Conclusion: Tracking Farm Dwellers’ Invisible Great Trek

South Africa’s power configuration is shifting as a result of post apartheid reform policies and increasing market liberalization that produce great contradictions in the nation’s transformation process. In this ethnography I have shown commercial farmers’ and farm dwellers’ positions in this transformation process and their feelings towards it through the lens of private farm conversions to wildlife exploitation for trophy hunting. I found that both commercial farmers and farm dwellers sense a threat of belonging; their place in democratic South Africa is perceived as highly insecure and problematic. The relational dynamics resulting from these perceptions and processes unfold indeed “astonishing paradoxes” (Ballard, 2005: 83) in the ‘new’ South Africa.

In the previous chapters I have given a detailed account of the empirical material I generated on the Karoo trophy-hunting farms during fieldwork in 2009. In this concluding chapter I relate the findings to Elias’ established and outsiders framework (Elias & Scotson, 1994 [1965]) and discuss the theoretical contribution generated through my interpretations of the ethnographic material. First, I present four established and outsiders dynamics that are at play in the trophy hunting game specifically and in Karoo reconfiguration processes generally. The discussion of these configuration dynamics enable answering the research question focusing on the reconfiguration of power and belonging in the Karoo, and the following sub questions posed in the introduction of this dissertation: 1) how do farm conversions to trophy hunting in the Karoo affect the lives of farm workers/dwellers living and labouring in the area? 2) How do conversion processes shift power relations in the post-apartheid Karoo? And 3) what do these conversions mean for attachments to place and belonging of commercial farmers and farm dwellers in the Karoo commercial farming landscape? After the presentation of the configuration dynamics I point out how my
constructivist use of the established and outsiders framework makes its application and conceptual repertoire more dynamic than the original framework introduced by Elias and Scotson (Elias & Scotson, 1994 [1965]). This allowed me to study the position of farm dwellers from different perspectives linked the configurations that they are part of. Three specific theoretical insights relating to the model have been derived from this ethnographic study and are presented in this chapter.

Last but not least I consider the societal contribution and political implications of this thesis. The alarming insights on the relational dynamics between commercial farmers and farm dwellers specifically question the state of social transformation in post apartheid South Africa. The contours of farm dwellers’ *Invisible Great Trek* are tracked by their positions in configuration processes that shape their circumstances and decisions concerning settlements and movements in the region. This development deserves attention of both government and civil society organizations aiming to topple the asymmetric power balance in the countryside.

**Four established and outsiders configuration dynamics in the Karoo**

It has been shown in this ethnographic study that the shifting power relations between commercial farmers and farm dwellers in the Karoo are linked to political and economic transformation processes in society at large. The first configuration dynamic unfolded in this study is the constant shuffling and overlap of established and outsiders categories at specific moments in time and in specific contexts. It is for example argued that Karoo farm dwellers have persistently been subjected to a ‘process of outsidering’ by commercial farmers and by various oppressive regimes limiting their mobilities and dispossessing them of land. In relation to African labour migrants or reform policies that aim to change the balance of power in their advantage however farm dwellers’ position shift to an established status. ‘We’ and ‘them’ feelings are shaped and continuously changed by the political and economic context in which relations are formed. In this sense English-speaking farmers were established in relation to the Afrikaners when the Cape Colony was ruled by the British, and their
status shifted somewhat to that of outsiders when the Afrikaners were in power during the political dominance of the National Party from 1948. Interestingly the descendants of British settlers have been the first to engage in wildlife exploitation for hunting in the Karoo. South Africa’s current political system aims to transform the asymmetric power relations inherited from the colonial past. One of its major paradoxes is the present-day salience of racial classifications in processes of social stratification. Constructions of race, ethnicity and class differences form a crucial aspect of challenging or legitimizing the balance of powers in the countryside.

State formation and the construction of race and space

One level where established and outsiders categories manifest is through relations with the state. Since South Africa’s political transformation social differences between white farmers and black workers have been considerably reduced, at least in a legal sense. Within the democratic framework all citizens are in principle equal. This shifts the established and outsiders configuration where commercial farmers have paradoxically claimed establishedness since they arrived and settled as newcomers that resulted in the formation of a colonial society. In the post apartheid political context white commercial farmers are being repositioned as outsiders whose land ownership and privileged status are deemed illegitimate. Under these circumstances the self-acclaimed established increase social distance to outsiders and re-assert their established positions through construction of racial and spatial constructions in the commercial farming landscape.

On the level of the state reform policies have been formulated through racial categories in order to provide redress for ‘historically disadvantaged’ people. Despite the fact that South Africans insist to live in a non-racist society, racial categories mean a great deal in the life worlds of Karoo inhabitants. The heightened racial awareness among South African people is noticeable in everyday conversations. Commercial farmers typically use the phrase “I am not a racist, but...” at the start of stories about the racial other, or outsider, to which they attribute stereotypical images of their behaviour. Perceptions of the racial other are associated with attitudes that transcend skin tones of a person.
Behaviour determines whether you are black or white and the use of these
categories is deeply inscribed in language and sense making practices of people
in the Karoo. Racial categories mean different things in specific places. White
people who do not act conform racist or conservative stereotypes are described
as “not really white”, and black people who do not conform to images of black
people are described as “white” or as “coconuts” meaning black on the outside
and white on the inside.

The symbolic equality enforced on macro level shapes local configuration
dynamics. In the Karoo white commercial farmers have established themselves
as dominant group and act to preserve their dominant position in a society.
Therefore they increase the social distance to those who are closest to them; in
this case farm dwellers living on their land. Based on examples from various
contexts theorists have argued that the erosion of social difference threatens
people’s identities and often results in undesired consequences ranging from
stigmatization to violence between groups (Blok, 1998). Other factors that play a
role in transforming societies where differences between people are diminishing
are demographic and ecological conditions, the political context and the role of
the state (ibid, 49). Social distance and identity formation go hand in hand (Blok,
1998: 41):

Identity, who you are, what you represent or stand for, whence you derive your
self-esteem, is based on subtle distinctions that are emphasized, defended, and
reinforced against what is closest because that is what poses the greatest threat
(Blok, 1998: 48).

In other words, social identity lies in difference. This explains why after the
abolition of slavery in the United States ex-slaves were subjected to fierce
discrimination and extreme violence. The equality of ex-slaves before the law
threatened poor and middle-class whites who were concerned about their social
distance to the black population from which they derived their self esteem and
identity (Blok, 1998: 40). The Winston Parva study in post-war England showed
that emphasizing minor differences between two working class groups was
important in gossip, stigmatization, and “we” and “them” feelings (Elias &
Scotson, 1994 [1965]). Elias and Scotson showed that emotional distance was
preserved to prevent closeness or “pollution” that could affect the superior status of the established (Elias, 1976).

