tennis courts on Sundays, the crack of cricket balls,
Shearing sheds and sheep manure, the diptank and the dose room. Slated skins.
To fight the broken windmills and blowfly
Burning sun above all day in hellish heat of summer
Crickets chirping after rain, aroma of the wet Karoo
‘pruimtwak’ and brown sugar, blue soap in the ‘stoor’.
The music of our horses hooves and bleats of newborn lambs
Biting cold and coffee in the morning, hard work and hunger coming home.
We conjured a mirage, without a record of its passing
Gone are all the neighbours and that perfect world.

The poem announces that the days of sheep farming as dominant landscape image are over. The increasing number of game farms in the sheep-farming landscape has given rise to new tensions among commercial farmers, in particular between game and livestock farmers. Wildlife and sheep do not make good neighbours as game farms are perceived as predator reserves. A Karoo sheep farmer sold his property to the neighbouring game farmer in 2004 because farming became impossible as he was “surrounded by game farms” which increased the number of predators that killed his livestock. The sheep farmer is reluctant to meet me for an interview, which indicates the sensitivity of the issue,

but during a short phone conversation he mentions that he eventually decided to sell his property because the game farmer offered him a “good price\textsuperscript{48}” that he could not resist. Another sheep farmer from Cradock, who is very disgruntled and willing to talk about his experiences, recites how he was “tricked” into selling his land to his game-farm neighbour after the latter had already fenced off his water supply that was situated on another property.

The community of Karoo commercial farmers is changing composition; both in numbers and in types of land use. This permanently shifts established and outsider categories like English/Afrikaans, biltong hunting/trophy hunting, and game farmer/livestock farmer. It is one thing to come with a neighbour who is doing the same as you; it is another thing to have a neighbour who has different interests and ideas about farming and whose land-use choice affects your livelihood directly. It seems a common understanding of what commercial farming is all about, is lost. Another empirical example of this is that John became increasingly hesitant to go to farmers’ association meetings. He feels he does not “have much in common” anymore with the other local farmers. He quite frankly states that “I think they discuss petty problems”. The trophy-hunting business exposes him to global networks and broadens his horizon; it involves interacting with overseas clients, foreign investment, and large cash flows. This is all quite alien to the average sheep farmer in the area. John participates in hunting conventions in the United States for marketing purposes and he employs an accountant from Johannesburg to deal with their international finances and taxes. These experiences alienate him from daily (local) farming concerns such as rainfall and predator issues that are still vividly discussed by his neighbours during the farmers’ association meetings.

Game farming as land use practice is perceived superior by game farmers. Compared to sheep farming, trophy-hunting farmers view their practice as more sustainable and profitable than livestock farming. Revenues in foreign currencies are higher than returns of agricultural products sold in the global food chain. Another argument used for claiming that game farming is “better” is that the ecology of the land needs protection from overgrazing by sheep and cattle; game farming is perceived more “natural”. One farmer stated that the conversion

\textsuperscript{48} Phone conversation sheep farmer 23 November 2009.
process to a wildlife habitat consists of taking out human engineering in the landscape: “it will take my whole life to get it clean; to get it pristine so that there is nothing left that is human”. The tension between nature and culture appears as another figuration dynamic present in the Karoo. The ecology of the Eastern Cape is considered perfect for the utilization of wild animals; the region is disease free (no TB and malaria) and hosts the widest variety of wildlife species. These features are used by game farmers to advertise their product to hunters.

Politically, the Eastern Cape also facilitates game farmers conversion processes. Dale Cunningham, Eastern Cape representative of Wildlife Ranching South Africa (WRSA), states during a symposium on the profitability of agriculture that the slow growth of game farming in Kwa-Zulu Natal due to land claim procedures is “made up” by rapid expansion in the Eastern Cape. The province is considered a paradise for land owners wishing to establish game farms. One Karoo game farmer repeatedly expressed a dream of “turning the Eastern Cape into game”. This farmer feels strong about the crucial role of the hunting industry for the “wise, and profitable, utilisation and conservation of African wildlife”. Often mentioned “evidence” used to substantiate this logic is that since the advent of commercial game farming and trophy hunting, numbers of game have increased significantly. One game farmer states on his hunting website that he was very proud to receive the “conservationist of the year” award from the East Cape Game Management Organization (ECGMA). Paradoxically, Karoo game farmers express much frustration with the governments’ conservation policies that they perceive as limiting their conservation and business efforts on their lands. Regulation related to specific animal species and game management often conflict with their practices and ideologies of conservation and/or preservation. This way game farmers do not feel acknowledged as custodians of nature by national conservation policies. Nevertheless, trophy-hunting farmers praise their community as successful commercial farmers and present themselves as true conservationists by which they distinguish themselves from other farmers and gives them the “right” to create wilderness landscapes. This claim of belonging is intimately related to the

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49 Interview 14 March 2009.
50 Website visited 2 March 2011.
sense of loss experienced in the rapidly transforming commercial-farming landscape.

**Hunting and farmers’ politics of belonging**

Trophy-hunting farmers see themselves as custodians of nature and wildlife in the country. In the following this justification for the expansion of game farming is interpreted as a political and psychological response to South Africa’s political transformation that requests white farmers to re-assert their place in post-apartheid society. Notably the state’s attempts to reform land ownership structures and shift the balance of powers in the countryside is perceived as major threat to the established configuration of power and the sense of belonging for white commercial farmers. Losing ownership, control and use of land, means “deprivation of political sovereignty and consequently loss of cultural integrity, language and cultural connections” (Dods, 1998: 264). Therefore, private trophy-hunting farms represent more than an economic survival strategy; they are linked to the very existence of a particular identity and lifestyle shaped through and inscribed in the Karoo landscape.

