Returning from fieldwork. Drawing by author: April 2010
Methodological reflections: tracking the research path of the Invisible Great Trek

Doing this ethnography has been an academic and a personal challenge. Doing fieldwork and the emotional attachment I developed to the places and people in the field made it difficult at times to keep an analytical distance from the data. Soon after I returned from the field I started drawing and writing about my personal experiences and feelings about the world of South-African trophy hunting. Although I was back in Amsterdam, my thoughts were occupied with rifles, windmills, wildlife landscapes, townships, animals, trophies, and the dominantly masculine environment that I had submerged myself in for over a year. Reflecting on these experiences and feelings gradually helped to detach myself from the data and focus on unfolding the social configuration processes that I had observed and experienced. The ways research participants related to me were illustrative of the ways they shaped particular established and outsider dynamics with each other. On my research path I encountered dead ends, crossings and entrances that characterize the trajectories of farmers and farm dwellers in the rural landscape around Cradock. Here, I aim to make this invisible research path transparent.

During twelve months of fieldwork I generated a rich set of data consisting of various kinds of materials: interviews, conversations, impressions, maps, observations, photographs and secondary sources like local newspapers and magazines such as Farmers’ Weekly or Hunter and Jagter available at the Cradock supermarkets. In total I conducted one or more formal interviews with 40 research participants. These include the trophy-hunting farmers in the Cradock area, farm dwellers and a range of other participants such as the private labour

157 For another interesting fieldwork account where feelings are used as source of data in their own right to generate insights in empirical and theoretical processes, see chapter ‘Subject to investigation’ in a PhD dissertation on everyday practice of state-building in South Sudan (De Vries, 2012).
consultant, sheep farmers, NGO members or politicians. In addition to this my observations of people, landscapes and activities in the world of farming and hunting formed a crucial aspect for the making of this the ethnography. These were generated while out hunting, waiting for research participants, driving on the gravel roads along sheep farms and wildlife fences, giving someone a hike home, spending time in Lingelihle’s community centre, running with local athletes, baking and cooking for church, walking around on farms, or having drinks at someone’s braai (barbeque).

Fieldwork challenges and dilemmas require attention in different phases of the research. In this final chapter I elucidate how I developed the research path, the choices I made during fieldwork, and reflect on my roles and positions as researcher from where I started seeing and understanding the ‘Invisible Great Trek’ of farm dwellers in the Karoo. My presence inevitably made me an integral part of multiple social configurations and the tensions inherent to them. The methodological contribution I want to make is illustrating that reflexivity enhances both the integrity of ethnographic/ interpretive research and generates insights into research themes. Reflexivity is therefore integral part of data generation and interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Schwartz Shea & Yanow, 2012). My particular research path has been paved by three themes that I reflect upon in this fieldwork account; access to places and people, power dynamics in the field, invisibility and mobility. As my engagements in reflexivity lasted throughout the research and writing process, I saw it fit to present them as the final piece of the ethnographic puzzle.

Just like in any other context where humans form social configurations with each other, researchers develop interdependencies in the field that produce challenges and power battles. An inherent tension in any ethnographic research process is the need to establish meaningful relationships with respondents and pursue research aims at the same time. These two objectives can clash. Geertz recognized that doing ethnography as a personal experience is an “unnerving” business.

We are not, or at least I am not, seeking either to become natives (a compromised word in any case) or to mimic them. Only romantics or spies would seem to find point in that. We are seeking, in the widened sense of the term in which it encompasses very much more that talk, to converse with them,
Establishing meaningful research relations and pursuing research aims are two objectives that clash and result in uneasy fieldwork moments or relationships in the field. Because they want to discuss sensitive issues and probe personal topics with research participants, ethnographers generally want to be liked by their informants. This typically leads to “situated dilemma’s” (Ferdinand, 2007) and “lying” (Fine & Schulman, 2009) when research subjects complicate the encounter with research participants from the start. Such behaviour consists of not being too explicit about research intentions, hiding frustrations when feeling bored, suppressing feelings of intimidation or distress, and the presentation of “successful emotional labour and play-acting” (Fine & Schulman, 2009: 181). Ethnographers experience losing “friends” in the field when they took the perspective of their friends’ enemies’ seriously (Ybema & Kamsteeg, 2009: 112). Moreover, researchers themselves often become the object of study when engaging in sensitive fields of study (De Vries, 2012). Hence, the relational dynamics in ethnographic research are interesting ‘tales of the field’ (Van Maanen, 1988) worth telling. Let’s start with the story of how I entered the field with two names; Femke and Nompepho.