In South Africa’s apartheid landscape social distances have been carefully engineered through spatial segregation of people labelled according to racial categories. Black and coloured people were often forcibly removed to marginal spaces like townships and homelands while the white minority state strictly controlled their movements towards urban areas reserved for the settlement and livelihood needs of whites. Besides displacing non-white people to designated areas apartheid spatial engineering served to arrange cheap black labour for the white commercial farms. Therefore many black people working and residing on the farms have been in close proximity to white farmers. This closeness has been managed for centuries through bonds of slavery, servitude, and authoritarian paternalism that shaped great differences and social distance between white farmers and black workers. As long as white people enjoyed protection and privileges of the apartheid state the asymmetric power balance between white farmers and black workers was never effectively challenged. The interdependencies of white land owners and black workers shaped forms of cultural exchange and social and economic relations that were not merely exploitative and brutal, but also diverse and complex, especially because of different class positions in the countryside (Van Onselen, 1990). Van Onselen (1990, 1996) illustrates that there was social mobility within and across racial boundaries. My interpretation of the social mobility during the first half of the 20th century Van Onselen observed is that it was possible because social difference, more importantly racial difference, was institutionalised. The entire state apparatus ensured and enforced racial difference in all spheres of life; in schools and churches and work places. If necessary, differences were retained with violence. In this context social mobility was ultimately limited through legal boundaries that clearly confined people’s place in society. This is radically different now the legal framework that regulated mobility has disappeared.

Not only are these institutionalised differences abolished since 1994, the post-apartheid state reform policies aim to provide redress for specific categories of people. Farm dwellers have been recognized by the state as vulnerable citizens deprived of land, tenure security and labour rights. Particularly the introduction of a land reform programme and labour legislation are perceived by farmers as a
challenge to the configuration of power and belonging in the commercial farming landscape. In response to the symbolic equality for farmers and workers on the level of the state, farmers re-assert their establishedness by increasing social difference and distance through the trophy-hunting landscape. This shapes contemporary rural interdependencies between farmers and workers in local configurations.

Transformation of rural interdependencies in local configurations

The shifting power balance as a result of South Africa’s state formation process, including the adopted neoliberal economic system, shapes reconfiguration processes in the Karoo. The increasing exploitation of wildlife and private farm conversions for trophy-hunting purposes are a response to political and economic transformations. These are notably the deregulation and liberalization of South Africa’s agricultural sector (Zyl et al., 2001) and the increasing neoliberalisation of nature (Castree, 2008). Processes of agrarian change have been biased towards large-scale and capital-intensive production in the agricultural sector. In general several authors (see for example Bhabha, 2004; Ferguson, 2007) have argued that the way African postcolonies have been “integrated” in the global economy has mostly generated unemployment and growing inequalities (Mbembe, 2001a: 55). Deregulation policies introduced in the 1980s “opened the way for mass poverty” and one of the consequences is the gradual disappearance of regular, protected wage employment; casual work is becoming the rule. Although the wildlife sector maintains that game farms contribute to job creation and rural development, I argue that these benefits very much depend on local circumstances and interdependencies.

A survey among private game reserves in the Eastern Cape funded by the wildlife sector claims that game farms contribute to rural development through the creation of jobs in general and skilled jobs in particular (Langholz & Kerley, 2006). Game farms are framed as win-win strategy to combat unemployment and poverty in the commercial farming landscape. The researchers who conducted the survey did not take into account that conversion processes accelerate processes of land consolidation and concentration as farm properties are continuously extended to create large conservation areas. This kind of
The legitimization of wildlife landscapes seems linked to contemporary societal pressure focused on rural development and poverty eradication. When farm conversions to wildlife production were first noticed in the Karoo during the second half of the 20th century a very different reasoning for their existence prevailed. As capitalist agriculture demanded increasing mechanization and decreasing labour costs farmers envisioned wildlife farms as suitable enterprises that did not require much labour (Beinart, 2003; Nell, 2003). The exact opposite claims proposed by contemporary adherents of the wildlife industry seem generated by modern-day discourses as well as the presence of opponents of the developments in the countryside. Other authors critically commented that conversions lead to large surfaces of land are now destined for wild animals, enclosed by fences and cleared of cattle and people (Connor, 2005; Luck, 2005). This increases the distance between land owners and the rural working class dependent on agricultural labour. Therefore, rural advocacy NGOs in the region express worries concerning the landless and rural poor and they report an increasing number of evictions and loss of livelihoods as a result of these conversions and farm incorporations (AFRA, 2003; Luck, 2005; Nkuzi, 2005; SAHRC, 2003). And when people do stay on the wildlife farm they have to move or cannot keep cattle any longer which affects their sense of belonging (Connor, 2005; Luck, 2005; Luck & Vena, 2003).

The most salient feature of this restructuring process on the Karoo trophy-hunting farms is the shedding of permanent labour; farmers have opened the farm gates to let farm dwellers and workers out. They contribute to processes of casualization, externalization and contractualization (Ewert & Du Toit, 2005). The trend away from permanent work, the widening gap between employment and unemployment, livelihood consequences for rural populations dependent on farm labour incomes, and the problematic prospects for the development of labour unions are worrisome trends in the process of agrarian change (ibid, 331-332). This ethnography is biased towards conversion processes for trophy-hunting and the processes generated might be different on other wildlife farms. Trophy-hunting activities do not require a substantial permanent labour force, which was indicated by game farmers as a reason why game farming is attractive to them. On the Karoo hunting farms, a small core of permanent male workers lives on the farm that are employed as general farm workers. Sometimes the
wives of male farm workers were employed, often part-time, as domestic servants or nanny on the hunting farm. The men engage in hunting-related work like tracking, skinning, and caping without being recognised as hospitality workers. The arbitrary ways hunting tips are allocated indicate that farmers persistently apply divide-and-rule strategies to control labour on their farms. These practices are still legitimised by farmers’ believes that farm dwellers are not civilised enough to save money and improve their own situations; they waste their money on funeral coffins and liquor. Specific aspects of farm work have been outsourced to contract or casual labourers, notably fencing.

The changing organization of labour on the farms shifted the interdependencies between farmers and workers that have been shaped through authoritative paternalism. The bonds between farmers and workers are increasingly depersonalised and formalised which reshaped these paternalistic ties that included farmers’ responsibilities for housing and the provision of certain services for people living, and working, on their land. Farm workers report that they have to renegotiate such informal rewards tied to their labour. They still expect these services and experience that farmers are less willing to take responsibilities that used to be self-evident in the past. They did not always provide transport, but farm workers still request and receive airtime or medical help when. The crux of the matter is that farmers feel the state wants to topple the balance of power on the farm by introducing minimum wages and labour laws. Hence, they feel that the state should take responsibility for providing services to labourers that are not related to their work on the farm. The traditional link between labouring and living in the farm is gradually erased and farm workers are increasingly dependent on the state for housing and services in the farming districts. State policies however create more space for the market to regulate agrarian relations. Farm workers are trapped in a low-income sector in which the labour conditions are deteriorating while the cash economy and consumerism thrive and fill their often dilapidated farm houses with DVD players and other consumer goods bought on credit. In the following section I want to discuss further how market liberalism shapes rural interdependences and support farmers’ attempts to retain asymmetric power balance on the commercial farms.
Second dynamic: established fears and responses to shifting power balance