The argument present here is that converting private farms into hunting fields is one way of imaginatively appropriating landscape. Foster (2008) affirms that the very making of South Africa has been mediated through a preoccupation of its inhabitants with landscapes that shaped their identities and transformed landscapes into socially constructed spaces charged with particular ideologies. South Africans developed an “unusually reflexive relationship” with “the land” that “became a defining feature of white South African nationhood, an ever-present topic in art and literature, and a recurring anchor of identity in the minds of those who controlled the land and those dispossessed and exiled from it” (Foster, 2008:2-3). In the next paragraph I discuss game farmers’ perceptions of uncertainty about their place in the commercial farming landscape, and ultimately their position in post-apartheid South Africa. In this context farm conversions take up particular meaning in the shifting balance of power that resulted from both economic and political transformation in the second half of the 20th century.
Jonathan Shapiro. The Times. 6 April 2010

THE ANC INSISTS "KILL THE BOER" IS A METAPHOR.

WHAT'S A METAPHOR?
Trophy hunting as political response to post-apartheid society

The Zapiro cartoon\textsuperscript{51} was published after the murder of Eugene Terreblanche in 2010. This incident prompted a public debate about the meanings of this murder in a postcolonial society. Whereas representational bodies of white commercial farmers immediately interpreted this as a political murder indicating orchestrated hatred towards white farmers, politicians and civil society insisted this occurrence represented the consequences of pervasive poverty and inequality in the country. The following two newspaper clippings present the divergent interpretations competing in public discourse.

\textbf{News24 April 6, 2010\textsuperscript{52}:}

The murder of Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) leader Eugene Terre'Blanche was no ordinary crime, but a political murder, "probably involving government", the agricultural union TAU-SA said on Tuesday... Du Toit (TAU-SA) said that farm killings had increased in recent weeks, nationalisation of agricultural land was on the agenda, and the "inflammatory song "shoot the boer" had made an appearance... "TAU-SA rejects statements that farmers treat their workers badly."... If workers felt they were being badly treated, there were sufficient statutory institutions they could approach for help and where their grievances would be considered and examined. Workers could also leave those farms to seek better treatment, accommodation, salary and fringe benefits elsewhere, Du Toit said. "Perhaps the time has now come to make a serious appeal to farmers to reduce their workforce and to mechanize for the sake of security and peace of mind.


\textsuperscript{52}http://www.news24.com/Content/SouthAfrica/News/1059/27c05cf1b4434b6d89057b0486adbc53/06-04-2010-10-33/Farmer_union_TerreBlanche_murder_political (accessed 7 April, 2012).
In response to the murder the agricultural lobby representing white farmers proposed farmers should reduce their workforce for the sake of existential security, rather than economic security. This implies that the reorganization of labour on commercial farms is a political choice motivated by a deeply felt sense of insecurity amongst white commercial farmers. Meanwhile discourse on farmers’ insecurities dominates the public debate and stifles debates on labour matters and asymmetric power relations on farms. Manby (2002) argued there are double standards in the way rural crime is talked about in South Africa. There is an overrepresentation of attention for farm attacks on white commercial farmers and hardly any references are made to violence affecting farm workers. The perceived insecurity amongst white farmers has caused this group to solidify their property boundaries to increase distance to other rural inhabitants who in their perception destroy the ‘old peace’ of the place (Elias & Scotson, 1994 [1965]: 127-9). Game farming in particular is a way for farmers to further increase the distance to farm workers who embody the perceived threat to farmers’ establishedness on the land, whether this threat is ‘real’ or not. The


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shared sense of insecurity amongst farms contradicts the fact that none of the Karoo hunting farms are claimed by black families insisting on their rights to land, as is the case in other regions of the country (see Mnqobi and Brooks for examples from KZN). Moreover, game farms do not seem to be considered for land redistribution practices as the price per hectare is considerably higher than other farms. The Karoo farmers with hunting operations are managing to expand their businesses and remain on the land. They distinguish themselves from those commercial farmers who have been marginalised in the process of agrarian change biased towards large-scale farming.

An uncertain place in post-apartheid society

In the rural areas of South Africa white commercial farmers were used to rule their territories through ‘farmer’s laws’ and organise themselves in commandos that controlled and regulated the countryside, often through violent means. The political transformation shifted institutional inequality to symbolic equality for all citizens of the state. The question is how individuals of previously privileged groups have adjusted and responded to this new state of symbolic equality. The uncertainty experienced by game farmers, about their position in post-apartheid society, was profoundly exposed during my fieldwork where at various occasions representatives of game farming organizations tried to take control over the research process. The urge to ‘defend’ their territory and make sure I would see things from their perspective made me even more aware of the sensitive issues I was exploring on the hunting farms. In the final chapter of this dissertation I elaborate and reflect on the tensions in ethnographic research relationships and how they revealed insights in the social world of game farmers. To me it became increasingly clear that their behaviour was motivated by a struggle for belonging in post-apartheid South Africa.

White masculinity in South Africa has been shaped through a monopoly on power and violence (Visagie, 2004). Linked to processes of state formation that “placed the control of a significant segment of the means of violence into the hands of one of the traditional subgroups of its citizens, and virtually excluded from access to this control members of another subgroup” (Elias, 1990: 215) a similar specific personality structure emerged in America where,
The possession of a firearm and the possession of a white woman’s favour were indispensable attributes of a white man’s pride. An infringement on either implied the lowering of a person’s self-esteem in a society in which social ranking of a person or a family had a very high significance (Elias, 1990: 223).