Starting fieldwork: Nompepho and Femke enter local figurations

From the moment I started writing the research proposal for this project in 2008 I visited the Karoo to get an idea of the area and announce my intentions to research farm conversions to wildlife exploitation. The rural Karoo town of Cradock was proposed as field site for this study because of the dominance of trophy-hunting activities in the Karoo and relatively few big eco-tourism farms dominating other regions in the Eastern Cape such as the rural areas around Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown. Hence, the selection of this locality immediately produced a bias towards trophy-hunting as one of the farm conversion possibilities next to other activities in the wildlife sector; notably eco-tourism, breeding wildlife species, and meat production. The overrepresentation of trophy-hunting farms limits the extent of some of the knowledge claims made in this thesis, especially on the meanings of farm worker performances in the
hunting game. It would be interesting to compare this with the performances of rangers and guides in other domains of the wildlife sector. It is also possible that there are relatively more employment opportunities on eco-tourism farms as well as different kinds of jobs compared to the trophy-hunting sub sector. The impressions, field notes and interviews from the initial field trip informed the development of the research objectives prepared before going into the fieldwork phase.

Between March 2009 and January 2010 I did fieldwork in the Cradock farming area. In February 2009, I travelled to Cape Town where I prepared my research activities in the rural Karoo. I had previous experience with living, working, and researching in Cape Town so I felt confident about my capabilities to adapt to the environment smoothly. Three years earlier I did fieldwork for my master thesis in sociology on a public curio market in the city centre and during 2007 I worked in Cape Town there as language trainer. Through these experiences I had been confronted already with the wide variety of languages spoken in South Africa. As I had already established relations in the city, I could rely on help with gathering two essential fieldwork tools necessary for fieldwork in the Karoo: a car and isiXhosa language training. The car I picked with a friend was a red Ford Fiesta Flair that turned out crucial to travel the vast distances between Cradock and the remote trophy-hunting farms in the area. The private isiXhosa language course was a vital preparation for establishing contacts with isiXhosa-speaking township dwellers and farm workers.

On language

“You are now ready to find your Xhosa name”. These were the words of my isiXhosa language buddy after one of my lessons. I was learning to comprehend and speak isiXhosa, one of South Africa’s national languages which is widely spoken in the Eastern Cape Province. The objective was to make an effort to communicate with isiXhosa-speaking farm workers in their language and to access the cultural knowledge built into the language. In Amsterdam I had already completed a language course in Afrikaans as this is the lingua franca on the commercial farms in the Eastern Cape. As Thiong’o declares in one of his writings against the tragic disappearance of many African languages “each
language, no matter how small, contains the best knowledge of its immediate environment” (2009). Learning a language is getting to know a system of meaning, particular ways of greeting and this creates opportunity for communication and interaction. After the isiXhosa lessons I met up with my friend Sbu; a Rastafarian and traditional healer who has been a sort of spiritual guide and cultural translator for me ever since 2006. He became my ‘Xhosa Buddy’ and assisted patiently while I was getting my head around Xhosa grammar, expressions, sayings and challenging pronunciations of the numerous ‘clicks’ that characterize this speech. When I asked my Xhosa teacher how I was supposed to ‘find’ my Xhosa name, she replied “ask the people you have been talking to, they will help you”. Still puzzled, I asked Sbu who confirmed that the idea to take on another name is very natural among Africans because a name is not just a name. Names represent a person’s qualities and reveal the purpose or meaning of his or her existence in the world. Name-giving should be handled with great care and by the right person according to Sbu who added “I am happy that you came to me to look for it, let me think about it, give it time”.

About a week later Sbu announced he had received the name. It had come to him in a dream and he exclaimed “the name is Nompepho, it is a very beautiful name, Nompepho, and I have not heard it before!” Sbu shared his interpretation of the dream and its message. It featured the herb ‘impepho’ that is used by the amaXhosa against evil; with the smoke from burning impepho branches they chase bad spirits and cleanse their homes. Taking impepho as the root of the name Nompepho, it referred to a peaceful person with courage, confidence, passion and intelligence, according to Sbu. To help me adapt this name, to become Nompepho indeed, we performed a secret and sacred name-giving ritual. This meditation guided by herbs, smoke and Sbu’s spiritual powers took place in his modest living room and lasted about 15 minutes. My friend

158 During my masters’ thesis fieldwork on a curio market in Cape Town I had also received an African name from a key informant from Malawi. He called me Ulemu, meaning “someone who shows respect” or “social person”. The name giving was of great symbolic importance as my status changed from a strange outsider to an accepted and trusted outsider, and in some instances perhaps even insider. In Cradock I came across stories about name-giving rituals too. Misfortune in a persons’ life was believed to be caused by having received the ‘wrong’ name as a child which can be corrected through ceremonies or rituals.
instructed me how to complete this ceremony at the place where I was going to
live as Nompepho: Cradock. He emphasized it was important that before
entering the town I had to announce my presence to the nature by completing
the name ritual at the Fish River flowing into the town.