The second established and outsider dynamic that I found in the Karoo commercial farming landscape is a discrepancy between the feelings game farmers have about their present and future position in post-apartheid society and their current practices on the land. The perception is that they are attributed an outsiders status by the reform-minded state policies combined with an increasingly radical political rhetoric that denounces the legitimacy of white land ownership explicitly. Moreover, game farmers’ feel that their conservation efforts clash with governments’ regulations concerning wildlife and nature conservation which increases the sense that they are pushed in an outsider position. Especially in relation to the state white farmers are anxious and feel they are being “attacked” by a black-run government that endorses a system of “reversed apartheid” whereby black people receive disproportionate state support and benefit from privileges they can no longer claim. They feel like an outsiders category in South Africa while my insights in their practices and behaviours on the farms show that commercial hunting farmers remain in many ways part of the established. In my dissertation I have studied game farmers’ ‘counterattacks’ to the shifting balance of power on the local level and the consequences for farm dwellers linked to their farms.

In several empirical chapters I have described in detail how commercial farmers respond and adapt relatively successful to post apartheid’s legal framework and how this asserts their established position. Linkages to the institutional environment enable farmers to construct an image of the landscape in which the police and the department of labour assist them in securing or representing their interests. The ways ‘crime’ and ‘security issues’ are framed and displayed through the countryside, for example emphasis on stock theft and security booms that lock of whole areas to unwanted outsiders, are in line with farmers’ perceptions, and in particular their fears to become real outsiders in the country. Labour inspectors’ difficulties in accessing farms for inspections illustrate the successful spatial exclusion of certain categories of people that according to farmers do not belong in their environment. Spatial constructions
legitimised by a ‘security’ discourse configure rural spaces in the Karoo and increases the distance between established and outsiders.

Another effective strategy to prevent the power balance from tipping over in favour of farm dwellers is the employment of a private labour consultant who ensures farmers they operate within the legal framework. This man, ambivalently positioned between the Xhosa en Afrikaans-speaking workers and the white farmers, serves the interest of the established. Farm dwellers lack such means and connections and rely on state representatives or civil society to represent their interests. In line with the work of Meagher (2005) such disconnections constitute an important disabling factor to challenge power configurations. An important dynamic in the farm dweller and farmer configuration is that everybody seems to have little faith or trust in government. These perceptions shape and trigger tensions in the configuration of farmers and farm dwellers.

Global connections in the trophy-hunting landscape

That farm conversions occur despite the doubts about its economic viability and sustainability suggests that these places are not just about economic land-use choices. Game farms are places where white farmers feel they can belong and are thus a political choice as well. The economic viability of game farming is contested. Several farmers and a local financial accountant in the Karoo mentioned that many farmers fail in making the conversion economically successful as a form of direct income on the short-term. In terms of long-term benefits the viability of game farms is less contested. The conversion process requires considerable capital investments to buy land and animals and farmers rely on wealthy connections and/or foreign investors to access capital and investment opportunities. Through international trophy-hunting networks consisting of well-heeled hunters from all over the world South African commercial farmers have been able to establish connections that assist them in furthering their businesses in the Karoo. This confirms Hart’s (2006:91) observation that the process of globalization has intensified “both the depth and extent of racialised dispossession” in South Africa.

Market liberalism configures power in favour of those who have access to resources, own assets, and provide wage labour. Karoo farmers are privileged in
having global connections with like-minded hunters that support them with the
collection of trophy-hunting places. This reveals indeed a perverse aspect of
South Africa’s participation in the global economy, namely the “highly selective
and spatially encapsulated forms of global connection combined with
widespread disconnection and exclusion” (Ferguson, 2007: 14). The economic
power of the Karoo game farmers is vested in the land and game species. The
lack of immediate economic profitability might be compensated by the long-
term revenues that will result from increasing prices of land and rare game
species. Wildlife landscapes attract foreign investors and urban business people
searching access to a particular lifestyle centred on being outdoors and hunting.

Third dynamic: belonging in wilderness landscapes, what and who is ‘native’?

The trophy-hunting landscape provides a comfortable space for white farmers
whose sense of belonging is existentially threatened. These places nourish
particular values about nature and wildlife and linked to the place are ideas about
the ‘original’ state of the land and the people inhibiting it. Furthermore, I have
illustrated that the hunting game expresses claims of who is civilised and who is
not, who can carry a rifle and who cannot. My interpretation of the material
generated on the trophy-hunting farms suggest that trophy-hunting landscapes
and activities produce racial categories and cultural imaginaries that re-assert a
social and spatial order that contradicts the aspirations of a rainbow nation. The
generation of racial and spatial constructions in the configuration of power and
belonging is the third established and outsiders dynamic at work in the field;
during the hunting game as well as in everyday life on the farms.

During the hunting game black farm workers perform as trackers and
skinners through which they become integral part of the play. The hunting game
is guided by specific interactions, rules and rituals that shape an imaginary world
in the imperfect ‘real’ world of farmers and hunters (Huizinga, 1955). The game
expresses meanings about the ways humans relate to nature, and to each other
(Dahles, 1990). The hunting client is guided by a white professional hunter who
is positioned higher in the hierarchical lay-out of the hunting party than the black
farm workers. The hunter and his guide maintain a social distance to the farm
workers through social distinction (Bourdieu, 1985; Paulle et al., 2012) expressed through clothing, language and spatial divisions. Farm workers wear bright uniform overalls, they do not engage in conversation with hunting clients, and are not depicted in the trophy-hunting picture that go home with the client. The trophy-hunting farms are an example of the intimate relation between spatial structures and social difference (Durington, 2006) and the legitimization of power differences through social distinction. Control of private farm properties is a political process that enables the confirmation of farmers’ identities and ideologies. Land owners have the capacity to control access to their properties and to assign roles to inhabitants of their privately-owned wilderness landscapes. The Karoo game farmers construct landscapes and decide who belongs to the farm and in what position; from the various game species to different categories of people present on their territories.

It has been shown in this dissertation that hunting farms, and especially the hunting game, produce imaginaries of different categories of people on the farm. Game farmers and hunters imagine the black farm worker in the role of tracker and/or Skinner as integral part of the social order in the hunting game. From the perspective of the game farmer black farm workers’ ‘uncivilised’ state makes them perfect helpers in the game. They are attributed natural talents and biological fitness to pick up wildlife tracks in the bush. They are positioned closer to the plants and the (dead) animals in hunting rituals, than to the ‘civilised’ participants in the hunt. Natives have long been thought to be ideally adopted to their environments (Malkki, 1992: 29) and in the trophy-hunting context this means black workers are confined to the position of tracker. Social superiority and domination are often expressed through stigmatizing outsiders, or “the other”, as behaving in “uncivilised” ways meaning lack of self constraint of drives and affects associated with “animalistic” behaviour (Blok & Brunt, 1982). Farm dwellers are incorporated in the imaginary hunting world as natives who play a crucial role in the hunting field. It is only the ‘civilised’ participants in the field that can carry guns because the established are able to control their drives and affects which they express by conforming to strict norms and rituals in the process of killing animals. The hunting field enables them to refine their self-control and their ‘civilised’ status and subsequently the trophy displays and confirms this established status. Ironically, the right to use violence and to
behave ‘wild’ is privileged to the established who claim they are more ‘civilised’ than the outsiders who need to be controlled and disciplined by them. This is how the hunting game shapes particular established and outsider relations that express the ideal social order according to game farmers and hunters.