White farmers’ historical ties to power and violence have been cut through by the post-apartheid government. Karoo farmers have been familiarized with the use of firearms from an early age whereas for black farm dwellers it is unlikely that they possess or use weapons on the farms. The intimate link between white South African males and their weapons was exposed when the state implemented the Firearms Control Act of 2004 that attempts to regulate the possession of weapons in the country. The Act forced licensed gun owners to reapply for their licences and apply for a compliance certificate by 2009. If they failed to do so they would have to dispose their firearms or hand them over to the state. This generated fierce resistance from white farmers’ organizations who responded:

The South African Hunters' and Game Conservation Association has welcomed an interim court interdict, saying it would temporarily stop more than a million South African gun owners from becoming criminals at the stroke of midnight on June 30. Judge Bill Prinsloo on Friday granted an urgent order in the high court in Pretoria that all firearm licenses granted under the 1969 Arms and Ammunition Act shall be deemed to be lawful and valid, pending the outcome of an application to declare portions of the new Firearms Control Act unconstitutional.

Farmers felt they were being criminalised by the Act that heavily interfered with their way of life (on the farm) and their sense of security. As the closing date for the Firearms re-application process was nearing I met some of the applicants on an Eastern Cape shooting range where they could obtain the licence.

Field note shooting range Eastern Cape: 3 April 2009.

A Professional Hunter was present at the shooting range to apply for a ‘dedicated hunter’ status and a new firearms license. There were a lot of people

to renew their licenses. They were all white. One man said he came for a ‘full house’ meaning he needed licenses for pistol, revolver and shotgun. A woman who was shooting with a revolver that her husband wanted to register in her name said “it is for self defense”. All applicants complained about the new Firearms Act feeling that it was just a way of the state to disarm them. This increased their sense of insecurity. A man from the organization managing the shooting range said about the applicants for the comJohnncy test “we direct them to the right answers”.

The shooting range applicants articulate a sense of self evident entitlement to own weapons in order to control their spaces. The rigorous shift in balance of powers since the transition to democracy has lead to an existential crisis for white men whose sense of self was closely linked to having the ability to exercise power over people and space. Generally, and expressed in many conversations on politics, many white South Africans claim to experience a reversal of power relations (“reversed apartheid”) in which whites are the victims of crime and affirmative action which they articulate through demanding much attention to farm murders and failures of the state’s reform policies.

For game farmers in particular sources of uncertainly are not restricted to domestic politics. They spring from global economic as well as conservation regulations that affect their wildlife operations. Game farmers distrust South African government as much as international environmental advocacy groups or animal welfare organizations whose constituency they commonly refer to as “bunny huggers”. These national and transnational movements constantly question the legitimacy of trophy hunting activities in their advocacy work. The following two quotes give an impression of farmers’ perceptions on their threatened position as part of the global hunting community and as South-African landowners.

Hunting is under attack worldwide. The ‘green’, I do not like to call them ‘green’, but these animal rights’ organizations have a big voice. It is going to an end. It is better to go the Shamwari route, tourism is a more sustainable market. Let me give you an example, if there is an endangered species in the USA then they will be protected and Americans cannot import them [the trophies] from Africa. So they are worth nothing, only Europeans can take their trophies home. Game Farmer, 26 November 2009.
I would say we buy more game, and more different things. Because with this government and the land issue, you do not know who they are going to take it from [the land]. They might say you have too much and expropriate it. Better leave it like this. The business has been good to us. Last year [2008] we made more profit than in the 30 years we have been in this business.

Game farmer, 20 April 2009

In these expressions game farmers portray their situation, and their futures, as unstable and highly insecure. Conservationist and game farmer Peter Flack\textsuperscript{55} writes on his personal website that he sold his Karoo game ranch for three reasons: 1) his children were not interested in taking over, 2) personal health problems, and 3) ‘government is against game ranching and is beginning to make life difficult for us ranchers\textsuperscript{56}. Nevertheless he sold the farm to a good friend whose son is now managing the place. Despite the looming expectations of the trophy hunters’ future, game farmers do not really seem to be limited in the prolongation of their expansion plans. During a visit to Cradock one year after my fieldwork (February 2011), I learned that one game farmer who had asserted in 2009 that he did not intend on expanding the property and rather invest in a greater variety of animals, incorporated another property. And though 2010 presented some challenges for trophy hunters to come to South Africa, notably because of the Soccer World Cup and the global financial crisis, trophy-hunting farmers reported that their businesses are still doing well. There seems to be a discrepancy between the perceptions trophy-hunting farmers have about their position in society, and the material reality in which they still manage to invest in land and wild animals and sustain, and increase, their wealth.

\textsuperscript{55} www.Johnflack.co.za

\textsuperscript{56} Website article John Flack: Last Hunt on Bankfontein. http://www.Johnflack.co.za/articles/articleLastHunt.html (visited 10 May 2011). On his website John Flack presents himself as ‘hunter, writer, conservationist, and retired game rancher’. He has one of the biggest trophy collections in Southern Africa and he writes about his experiences related to (trophy) hunting. In his private capacity he produces books and films about hunting in Africa and in March 2011 he launched a documentary called ‘The South African Conservation Success Story’.
Whether the perceived national and international threats are real or not is not the point here. Game farmers’ perceptions about their situation have consequences for the way they behave in the current configuration of power in the Karoo commercial farming landscape. Sociologist W.I. Thomas observed that “as men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (quoted in: Merton, 1948:193). The theorem assumes that people respond to the meaning they ascribe to a given situation, regardless the “objective features’ of that situation” (1948:194). And thus trophy-hunting farmers respond to what land reform and environmental activism means to them: loss of livelihood, lifestyle, power and ultimately, a sense of belonging.