Crossing spatial and social boundaries

From Amsterdam I had arranged accommodation in Cradock through property
owners I met during the field visit in 2008. I moved into a little house in the
town centre and started exploring the research environment further. After two
months in the field I wrote:

Reflections April 2009

I started exploring Cradock and went searching for game farmers and workers.
This process so far involved a lot of people and a lot of talking, meeting, coffee
drinking, going to Church, toy-toy at ANC rallies, jive at weddings, visiting
homes, phoning and waiting for invitations. Since my ordinary life seems to be
completely entrenched in my ‘research field’, simply by living in Cradock, many
observations, conversations and impressions are not only generated through
work, but rather during every aspect of my every-day life.

From the start of the fieldwork process there has been a constant moving in and
out, up and down, of different social spaces to encounter research participants.
To “find my feet” (Geertz, 1973: 13) in Lingelihle, the former black township I
spent considerate time at Masizame, a community centre founded during the
early 1990s that provides services and houses a creche, a library and a legal
advice office. Moreover, the centre functions as a social space and meeting place
for ANC members, church groups, school children, and visitors coming to read
newspapers (often to search for job advertisements) and hear about the latest
gossip. There I practiced speaking isiXhosa and people addressed me as
Nompepho which initially surprised me as I assumed people would perhaps find
it pretentious to introduce myself as somehow part of their (language)
community. I was especially interested in the work of the Cradock Advice Office
(CAO). It originated in 1983 during the anti-apartheid struggle to train and assist

In isiXhosa Masizame means ‘let us try’.
black people in legal matters and nowadays it assists and advices workers
involved in labour disputes or who have been deprived of their rights by
employers; including dismissed or evicted farm workers. The Office irregularly
attempts to mobilise workers, for example domestic workers, and inform them
about their labour rights. I had met the director during the visit in 2008 and
when we met this time he asked: “where have you been? I have been waiting for
you the whole year!”

Cradock is still spatially segregated along lines of racial classifications and
class. In town I met farmers, ex-farmers, teachers, church reverends,
accountants, lawyer, estate agent, hotel and Bed & Breakfast owners, the labour
consultant, police officers, municipal workers, veterinarians of the department of
agriculture, and shop owners. In the townships I met NGO workers, teachers,
more church reverends, domestic workers, politicians, farm workers and ex farm
workers. As a foreign newcomer and outsider I crossed social and spatial
boundaries governing relations in Cradock. The town has been, as many South-
African commercial farming centres, founded on a spatial lay-out that divided
white people residing in town from black and coloured people in the
surrounding townships. Cradock residents have strong emotional affection or
resistance in relation to different spaces. Many of the white people born and
raised in Cradock’s town centre have never visited someone in the townships to
share a meal or listen to a story. On the contrary, they fear entering the
townships where they feel they do not belong. White people go there as police
officer or employer dropping off their domestic worker or gardener, but this
means driving in and out with the bakkie without engaging in the place. Many
people from the townships in the other hand regularly visit town to shop or go
to work. Although in Cradock the physical distance between town and the
townships is actually very short, not many people cross or bridge these divides in
their day-to-day life. The two images below give an impression of the different
feel of places that exist within one kilometre of each other.
Two images depicting different spaces in Cradock: town centre and Lingelihle.
My daily movements between town and Lingelihle, and to a lesser extent Michausdal, were a typical dynamic during the field work process. As soon as I had explored the spatial and social lay-out of town I started focusing on mapping the commercial farms, in particular the locations of the trophy-hunting farms in the region where I could study the work and the lives of farm dwellers.