Unfortunately, beyond the world of the hunting game farm dwellers are posing a threat to the established status of game farmers. Their experiences on the hunting farms reveal that they attribute different meanings to the wilderness landscape and that they do not share the idea that they naturally belong among wild animals or in the hunting field. Especially when faced with dangerous game, farm workers fear their environment and resent the fact that they are unarmed during the hunting game.

Indigeneity claims and ethnic/racial categorization in the Karoo.

The mushrooming of game farms in the Karoo produced a battle over land-use superiority in a configuration consisting of game farmers and livestock farmers. Land use practices and agrarian activities are topical issues as they are closely linked to land ownership structures in the country. In line with other scholars I have identified tendencies linked to the use of race and ethnic categories in power struggles between groups in post-apartheid South Africa (Ross, 2004; Sallaz, 2010). Groups are not well-defined by themselves so that it often unclear to which group people belong (Ross, 2004: 312). Social actors construct ethnicities in pursuit of (local) economic or political interests (Hyslop, 1996). In the Karoo, game farmers conceive themselves as custodians of nature with the right to determine the design of the commercial farming landscape. They constantly praise their own land use practices. The conservation awards and animal conservation projects they engage in are important symbols that confirm their feelings of superiority. Game farmers are convinced that wildlife farming is a better and more viable land use compared to livestock farming. Moreover, they feel that they are better in adapting to the natural environment; they claim establishedness by knowing the ideal scenario for the Eastern Cape’s ecology. They claim to have adapted best to the environment, to belong there, and to have the right to stay.
Besides praising their own contribution to nature conservation and development of the land, game farmers stigmatise other land uses, and users. They are convinced that the Karoo is even less suitable for what they refer to as “subsistence farming” by black rural inhabitants. They say stereotypical things about the amaXhosa as people “sitting under a tree smoking a pipe” with no talent for commercial farming nor hunting. One farmer remarked “if it was not for us they would still be subsistence farming”. These stereotypes invoke images of “good” and the “bad” natives (Neumann, 1997: 561). On the one hand Xhosa people are stigmatised as natural talents for tracking and skinning and on the other hand they are viewed as bad farmers. Images of ‘good’ natives were associated with people that are at a far distance from the trophy-hunting landscape. In white farmers’ narratives from the Karoo the Bushmen would be the only people with the right to claim an identity as indigenous people of the land. They express respect for the Bushmen or Khoisan. In their version of history those people used to hunt the Karoo plains before they were killed and chased out of the region by other groups competing for land and power. But descendants of the nomadic KhoeKhoen or San (Bushmen is a local pejorative term), known as the “Karreťje people” represent a rural underclass in the Karoo with no access to land, space or place (also not on hunting farms). They live on roadsides in temporary shelters and are part of South Africa’s poorest of the poor (De Jongh, 2002).

Social difference in the rural working class is articulated through categories based on race and ethnicity. A group of Afrikaans-speaking coloured farm workers proclaim during a focus-group interview in a rural township that game farmers only employ ‘Bantu’ people on their farms. I heard this perception of game farmers insisting on employment of ‘Bantus’ several times. Farmers articulate preferences according to ethnic categories by stating that “coloureds are trouble” or “coloureds are slightly more intelligent than Xhosas”. Other game farmers “switch” to Zimbabwean migrants who are working as chefs on some of the Karoo hunting farms. These labourers are compared to South Africans by farmers who feel that they are “more educated, civilised and friendly”. My interpretation is that the Zimbabwean worker is the farmer’s ideal employee as they can represent the image of a “good native” in the colonial wilderness recreated on hunting farms, without having to deal with local power
battles. Zimbabwean migrant workers cannot claim land or tenure rights through
the South African reform laws. Because Zimbabweans are only temporarily
present in the local power configuration they do not challenge the established
and outsiders configuration in a way that threatens the established. On the
contrary, the established can make use of their presence to increase the distance
between them and the local outsiders.

In the local configuration of farmers and workers interdependencies are
exposed in ambivalent feelings towards farm workers. Farmers say they
“completely” trust their own black workers, just not those of the neighbours.
Postcolonial scholars noticed ambivalence regarding natives in colonial and
postcolonial discourses. The native is barbaric and a docile servant at the same
time (Bhabha, 2004). Such ambivalent attitudes are present in the trophy hunting
landscape as well. Especially interesting in this regard is the exceptional story of
Luvuyo Molo, a black professional hunter. Positioned between the white farmer
and the black workers he expressed both stereotypical ideas about black workers,
yet recognised how white farmers reinforce stigma by maintaining a great
distance between themselves and workers. The experiences of the black PH in a
sector dominated by white males revealed the workings of race and class that
limit his career in the wildlife sector. Ultimately he does not fit into the image the
established have of their world and themselves. The boundaries of the
established are solidified by defining outsiders through racial and ethnic
categories.

Re-creating images of Africa’s ‘empty land’.

Farm conversions are typically imagined as creating pristine wilderness
landscapes through rehabilitating land and removing traces of modern
agricultural land uses. In the conversion process of colonial occupation and
dispossession are erased, as well as remnants of pre-colonial land use practices.
Wildlife farmers recreate the image of an ‘empty land’ that legitimised colonial
land occupations by settlers, and now postcolonial land transformations by
descendants of these settlers. A particular version of history is presented on the
farm that portrays white farmers as the first people to plant their roots in the
Karoo soil.
The idea of being the “first citizens” to a place is an important aspect of claiming establishedness (Ballard, 2005:70). Even though European settlers are not natives to African territory they do claim nativeness or indigeneity; South-African settlers installed themselves as established group by effectively displacing indigenous people as original inhabitants of the country (2005: 83). Since their arrival they have subjected Africans to a process of outsidering. Descendants of European colonialists gradually adopted South Africa as their home and claimed rights to occupy land and citizenship status. To legitimize the claim to land settler’s history portrays colonized land as empty prior to occupation (2005:74). The colonial, and later apartheid-, state supported settler’s claims to establishedness through numerous laws and regulations that controlled and restricted movements of black people, who were sub-divided in many ethnic minorities (Mamdani, 2001), and who were effectively created outsiders in places defined as white places. Society is characterised by a powerful sense that certain people belong in certain places but not in others (Ballard, 2005: 68). Local understandings of nature and landscape give insight into the ways people are positioned in a place, and how they relate to it. This relation to locality is associated with identity and belonging (Lovell, 1998a). In this sense established and outsider relations configure spatial relations and certain attachments to place.