*Imaginative appropriation of landscape though hunting narratives*

Hunting stories and narratives have contributed to the project of belonging by detailed descriptions of the landscape and the people in it. These writings have contributed to the production of cultural imageries of nature, wildlife, and different categories of people involved in hunting safaris or nature conservation. I generally saw book shelves stacked with stories on hunting adventures in Africa in the farmers’ house or in the hunting lodge. On cupboards and on the walls I watched framed pictures of hunters and their hunting trophies gathered in different places. On coffee tables I usually found a pile of hunting magazines, photo books with images of the Big Five and African Wilderness, and a guest book with hunting stories from clients that visited the farm. In other words, the trophy-hunting farms pictures and conserves narratives of a hunting landscape.

Contrary to other Afrikaans literary genres that since the 1960s have moved towards progressive and revolutionary writings on South-African society, hunting literature in particular is a genre that still articulates conservative ideas about Afrikaner culture and politics. Especially Afrikaner men, usually portrayed as hunters and adventurers in Afrikaans writings, escape in contemporary hunting stories the demands of historical and political burdens when they enter the hunting field (Visagie, 2004: 132).

Recent history has dispossessed the white South-African male of his identification with power: the horrific apartheid history and contemporary politics no longer confirm the fiction of the white ‘legitimate’ ruler in South
Africa. And when this historical burden is too heavy, there is the possibility for the male subject to fetch his rifle and search the primordial, pre-historical, man within himself (Visagie, 2004: 110-111 translated from Afrikaans by author).

An important aspect of the image of the hunting field is that it is situated in nature untouched by man. The following passage from ‘The Great Hunters’ illustrates how the African landscape was perceived to be predestined to hunt:

When Jan van Riebeeck and his party arrived at the Cape in 1652, they found a totally undeveloped country in which wild animals such as the lion, the elephant and the buffalo wandered to the very shores of Table Bay. Curbs were placed upon the hunting activities of the first colonies by the Dutch East India Company, but soon proved hopeless. The Southern tip of Africa was hunter’s paradise (Haresnape, 1974:viii).

Hunting landscapes found in an “undeveloped country” refers to the myth of the “empty land” waiting for colonists to occupy and use it. This story is currently reproduced in discourses on ‘unproductive’ land use by black land reform and game farmers claiming that the Karoo simply is not destined for small-scale farming. White South Africans of British descent generated hunting narratives too. During fieldwork I read several Wilbur Smith books, narrating the life of professional hunter Michael Courtney, in which I encountered similar descriptions of Africa as hunting paradise and place of adventure; including the many wars between Brit and Boer. The book *A Time to Die* (1989) is “set against the majesty of the African landscape, its great plains, swamplands, forests and mountains, *A Time to Die* is a story of courage and friendship, the thrill of the hunt, the savagery of war and the saving power of love”57. On the internet the biography of this “world-wide bestselling author” shows where the love for hunting narratives comes from:

When I turned eight years of age he [father] gave me a .22 Remington repeater rifle. It had belonged to my grandfather before him, and it had 122 notches on its butt. He taught me to shoot it safely and to honour the sportsman's code. Soon there was no more space on the butt for my own notches. It was the start of my lifelong love affair with firearms.

In a padstal\textsuperscript{58} along the main highway leading into the heart of the Karoo Midlands I found a book written by a local farmer titled ‘The Glory of an African Farm’\textsuperscript{59}. The story was published locally in 2008 and is situated at the heart of the Karoo Midlands. It represents a farmer’s perspective on the changing commercial farming landscape in the Karoo and notably the increasing presence of trophy-hunting farms. The book tells the story of a local farmer’s son who falls in love with the daughter of an American hunting client who visits the neighbouring hunting farm. One of the trophy-hunting farmers I knew assured me that he knew author Chris Hood personally and “everything he knows about trophy-hunting, he knows from me”. Interestingly the book gives insight in the world of contemporary commercial hunting.

Reno, Nevada is a long way from Camdeboo in South Africa. Reno is second to Las Vegas as gambling mecca and convention centre. But for the last days of January each year there is a buzz of excitement when SCI or Safari Club International host their huntin’ shootin’ and fishin’ expo (Hood, 2008: 24).

Set against the timely background of trophy hunting activities Hood typically represents a conservative farming landscape in which adolescent sons of white commercial farmers make sense of their place on the farm.

The farmer was vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather and the vagaries of markets. He had no control over prices. World markets, crop failures and successes were all factors. Mohair and wool prices had their ups and down when compared to wash and wear synthetic fibers. Maize and Lucerne fodder prices plummeted on oversupply and farmers sometimes found their input costs more than what they got for the crop. In South Africa, as opposed to most other European countries, and in the United States, there was no farming subsidy. World trade was skewed. Tariffs and import restrictions counted against free trade. It was a crazy world but farmers persisted. The glorious feeling of the earth. The outdoor life. The joy of each sunrise made for the glory of the African farm (Hood, 2008: 79).

\textsuperscript{58} Afrikaans word for road café.