On the trophy-hunting farms a particular representation of nature and wildlife is shaped through marketing practices in the hunting field. The images and associations produced by the owners of the hunting operations differ from the perceptions of nature and wildlife of farm dwellers whose experiences in the hunting field are less romantic and nostalgic than those of the engineers and consumers of this landscape. To hunting clients, investors, tourists and other visitors of the Karoo trophy-hunting farms these places are presented as exclusive pieces of pristine wilderness where guests can enjoy the roar of the lion. Nature and wildlife have become aesthetic, and commercialised, leisure destinations to commercial farmers who trade with it, and play into the sentimental arousal the countryside evokes with their overseas clients from upper class circles around the globe. The way trophy-hunting farms are portrayed in merchandizing for the international hunting market shows how farmers view their social space, or how they wish to see it, and which features of
the landscape are suppressed to produce an images framed in nostalgic sentiments.

Landscape images and feelings towards nature shift during configuration processes. In ‘The Civilising Process’ Elias describes the emergence of nostalgic feelings towards “nature” during the advance of Western European courtly society at the end of the Middle Ages. He identifies an increasing rift between the countryside and town where courtly society gradually replaced the knightly aristocracy from the rural areas. The pictures and drawings of the countryside started depicting desired landscapes of the upper classes, exposing their “wishful fantasies”, in which everything that felt painful or embarrassing was suppressed (Elias, 2000 [1939]: 178).

For the public in the absolute court, much that really existed in the country, in “nature”, was no longer portrayed. The hill was shown, but not the gallows on it, nor the corpse hanging from the gallows. The field was shown, but no longer the ragged peasant laboriously driving his horses (Elias, 2000 [1939]: 174).

It is not the events and practices in the landscape that change, but “above all the fact and the manner of their portrayal that underline the changed emotional structure” of the elite (Elias, 2000 [1939]: 176). Once the labouring classes were “indispensable figures in the landscape of knightly existence” where lords and servants lived close to each other and the “sight of contrast heightened joy in living”. The self-esteem of masters in fact relied on the presence of servants who behaved not like him. This emotional structure changes with the pacification of larger and larger areas and increasing urbanization that shift the interdependencies between the classes. Behaviour, manners, and the representation of self became means of social distinction. Moreover, “nature” became an object of visual pleasure, and a place of relaxation. Especially townspeople “take pleasure in the harmony of colour and lines, become open to what is called the Happiness of nature; their feelings are aroused by the changing shades and shapes of the clouds and the play of light on the leaves of a tree” (Elias, 2000 [1939]: 419). The greater distance to the countryside allowed different ways of seeing nature that were sometimes far removed from those classes from whom the countryside remained the immediate background of their everyday lives. Just like the nobleman in European medieval court society the
white commercial farmer “is no longer a relatively free man, the master in his own castle, whose castle is his homeland” (Elias, 2000 [1939]: 182). Shifting class structures in society transform power relations in the countryside and the meanings of nature, and wildlife.

Wilderness landscapes attract urban and foreign investors, but land owners and managers of the Karoo trophy-hunting farms still reside in the countryside, side by side with black farm workers who are symbolically equal and who cannot be treated any longer according to the traditional farmers’ laws. Paradoxically, white farmers in the Karoo first claimed they ‘civilised’ the land like white settlers in Zimbabwe (Hughes McDermott, 2010) by erecting fences and developing modern agriculture contrasting to pastoralist or other indigenous land uses. In the postcolonial era game farmers claim they undo the civilization of the land, and the people, by erasing memories of the past, and this preservationist attitude legitimizes their control of land. Access to the trophy-hunting farm is mainly restricted to those who share the aesthetic feelings of the place, who feel they belong there. The warning signs on the game fences are not meant for the upper classes visiting the countryside to replenish. They feel pleasure upon entering the hunting farm and not danger as the signs indicate. The warnings are meant for farm workers and other rural dwellers from the black underclass whose presence is arousing feelings of discomfort with farmers. Farm dwellers do not share the same emotions in relation to the hunting farm, and their poverty (and behaviour related to this) is a painful reminder of the uncertain world beyond the farm gates.

The position of farm dwellers on the trophy-hunting farm prevents them from having the same pleasant feelings in the wildlife habitat. They are incorporated outsiders in this landscape instead of consumers, owners or creators of it. Their presence is concealed or restricted to the role of servant. Their living compounds are spatially segregated from that of the farm owner and guests. The trophy-hunting farm is not a place where they feel they can belong or secure a ‘home’. Especially the men working out in the hunting field feel unsafe being surrounded by game, particularly as they are not equipped with weapons to defend themselves in case they are attacked. This practical fact gives, amongst workers, a sense that they are indeed defined as a disposable category of people (Mbembe, 2003: 27) on the farm. This sensation is linked to the
unceasingly dismal working and living conditions that starkly contrast the display of luxury on the farms that they are excluded from. Private trophy-hunting farms retain or increase a great distance between farmers and farm dwellers in the commercial farming landscape.

**Fourth dynamic: meanings of farm dweller mobility**

Farm dwellers in the Karoo have mobile histories as labouring class constantly negotiating their terms of employment and place in the commercial farming landscape. The meanings of this mobility for their attachment to place and sense of belonging is the fourth and last established and outsider dynamic that reveals the contours of farm dwellers’ Invisible Great Trek. In this section I want to discuss how farm dwellers’ decisions regarding settlement and movement are shaped by processes within a particular power configuration that increasingly limits their sense of belonging in the Karoo. In many ways they seem perpetual outsiders whose place in post-apartheid South Africa is

Despite the mobility restrictions imposed by the colonial and apartheid state wanting to preserve a pool of cheap labourers, farm workers often resisted by using their feet to escape labour exploitation and violence. This ethnography demonstrates how farm workers increasingly decide to settle in the rural townships where they can secure a home in the context of post-apartheid’s political and economic uncertainties. Traditionally nation states and anthropologists adhere to the idea that cultures or identities are fixed in a place or attached to a particular territory. This idea has been contested under global conditions of interconnections, chronic mobility and routinized displacement (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Malkki, 1992; Okely, 2003). As reaction to the perceived social insecurities part of a rapidly changing society some people withdraw in tradition that provides a sense of security and clear identity, others jump into the unknown and shape new social relations and new ideas about society and the world (Eriksen, 2010: 16). Unfortunately, South Africa’s land reform programme is premised on the on the idea that people are like plants who put their roots somewhere in the soil and based on these roots they can claim belonging to particular places. In line with Eriksen (2010: 16), I have shown that farm dwellers indeed have both roots and boots. This means that
farm dwellers’ mobile histories and life trajectories can be interpreted as a claim of belonging to the Fish River area where they shape the contour of an Invisible Great Trek.