\textsuperscript{59} The title is inspired by a famous Olive Schreiner novel named ‘The Story of an African Farm’.
Through the considerations of a young farmer, Fanie, pondering over the start of his independent farming career, the Karoo farmer is portrayed as survivor of global capitalism after having survived frontier wars and continuous challenges posed by the natural environment. Despite the dire farming circumstances he remains on the land because he belongs there, that is the image presented in this local narrative that resonate with farmers’ stories I heard during fieldwork in the area. Besides the external challenges farmers are faced with, Hood also presents tensions coming from farm life itself.

But here on the farm were also people. Sometimes they came to work. Sometimes – and mainly on payday – they drank themselves into oblivion. Sometimes they fought with each other. Or they even went as far as putting on curses and casting spells. Africa had a strange and dark side where logic was cast aside and the ancestors called into play (Hood, 2008: 79).

In Fanie’s neat mind, this was far too complicated. He was now the boss and had to interpret different agendas. Oubaas was African and Kotie of mixed blood. Like oil and water, deep down they did not mix.... He had to command respect both with Oubaas and Kotie and the other workers on the farm. Kindness and consideration were often interpreted as weakness. A weakness that was there to be exploited. The African mind was a complex mechanism that needed careful handling.

People, people, people, Fanie sighted. It’s people who complicate everything (Hood, 2008: 80).

The narrative constantly presents stereotypical images of black and coloured farm residents as exotic others. The novel’s characters all long for the familiar configuration of power in which master and servant are both certain about the way they relate to each other. This figuration is represented in the book as the natural order of things in the Karoo formed through spontaneous segregation of different categories of people who “deep down do not mix”. The book is therefore another example of the ways Karoo farmers imprint landscape images into reality. By producing and selling such local stories and images to travellers and tourists passing the Karoo they appropriate the landscape imaginatively.
Cultural imaginaries and racial formation in the trophy-hunting landscape

How do game farmers make sense of the shifting balance-of-powers and how do they deal with it? This section provides ethnographic evidence to argue that the trophy-hunting landscape is shaped by and re-shaping cultural imaginaries that re-assert white farmers’ power in relation to farm dwellers.

Restricting mobilities and stereotyping farm workers have been powerful means employed by farmers that formed the racial and spatial foundation of the Karoo landscape. Like in Winston Parva “exclusion and stigmatisation of the outsiders by the established groups were powerful weapons used by the latter to maintain their identity, to assert their superiority, keeping others firmly in their place” (Elias, 1976:4). Both exclusion and stigmatization are part of the farm conversion processes in the Karoo. The conversions enable removal of farm residents and farmers keep stigmatising farm workers as an inferior brand of people. A typical example:

These people’s mindset is lifestyle-driven not money-driven. They just want to drink and have a good time, but you also have to make money. She earns more out of welfare which is lots of money by their standards. And I pay them above minimum wage. I also tried somebody from Grahamstown but he liked to stab his wife and she also stabbed him; we had a hearing yesterday and they were dismissed. There are lots of social problems. The Zimbabweans work much harder, though their true colours also come out; they did some stealing. But I was so impressed with them, if we had people like that. It’s the people that hold us back economically. I could start butchery and produce my own meat here, or start a restaurant. There are many ways to add value, but it is the people that hold you back!

Game farmer, 26 November 2009

The owner of ‘Karoo Hunting’, Steward Burns refers to farm workers’ behaviours as indication of natural inclinations of a different category of human beings. The circumstances of farm workers who drink or Zimbabweans who steal are not considered relevant to explain particular manners. A new category of people is introduced: ‘the Zimbabweans.’ Steward compares them to his local
workers whose behaviours he ranks as lesser than the hard-working Zimbabweans. This makes sense as foreign labourers are less threatening to the position of the local established than the local outsiders that challenge the balance of powers. According to the farmer bad behaviour is simply intrinsic to “these people”; it is explained by their “mindset” and their “true colours”. It functions as an “objective sign” of workers’ inferiority (Elias, 1976: 20) because the farmer did not create the stigma, it keeps alive the images attached to the category of black farm workers shaped throughout the process of colonialization. With the changing balance of power (whether perceived or ‘real’) farmers put up emotional barriers to preserve the identity of the group and its superiority (Elias, 1976:8). This is necessary because associations with outsiders are taboo; they potentially “infect” or “pollute” the established group’s norms and breaking those means lowering one’s own status within the established group.

For decades, distance between whites and blacks was institutionally arranged through a myriad of pass laws and apartheid rules. Contact and (physical) closeness across race categories was severely restricted through the separation of groups, and criminalising intimate associations between different categories of people defined by their skin colour. On commercial farms where residents of different race categories continued to inhabit the same space (though sub-divided in different spaces for white farmer and black worker) residents made sense of their place through stigma. Post-apartheid legislation might assume institutional equality for all citizens of South Africa, but farmer’s attitudes towards workers perpetuate the taboo that ensures their power that is linked to their sense of self; even more so when the balance-of-power is challenged by the introduction of reform policies that aim to tilt the balance of power in favour of the worker. Woolman and Bishop (2007:4) reported that despite South Africa’s legal revolution, “widespread non compliance with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act” remains a common problem’ in the case of farm workers. They argue that the position of farm workers is a “crisis of caste” which cannot be solved in courts but require changes within “all of the social conditions that reinforce such entrenched systemic inequalities” (Woolman & Bishop, 2007:6). The paradox is that because of legal transformations farmers preserve or increase the emotional distance between them and farm workers, thereby
reinforcing the very social conditions that created the power imbalance. Confronted with change, be it social, economic or political; human beings apt to seek refuge in the image of a social order which never changes and project it to a past that never was (Wouters, 2008:184). And trophy-hunting farms represent exactly that: the longing for a perfect, and fictional, colonial order.