**Settlement and movement decisions**

Mobility and displacement are not necessarily problematic phenomena as they might lead to better circumstances and lives for humans. An obvious example is the mobility of Karoo settlers and farmers whose settlement patterns enabled them to become the established rural elite in the Eastern Cape. Literature on mobility and displacement tends to focus on the consequences for the displaced instead of the meanings of mobility for socio-political processes that inform patterns of settlement and movement (see for example Malkki, 1992: 33). Contemporary farm dwellers’ mobility should be interpreted as a response to changing interdependencies that put their lives in precarious situations.

Whether farm dwellers report decisions as voluntary choices or choices that were made for them depends on the context in which these decisions are made. Critical livelihood scholars emphasize not to downplay structures, such as institutions and processes, that affect decision-making (De Haan & Zoomers, 2005). The decisions of Karoo farm workers are tied to the interdependencies shaped in local configurations with commercial farmers that employed and housed them for generations. Studies from other regions in the country indicate that farm workers consider the commercial farms they work and reside as their homes (Murray, 1995). In the Karoo the meanings of commercial farm places shifts as farmers want to increase the distance to farm dwellers. Farm workers’ anticipate to this process and consider their place on the trophy-hunting farm as that of an outsider, Joseph articulated this as: “this is a house, not a home”. For this farm worker home means a place he owns, where he can stay with his whole family and where he can decide to extend the house with new rooms whenever he wants. On the farm he relies on the goodwill of the farmer to fix the shortcomings of his farmhouse that leaks and has cracks in the walls. This frustrates him and he has little confidence the farmer will improve his accommodation. Ruth, who lives on the same farm worker compound, interprets her place on the farm differently. To her, the farm house means a
place to escape township life and the costs of being there. She considers the place as more dangerous and the costs of living are much higher than on the farm. But she equally feels that her home is in the township where her family owns an RDP house. Ultimately farm dwellers envision their homes off-farm. The farm is a work place, and not a home.

The current formalization of labour relations and use of non-standard employment produces new established and outsiders configurations with inherent tensions and power battles. The rearticulated paternalistic interdependencies that govern power relations on farms produce division among workers. The divisive working of arbitrary paternalistic informal institutions create a culture whereby workers compete for the farmer’s approval at the cost of solidarity with each other (Du Toit, 1993). Farm conversion processes and transformations in the labour arrangements seem to reinforce rivalry among farm workers. Amidst a rural population with very high unemployment rates, those with jobs have become a relative privileged group (Natrass & Seekings, 1997:453). This increased tension for the need for wage growth for the employed and the need for job growth among the unemployed (ibid: 474). The arbitrary ways in which positions, wages and tips are allocated on trophy-hunting farms contribute to this process. Another configuration mechanism is the racial and ethnic labelling by shaping established and outsiders relations within the rural working class. While the established rural land owning class reorganizes the rural landscape, different factions of the rural underclass compete for employment and scarce opportunities to climb up the social ladder.

The configuration of South-African and Zimbabwean migrant workers is an example of this. The influx of immigrant workers from other African countries leads to more violence among farm dwellers on farms. But this configuration overlaps with other configurations formed in the struggle for belonging in the Karoo. ‘We’ and ‘they’ feelings are expressed in different ways among farm workers. Sometimes ‘we’ means we black people, in other contexts it means we coloured workers or we local workers. South African workers feel threatened by the arrival of newcomers that shift their position in the commercial farming landscape. In the context of neoliberal capitalism immigrants are the ultimate nonstandard workers in the postcolony.
The backwash of this process, as we have seen, is readily evident in contemporary South Africa, where rapid deregulation, increasingly labile employment arrangements, and the gross shrinkage of the job market have altered the generic meaning of labor, the specific relationship of production to reproduction, and the connection of work to place (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2002: 797).

The meanings of farm work and farm residency and farm dwellers’ attachments to the farms have changed as a result of South Africa’s changing political and economic context. Their arrival in the extended parts of Cradock’s townships create yet another established and outsider figuration in which they are again outsiders in relation to established residents who have formed (political) connections in the place. Township residents refer to farm dwellers as *plaasmense* which means they attach farm workers’ place to the commercial farms. This is a typical “naturalized identity between people and place” (Malkki, 1992: 26) that positions farm workers as outsiders in multiple power configurations in the Karoo.

*The Tragedy of farm dwellers’ Invisible Great Trek: linkages and disconnections*

Farm dwellers maintain and establish linkages to rural townships. Cultural practices that used to take place on the farm are increasingly performed in town; marriages, weddings, burials, initiation rites. Church practices are to some degree still organised on the farms, but with the rapid decline of farm workers residing on farms it is harder to sustain church services on the farms. Church leaders rather focus on their increasing constituency in the rural townships. Farm dwellers are disconnected from local institutions such as the police and government departments or rural NGOs. They distrust government officials who are embedded in the power imbalance and do not seem to challenge it in a meaningful or effective way. In absence of the state, farm dwellers rely on their own social networks that are increasingly concentrated in town (Meagher, 2005). They have to invest in linkages and places that provide a sense of security or belonging which means they continuously move in between the commercial farms and town.
A disturbing image of the commercial farming landscape has emerged in this ethnographic account on the position of farm dwellers in the reconfiguration of power and belonging on trophy-hunting farms in the Karoo. Farm dwellers are increasingly estranged from the places they lived and worked on throughout their mobile lives. They resort to small patches of land where the state provides housing schemes where they can practice their cultural beliefs and establish meaningful communities. Meanwhile farm dwellers are surrounded by vast stretches of privately owned land. Farming communities rapidly decline and the townships swell with people joining the ranks of South Africa’s poor and unemployed. This constitutes a tragic scenario for farm dwellers and their forebears who have co-constructed every square of the Karoo. Farm dwellers recall their intimate relation to the commercial farming landscape around Cradock and articulate a sense of injustice that occupies their minds. When we drove through the country they reminded me their bare hands have worked the land and that without those hands the farmlands would not be the commercial places they are today. There are few people who expressed hope for change, and many who seem to, in Scott’s words, “work the system to their minimum disadvantage” (1985:preface). Expressions such as “It is just the way it is, here” indicated farm workers’ difficulties to imagine a different countryside.

The power configuration inherited from the region’s colonial and apartheid past are spatially imprinted in the land and the minds of the rural population. Farm dwellers act primarily within the given landownership structure where they imagine and claim space by establishing homes in the townships situated on the riverbanks of the Great Fish River. These places are marginal spaces with limited opportunities to create a sustainable livelihood which indicate the urgency of rethinking and imagining town and country (Walker, 2010) so that the power imbalance can truly shift towards the needs and rights of Karoo farm dwellers.

Reflections on the dynamic use of the established and outsiders framework

Having outlined the contours of farm dwellers’ Invisible Great Trek I now want to reflect on the scientific contribution of this ethnographic study and in particular on the theoretical insights generated by the constructivist use of the
established and outsiders framework introduced by Elias and Scotson in the 1960s (1994 [1965]). The four established and outsider dynamics presented in this chapter spawn three important understandings about the process of power reconfigurations in relation to people’s sense of belonging specific contexts. These are discussed after I have sketched the contribution of The Invisible Great Trek to current academic literatures and debates.