*Marketing colonial nostalgia*

For some farmers conversion to game farming has been an economic solution to processes of agrarian change that made wildlife a more viable investment than livestock products. This economic viability is not guaranteed according to a local accountant who confided that “lots of people do not make it, only if they have massive outside funding, from outside investors”. To the question why investors are interested in an unprofitable business, he answered: “most do it for the love of it, they come here to hunt and then they want their own place, their own game farm”. Karoo game farmer Ralph Watson confronted with this statement during the interview further defined the attractiveness of owning a game farm:

> No, it is not about the big money. It is about the lifestyle they do not want to lose; the colonial lifestyle that you do not have in Europe.

(Game Farmer, 26 March 2009)

In order to preserve the “colonial lifestyle” Watson further explained “we need to maintain the elitist nature of hunting and wildlife safaris”. When the idea of the “big game safari” emerged during the early 20th century it promoted an image of Kenya as veritable Garden of Eden for European hunters and at the same time it “created and reinforced an image of African inferiority and subordination that was at the heart of the imperial and colonial ideology” (Steinhart, 2006: 2). The idea of the hunting safari and its roots in colonial relations is explicitly promoted and marketed on the websites and in public relations material of the Karoo trophy-hunting farms:

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60 Interview March 2009
Website fragment

The Lodge has an ambience and romance of a bygone Colonial African era...After a day's hard hunting; hunters are entertained in the magnificently appointed guest lounge. There is no better way of encountering the freedom of spirit of the real Africa, listening to the roar of Lions, whilst relaxing and enjoying the famous African Barbeque in the beautiful outdoors. The well-designed garden has a full pool and seating areas. Aloe Safaris is an introduction to the envious hunting lifestyle61.

Brochure fragment

The Watson family settled on the Safari Estate in 1843...Sundowners are enjoyed in the quaint colonial underground pub or around a campfire under the star filled African Sky. Candlelit hunting cuisine, with fine South African wines, is served in old colonial comfort, with classic China, antique silverware and crystal.

The Karoo trophy-hunting farm is presented as a place to celebrate, and commercially exploit, Africa’s “bygone” colonial era. This landscape enables the dramatization and reinforcement of certain class, race and gender asymmetries. A similar interpretation was provided by Bunn (1996: 44) who recognized the establishment of the private Mala Mala reserve in the Transvaal in 1927 by Sir Marshall Campbell as response to the modernization of labour relations on Campbell’s sugar estates in Kwa-Zulu Natal at that time. The game reserve:

naturalizes certain types of ethnic identification...trackers, game guards, cooks, waiters, gun bearers, inhabit positions and wear fantastical uniforms that advertise the pseudo-regimental code of authority imposed by a class of white capitalist managers like Campbell. Existing for the pleasure of another, these actors perform roles whose ontological emphasis is towards the other’s system of meaning’. (Bunn, 1996:47)

African labourers on the game farm are only acknowledged in positions that comply with colonial images of African presence in the landscape: as servants of those who came to enjoy the landscape converted in the image of Africa’s bygone colonial era.

61 (Website visited 2 March 2011)
Another crucial part of this landscape image is the complete absence or invisibility of farm workers on the trophy-hunting farm. The absence of Africans in the landscape is marketed together with their presence in the landscape as servants.

**Fragment from trophy-hunting website** (italics added by author)
You should hunt with Springbok Game Farm because:
- The Eastern Cape is malaria free and there are no tropical diseases.
- This area is not over populated by people.
- We are very proud of being one of the largest privately owned family run game reserves in South Africa/Eastern Cape.
- Our hunting area is big; it encompasses one block of over 100,000 acres/40,000 hectares where all the species roam free in their natural state.

......
- We also have a large number of well trained friendly staff to cater for your every need, helping to make your hunting trip an unforgettable experience.

What do game farmers mean by phrases like ‘well trained friendly staff’? The use of a word like ‘training’ in relation to catering for clients on the farm suggests that workers are offered a process of skilling and learning in order to work in a hospitality setting. ‘Training’ is far removed from the Karoo farm practices where being ‘trained’ preferably means being ‘disciplined’ and ‘obedient’. As Watson described:

> It all has to do with supervision. On an elite, top-quality safari business you need trained staff, but farmer’s wives nowadays are too busy visiting the hairdresser, making trips in and out of town leaving the farm unmanaged and staff members undisciplined.

The manager of ‘Springbok Game Farm’, Du Toit, explained that their “well trained friendly” staff is trained on the job. He sends new workers along with experienced workers who simply show the practice while they are working. This is the way it has always been done on the commercial farms; it just was not

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62 Website visited 2 March 2011
63 Interview 17 March 2009
presented to visitors before as ‘training’. It is a way of framing old practices in new discourse that meets the demands of the hunting industry as well as society at large (calling servants trained staff). Du Toit did not envision any possibilities for his staff members to hold management positions: “they are no good mentors”. He added that “only a white man can tell them what to do”. On the Karoo hunting farms the meaning of ‘well-trained staff’ remains thin and arbitrary as workers are defined by cultural imaginaries that keep them in the place of subaltern. The South-African game lodge is a place where “those who have lost power regain their sense of its possession” (Ndebele, 1997:99-101).

The ideas about farm workers as trackers and skinners represent distinctive markers (stigma) that determine the value of the work and power relations. These differences are expressed, known and recognized, as natural and therefore legitimate differences. Insights from my participant observations in a ECGMA ‘Game Guides Course’ illustrate how farm workers are informed about their natural fit with wildlife and hunting on the game farm.

The ECGMA ‘Game Guides Course’: converting farm workers into game guides

The Eastern Cape Game Management Association (ECGMA) offers a course called ‘Game Guides Course’ which aims to educate farm labourers working on game farms. Designing and providing a Game Guides Course shows that the wildlife industry aims to regulate the performance and roles of game guides on the farms. In 2009, I participated in a three-day Guides Course as the only

64 A longer quote from Ndebele’s essay worth reading: ‘Does the game lodge not represent the ultimate ‘leisuring’ of colonial history? The contemporary tour of duty in a game lodge is of a special kind. It is to reaffirm and celebrate a particular kind of cultural power; the enjoyment of colonial leisure...The thought occurs to me that the game lodge has become a leisure sanctuary where moneyed white South Africans can take refuge from the stresses of a black-run country. Once the game lodge was an extension of their power; now it is a place where those who have lost power go to regain a sense of its possession’ (Ndebele, 1997:99-101).

65 ECGMA hosts ‘all role players in the safari-industry’ in the Eastern Cape. The majority of its members consist of recreational hunters. Other membership categories are ‘Game Ranchers’, ‘Professional Hunters and Outfitters’, ‘Junior Hunters’ and several associate memberships. ECGMA’s objective is to service and represent their members on provincial as well as national levels. Reference: www.ecgma.co.za.
female and only white person in a group of fifteen black male participants. The programme of the course, that shaped my expectations, looked like this:

**Respondent Form ECGMA 2009**

- client handling (hunters),
- tracking,
- shooting skills,
- skinning & dissecting (basics),
- caping (taxidermy),
- vehicle status (prepared & clean),
- animal identification,
- animal behaviour,
- animal food preferences,
- personal behaviour in hunting situations.

On a rainy day I arrived at the course venue which was a remote farm nearby the Kei River. In the trunk of my car I had packed the required animal, sealed in a plastic bag. Immediately one of the facilitators explained to me about the other course members that “they are all black men” and “here are sandwiches for you because you do not eat what they eat”. This local farmer’s wife who was hired as a caterer mentioned that the Guides Course was actually meant for “Africans”. David, the course instructor from ECGMA, told me that white men do not need to do the Guides Course because they participate in different hunting courses from the age of 10 already. David facilitates some of those courses too. As a result of different socialization patterns for white farmer families and black farm workers “they” are not “on the same level” and need a separate course to train them as Game Guides. This is the basic assumption David, a middle-aged white South African, started from. Differences in experiences with and the meanings of hunting were racialised from the start and reflected in the design of course.

Throughout being in the course it was hard to engage privately with the other course participants to find out what their expectations or objectives were. There was never a round of introductions or space to share experiences with the facilitator who generalised that “first you were herding sheep and now you need to look after wild animals”. The only question David directed towards the participants was if anyone could perform as isiXhosa translator so that he could
speak Afrikaans. In his interactions with the participants David would refer to the attendants as “belonging” to a particular farm or landowner, instead of asking or using their names. It gave me the impression that the black men in their identical overalls were denied a personality; that they were only there for the sake of the employer and not for personal benefit or development. This feeling intensified as some of their names were spelled wrong on the course certificates or contained only a “nickname” that was submitted on the registration form by the employers. Telling was an interaction between a hunting outfitter who arrived at the venue when the course was over to fetch one of the participants who works as his tracker. The young white man walked straight up to David, ignoring his employee, and received a report on his employee’s performance from David. Then he discussed with David the requirements for outfitters licenses, and continued chatting to the other white people. Meanwhile everyone ate their portion of meat from the braai; tender steaks for white people and rough bony chunks for the black men because the caterer believed they want “meat they can chow”.

My ambivalent appearance as course participant between the other black course participants and as white female researcher between the white facilitators resulted in a strange position during the course. I slept in a separate room, was told to make use of the instructor’s bathroom, dressed in a worker’s overall, was the only person making notes, and talked with both the course participants and the facilitators during meals and free time (of which there was lots to my surprise). Due to limited time and the segregated spaces at the venue it was extremely difficult to talk freely with the isiXhosa-speaking men. It did not seem appropriate for me to enter the male sleeping quarters where they would retreat during breaks, especially considering I experienced constant care and attention of the white facilitators. Only few opportunities arose to find out where people worked and what their names were. When I got a chance to ask them what they felt about the course they simply said they liked it. On the other hand there were the white facilitators who were constantly keen to share their views and stories with me. The informal talks with David, a visiting taxidermist and the farm owners provided me with interesting insights into cultural imaginaries produced in the hunting industry.
The course consisted mostly of ‘theoretical’ information about the nature of wildlife ranching and hunting provided in a small room furnished with plastic chairs and a flip-over that David used to write key words and make drawings of tracks, game capturing strategies, shot placements, trophy photographs, horns, and caping techniques. Most of the time David was talking and we were listening, there were hardly questions asked or responses from the participants in this setting. This lack of interaction and input from the participants characterized the whole course. During some practical parts of the training I felt that the intention was not to skill farm workers. The shooting practice, supposedly training shooting skills as promised in the course outline, was not presented as serious practice at all. Everyone was allowed to shoot once or twice with different calibre rifles; for some black men perhaps the first time they ever hold on to a weapon. We got the opportunity of firing a shotgun which has a powerful drawback that throws your body off your feet causing hilarious entertainment for the observers. There was constant laughing about the workers who were clearly unskilled in handling a rifle. And they were still not skilled after the practice. The men merely were able to demonstrate failure which reinforced the idea that they are bad shooters. This ‘entertainment’ session was not a safe environment in which learning could take place; where mistakes are analysed and explained, and where the individual progress of participants is reflected upon in the process of the course.