It has been shown that shifting power relations in particular established and outsider configurations consisting of interdependent human beings are reconfigured according to people’s perceptions about their place in post apartheid South Africa. Configuration processes and notions of belonging are closely related to landscapes. This study affirms suggestions by other scholars who argue that landscapes are related to relations people have with nature and with each other (Dahles, 1990; Hughes McDermott, 2010; Rutherford, 2008). This has been analysed especially in the context of private farm conversions to trophy-hunting operations where hunting practices and rituals express meaning about farm dwellers’ place in the Karoo landscape. The interpretative and constructivist perspective in this qualitative study on reconfiguration dynamics shaped by farmers’ and farm dwellers’ perceptions and feelings offers additional insights to debates on agrarian change, nature conservation and rural development.

Through the constructivist and interpretive application of the established and outsiders framework (Elias & Scotson, 1994 [1965]) I generate a more dynamic use and conceptual repertoire of the framework which enables three theoretical insights that can benefit studies into power configurations in other contexts as well. These insights partly confirm evaluations and critiques of others who have applied the established and outsiders theory in studying local power conflicts. The main themes that have been discussed in relation to this theory are the dynamics in time and place, interdependencies, and influences of context and scale on established and outsiders configurations (Hogenstijn et al., 2008: 146).

The theory has been mainly discussed in the field of urban sociology and geography (May, 2004; Quilley & Loyal, 2005; Stacey, 1968). As discussed in the chapter where I introduce my interpretive framework anthropologist have been very critical of Elias’ work as they argue it is ethnocentric, in particular the concept of ‘civilization’ (see for example Blok, 1982). From a constructivist
perspective I took into account the contexts in which humans construct and legitimise ideas and meanings of who is civilised and who is not, on the emotions and associations humans have with landscapes, and how these perceptions configure power and belonging in the Karoo.

Firstly, I have shown that established and outsiders configurations are constantly shifting in relation to political and economic context (processes linked to state formation and market liberalism) in which power relations and interdependencies among humans are shaped. The categories established and outsiders are not fixed categories defining power differences between groups in society, but dynamic categories that relate to empirical contexts and historical processes in which humans generate specific meanings and understandings of the world and other humans around them. It has been proposed to refer to processes of outsidering instead of fixing outsider positions in space and time. In the context of increased mobility in general (Hogenstijn et al., 2008) and mobile farm dwellers in particular the meanings of established and outsiders emerging in a ‘local community’ seems to static as well. As people settle and move continuously they engage in multiple and overlapping power configurations.

The second theoretical understanding relates closely to the first, namely that there are multiple established and outsiders configurations at the same time that shape local power battles. This finding resonates with May’s observation that it is important to recognise different levels of established and outsider configurations as mechanisms of exclusion and stigmatization work differently in large-scale configurations or face-to-face relations (May, 2004). It was very clear that in the Karoo established and outsiders relations manifested on different scales. Concretely, this means that it is hard to understand farm dwellers’ position in relation to white farmers when the political context is not taken into account. Farmers’ anxiety about their place is mostly generated through national debates about reform and consequently shapes their feelings and attitudes that manifest in local power battles. Whether a person is attributed an established or outsider position depends on the specific relational context we are looking at. Then we see indeed that established and outsiders are themselves stratified along lines of class or ethic categories (Loyal, 2011: 192). The rural working class is deeply divided along ethno-national characteristics such as the Zimbabwean migrant workers and persistent divides between blacks and coloureds. Farm dwellers
remain outsiders in multiple configurations because of their disconnections from networks linked to political institutions (including unions) formed during the liberation struggle that mainly took place in Lingelihle. Hence, this study confirms the importance of recognizing multiple layers and internal stratifications of established and outsiders figurations. I have used the term *incorporated outsiders* to illustrate how established can make outsiders part of their world and their perceptions of the ideal social order, in this case during trophy-hunting games, which in turn re-asserts their establishedness. This figuration mechanism is not based on negative stigmatization but a type of inclusive stigmatization that retains power imbalances.

The final and third theoretical point relates to the workings of racial and spatial constructions in configurations dynamics and the process of outsidering. Although Elias insisted race was a second-order principle in established and outsider relations that distracted from understanding power figuration (Elias, 1976) racial categories and spatial engineering are crucial aspects of power relations in the context of post apartheid South Africa. The way humans categorize themselves and others in racial or ethnic terms has to be taken into account to understand the meanings of farm conversions in the Karoo. Race and ethnicity are important ordering principles by which farm dwellers and commercial farmers define ‘we’ and ‘they’ groups that they subsequently link to perceptions about ‘civilised’ people and landscapes. In the context of hunting English game farmers distinguish themselves from Afrikaner *biltong* hunters or African subsistence farmers. However, as shown in the multiple configurations observed in the Eastern Cape, race and ethnicity are not the only classification mechanism defining ‘we’ and ‘them’ groups. Figurations are also divided along lines of class which presumably increases as South Africa’s neoliberal economic framework reconfigures relations in the agrarian sector by promoting deregulation and large-scale operations. The persistent thinking in racial categories is reinforced by the state’s insistence on using racial categories to formulate reform policies aiming at restoring and transforming power imbalances inherited from the past. Spatial constructions reconfigure power and belonging by creating more distance between established and outsiders in the countryside. In the Karoo rural elites share living and working space on the trophy-hunting farms with the labouring classes. Due to this *closeness* they create
social difference and *distance* through performing and maintaining a persistent racial hierarchy repeatedly performed in the hunting game. This affirms the suggestion that racial stratification is more likely when people share a geographical space (Loyal, 2011: 193). In the context of the rural Karoo environment, spatial arrangements and landscape images are crucial devices for farmers to re-assert their establishedness on the land. Farm dwellers’ influx into the rural townships increase the distance between white farmers and black workers, and reinforces racialised settlement patterns.

In short, the application of the established and outsiders framework is enhanced when multiple configurations and stratifications are taken into account. In addition to this it is important to pay great attention to the political, economic and historic context that shape configuration processes, and processes of outsidering. In doing so, ethnographers can use this framework to explore how people make sense of themselves and others through categories, labels and classifications that are linked to local power battles and the way they belong in relation to each other.

**Where does the farm dwellers’ Invisible Great Trek lead to?**

Climbing down again from Miro’s ladder of abstraction this ethnography unfolds an empirical tragedy set in 21st century Karoo Midlands. It gave a detailed description of the social processes in which the Karoo trophy-hunting farms are embedded and their meanings for power relations and people’s sense of belonging in post-apartheid rural society. The stories of farmers and workers revealed the contours of an ongoing Invisible Great Trek that directs the rural working classes toward the rural townships and divides those of have to compete for scarce jobs and places to belong. Private properties in the countryside remain in the hands of rural elites that survive and benefit from the increasing liberalization of the agricultural economy. Their landscape representations contradict South Africa’s reform agenda and illustrate the power of rural elites to re-assert establishedness in the countryside at the cost of an increasingly impoverished working class.

I now want to discuss the political implications of this process in relation to transformation objectives in post-apartheid society. The societal contribution of
this PhD thesis is that it offers insights into the feelings and perspectives of farm dwellers and commercial farmers involved with or affected by private farm conversions to wildlife exploitation in the Eastern Cape. Understanding power relations on farms is topical in light of the land reform and labour debates concerning the position of farm workers and dwellers in South Africa.

_Trophy-hunting, land reform and transformation_

The stories and perspectives presented in this ethnography suggest a critical stance is needed towards the increasing farm conversions in previously white commercial farming areas in South Africa. It seems the ANC government is willing to adopt game farmers’ perspective on the win-win situation of game farms for conservation purposes and rural development through tourism and employment opportunities. The findings generated on the Karoo trophy-hunting farms question whether such statements apply across all sections of the wildlife sector and moreover demands attention for the land reform implications of farm conversions in a divided post apartheid society.

In chapter four I have shown that converted farms are believed to escape the possibility of being used for redistribution purposes within the land reform programme. The transformation of the landscape, notably the destruction of infrastructure and the incredible rise of land prices, make them unattractive units for land reform. Market-driven land reform drives capital intensification instead of redistribution which has led to land consolidation and concentration in the previously-white commercial farming areas. The establishment of trophy-hunting lands in the Karoo accelerate this process as farm borders are constantly expanded by incorporating neighbouring farms in order to create large wildlife habitats for potential trophy animals. Farm conversions are gradual processes and not always or necessarily disruptive events in the lives of Karoo farm workers. Ultimately, farm transfers typically make farm labour redundant and complicate the place of farm dwellers on the farm. Without livelihood opportunities on the converted land they decide to leave and find work elsewhere. Their departures might seem self evident decisions instead of forced removals or displacements, as occurring in other places. Nevertheless, the continuous leaving and influx of farm dwellers into the rural townships represent
a deepening dispossession of their land and tenure rights. Paradoxically, legal frameworks related to land reform technically provide means for farm workers to claim rights on land, but in practice farm workers have not managed to benefit from these legal provisions. The ways in which the market configures agrarian relations begs to re-define our understanding of evictions and displacement.

Land owners on the other hand have been effective in finding ways to use the constitutional framework to their advantage (Cousins, 1997; Hall, 2007; Lahiff, 2005; Nkuzi, 2005; PLAAS, 2011). In the Karoo context the employment of private labour consultant is a clear example of how farmers effectively use legal frameworks to create more distance between them and the rural population. A factor that enables this development is the protection of private property rights in the constitution that protects land titles. The entrenchment of the property clause has been suggested to form a fundamental problem in post apartheid land reform (Ntsebeza, 2011a) that secures existing skewed land ownership structures and limits options for land expropriation by the state.

The absence of overt resistance of farm dwellers in the Karoo against the skewed land ownership structures relates to their specific histories of dispossession and mobility and misunderstandings among policy makers who do not recognise the implications for reform objectives. In 2013, it has been exactly a hundred years the since the infamous Native Land Act was implemented that disabled the black majority to own 90% of South Africa’s territory that was exclusively owned by the white minority population. During the promulgation of the Land Act the Karoo landscape had already been shaped by British settlers who were at the forefront of commercial wool farming and the entrenchment of capitalist relations between Afrikaner and British land owners and dispossessed Xhosa people, descendants of slaves from the Cape Colony and ‘coloureds’. The regional and specific history of dispossession in the Fish River area complicates the land reform process as restitution is premised on claims to land by people who have been forcibly removed from land through colonial and apartheid legislative measures starting with the Native Land Act of 1913. Black rural residents on the eastern border of the Cape were dispossessed of land long before 1913 and pushed into special native reserves that served as labour reservoirs for the mining and farming sectors surrounding the homelands. In the
Cradock district black families have been selling their labour on different farms for generations. Their claims of belonging to specific pieces of land do not fit the post-apartheid land reform framework premised on specific meanings of settlement and mobility.

This research demonstrated that the separation of labour rights and tenure rights in policy frameworks is problematic in the context of Karoo farm conversions. When farm workers lose their job in the process of land-use change or ownership transfer they often lose a house and a place to live too. Farm workers’ decisions to anticipate to this by investing in township housing and reconfigure their relational networks, indicates they experience these processes as inevitable. The disconnection of land and labour issues is also visible in the organization of government departments and NGO activities on local level. These institutions fail to address farm workers’ needs for information about their labour and tenure rights. Access to information and services is intimately related to the political configuration in town from which farm workers have been historically excluded. They are newcomers in the townships dominated by ANC loyalists that engage in a local reconfiguration process and power struggle as exposed during the 2009 national elections when a lot of effort was put into suppressing the emergence and success of a new political party, named the Congress of the People (COPE), formed by former members of the ANC.

The national alliance of ANC and the Congress of South African Unions (COSATU) is reflected in Cradock’s union structures. Union leaders are embedded in the town’s political structures dominated by the ANC. Farm workers are not linked to these networks that provide access to resources, information and positions in the municipality which is the second, after agriculture, sector that provides employment opportunities. Farm workers enter the township in an outsider position after years of dwelling on the commercial farms around town. Farm workers are not unionised and difficult to mobilize which Pahle (2011) explained by the problem of access to farms and the transformation of farm labour. For union members, is it very hard to visit farms to recruit members and with the gradual disappearance of resident farm labour and increase of non-standard employment arrangements unionization becomes more and more unlikely as farm workers cannot afford subscription fees. This places farm workers at the mercy of the state that has to replace the role of the
paternalistic farmer (Theron, 2011). The post-apartheid state commitment to land reform and rural development seemed to enhance under ANC President Zuma who formed a Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) whose minister introduced improved plans for land reform.

Although the political rhetoric about the urgent need for land reform and transformation is becoming stronger, the political commitment to address the situation of farm workers who have become increasingly dependent on the state is not shared and not translated in real provisions for the rural population in the Cape Provinces. In response to the alarming Human Right Watch report on farm worker conditions in the Western Cape the provincial leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA) Hellen Zille published a text on the party’s website titled ‘the problem with the HRW report’. She claims that the report is not representative for the whole agricultural sector and she denies that there is a structural problem with the balance of power among farmers and workers in her Province. She writes that ‘we must conclude that the examples raised in the HRW report represent extreme and isolated cases within an otherwise sound agricultural sector in the province’. And although the ANC political leaders provide an increasingly revolutionary discourse on the need for social change, their commitment to market-driven land reform is not revised. The Invisible Great Trek of farm dwellers deserves attention before the tensions in the Karoo power configurations erupt in violent attempts to swing the balance of power to those who have worked the land throughout their mobile lives.

(published 28 August 2011, accessed 7 October 2012)