Due to heavy rains the tracking part of the course was skipped completely. Possibly this was also because it is believed that farm workers do not really need training on this aspect. The course instructor presented the idea that black workers have ‘natural’ talents for tracking. This became evident when he spoke of the requirements:

Tracking. Your ancestors were specialists at this work. Like ghosts in the mist. They could find tracks like no one else and you all still have this capacity and this knowledge! It just has to wake up, use your eyes and ears. Then you will proper. Excel the white man. It is natural to you! We cannot comJohn with you.
You have been working with sheep, now you need to know the game tracks
(Translated from Afrikaans by author)66.

The course instructor claimed that “they”, black farm workers, are “naturally” suited for following animal tracks in the wilderness. Attributing biological talents to unskilled and low paid jobs on farms legitimises farm workers position placed in the realm of the uncivilised, as if that is where they “naturally” belong. In stark contrast to this imaginary the last session of the course revealed that many of the course participants fear wild animals and feel insecure and incompetent about working with wildlife. Several men asked questions about how to approach various game species like leopard, rhino, and lion and how they could prevent being attacked by them. They expressed concerns about working and living among wild animals whose behaviour they are unfamiliar with. Clearly the farm workers in the course did not perceive it as normal or natural to encounter wildlife in their personal environment. They revealed the constructed and fictional dimensions of the landscape and trophy hunting practices that game farmers are pursuing on their lands.

The meaning or value of the certificate provided by ECGMA remained unclear to me. Unfortunately I was not able to ask the participants what the certificate meant to them. Perhaps it would increase their salaries or enable promotions in the farm organization? The hunting industry obviously needs certified labour to comply with increasing formalization tendencies and business ratings in the tourism sector. Possibly certified black game guides contribute to a favourable ‘Black Economic Empowerment’ status for the game farm. Nevertheless, my experiences and observations from the Game Guide Course suggest that game farmers’ needs and images of wildlife landscapes are represented stronger than those of farm workers.

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66 It is worth to have a look at the original text as well. “Spoor Sny. Hulle voorvaders was spesialiste met dai werk. Soas spoke in die mis. Hulle kon spoor sny as niemand anders. Daai vermoo en kennis het hulle almal nog! Net weer wakker maak, net oe en ore gebruik. Dan gaan hulle weer dik maak. Verbeter dan die witman. Das natuurlik in hulle! Ons kan nie met hulle loop nie. Hulle het met skape gewerk, ma nou moet julle die bokke spoor ken”.
Permanently shifting categories in the Karoo power configuration

In this chapter I present trophy-hunting farms as a particular kind of space constructed in response to the shifting balance of powers in post-apartheid South Africa where the legitimacy of white land ownership is contested and processes of agrarian change altered farming conditions and possibilities considerably. The burden of the past combined with uncertainty about the future felt by white commercial farmer’s triggers a response to re-assert their place in the post-apartheid configuration of power. Specific cultural imaginaries are produced and marketed on trophy-hunting farms that assert their establishedness in relation to black farm workers who are kept in an outsider position; working as trackers, skinners and servants on the Karoo trophy-hunting farms.

The conversion processes signal an economic and political strategy for white farmers to remain on the land where they feel they belong. The rapid breakdown witnessed by Karoo farmers of their local communities as result of ever growing property sizes that reduce the number of farmers in the area and have gradually erased numerous social institutions that used to assert their sense of belonging. In the process of changing power relations established and outsider categories are permanently shifting in the Karoo farming landscape. Firstly, game farmers feel superior in relation to their neighbours who are farming with livestock. Secondly, they introduced foreign labourers on their farms which shaped a particular established and outsiders configuration between the South African farm dwellers and Zimbabwean migrant workers. Then there are tensed relations between Afrikaans and British farmers and black and coloured farm workers that are constantly re-configured through various narratives about rights to belong in the Karoo.

The political dimensions of conversions are often concealed as the wildlife sector prefers to present shifts to wildlife utilization as beneficial for rural communities. They claim that game farms would provide jobs, training and economic benefits for the population in the surroundings (Langholz & Kerley, 2006; Van der Merwe & Saayman, 2003). This contradicts the historical and contemporary narratives of converting farmers who find conversions attractive because labour demands decrease considerably which reduces labour costs as well
as the number of potential land claimants. The trophy hunting farms in the Karoo have not provided more employment opportunities for farm dwellers or other rural inhabitants. The amalgamation of farm properties to establish hunting properties accelerate land concentration processes and the continuation of retrenchment and displacement of farm workers since the 1970s. Game farmers claim the right to land ownership and wildlife farming by presenting themselves as custodians of nature contributing to rural development. They appropriate the Karoo landscape through the conversion process by removing traces from settler agriculture are substantiated by the idea that game farming is a superior land use compared to livestock farming or small-scale agriculture. With the conversion process they erase memories of dispossession and re-create an empty land in which they paradoxically position themselves as natives.