Mapping the trophy-hunting field

Across the street of my house in town was the local Department of Agriculture. Soon after my arrival I walked in and asked if they could tell me where the trophy-hunting farms were and who the farmers were. With their information and maps I initially located six private trophy-hunting farms, of which one is a hunting concession\(^\text{160}\), within the boundaries of the Karoo municipality. These farms are known locally as long established and big hunting operations. During the fieldwork process I learned there were more private hunting properties of which some were still also used for conventional types of land use, and others had absent land owners (South-Africans or foreigners) and did not depend on the hunting business for their livelihood. I found out that there was a National Park and a Nature Reserve in the area too. I started contacting the farmers and visiting the farms. Besides trophy-hunting operations I visited dairy farms, stock farms and hunting farms beyond the municipality boundaries. After two months of orientation I reflected on the research process:

Reflections 29 April 2009

The orientation phase of the research helped me to identify the private game properties in the Cradock area; to get a feeling who the relevant stakeholders are and where I can find them. I have done my ‘grand tour observations’ on some game farms; seen the properties, the owners and their houses, seen hunting clients and workers, vehicles, animals, workers’ houses and offices. And now I would like to observe how these spaces are used, what they look like from the inside, how people interact while they work and I want to speak with game-farm workers. These ‘mini tour observations’ will give a more diverse account of

\(^{160}\) A hunting concession is a place where several land owners merged their properties together to form one big wildlife habitat where they can keep wildlife species, hunt and run a trophy-hunting business.
practices on game farms and will assist me in starting to find out where people went who left the farm at any stage of the farm conversion to wildlife-based production.

These “grand tour” observations (Spradley, 1980:76-81) helped to identify the major features (place, actor and activities) of the trophy-hunting farming landscape. With ‘mini-tour’ observations (ibid.:76-81) I started zooming in. At first I selected two farms where I wanted to do life-history interviews with workers and engage in participant observation. The ‘selection’ of farms and persons with whom to explore the implications of farm conversion processes was linked intimately to the process of negotiating access. In the following sections I clarify how the research contextuality, referring to meaning-making processes inherent to particular sites (Schwartz Shea & Yanow, 2012:69-71), mattered a great deal for accessing farmers and workers in the field.

**Being reflexive about positions and emotions during the research process**

“Reflexivity” refers to a researcher’s active consideration of and engagement with the ways in which his [sic] own sense-making and the particular circumstances that might have affected it, throughout all phases of the research process, relate to the knowledge claims he ultimately advances in written form (Schwartz Shea & Yanow, 2012: 100).

Ethnographies are generated through a human research instrument that constantly engages in sense-making processes that need to be checked and analysed through the practice of reflexivity, which is a key aspect of interpretive research. Particularly the link to epistemological matters - how seeing, hearing and feelings produce researcher understandings - makes the practice of reflexivity interpretive (Schwartz Shea & Yanow, 2012: 101). Reflexivity is methodologically significant as it makes explicit how the researchers’ positionality affected the research account and the knowledge claims generated from it (ibid, 102). Being transparent about the research process generally enhances the trustworthiness, or integrity, of these knowledge claims as the research activities at least can be assessed. During fieldworking I produced several reflection reports in which I discussed the progress of the research and
the dilemma’s that I faced during the process. These were discussed within the research project over email or during seminars in which we evaluated multiple research projects working on related topics. These were useful moments of introspection and feedback generation that guided the research process. I support the idea that during all phases of interpretive research reflexivity is a necessity with many advantages.

Reflexivity as methodological tool

Interpretative research departs from the assumption that “data” and “meanings” are not just out there to be collected by scientists. Empirical data is coproduced in and through interactions between the researcher and the research subjects (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006: xvii). Reflecting on these research interactions gives insight on how sources of data are accessed; on the role of the researcher in conversations and participatory observations through which data is created; and the way it is accordingly interpreted (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). The practice of reflexivity is important for critically assessing the researcher-researched relationship and the researcher’s “positionality” in the field (Ybema et al., 2009: 9). Reflexivity further strengthens ethnography as scrutinizing and analyzing interactions with research subjects ultimately reveal their social worlds (Shehata, 2006: 260). Mentioning reflexivity as researcher has become so common, or even institutionalized (Koning & Ooi, 2010: 14), that scholars have started reflecting on the practice of reflexivity itself (Down et al., 2006; Lerum, 2001; Pillow, 2003). What does it mean to be reflective or reflexive and how do you do it? When applied badly, the construction of so-called “confessional tales” only sucks both author and reader into a “black hole of introspection” (Van Maanen, 1988: 92; 2010). Unproductive reflective research reveals a lot about the researcher, but little about the researched. Reflexivity should not simply be used as a methodological power (where we learn about the position and assumptions of the researcher), but used as a methodological tool (Pillow, 2003: 192) that ultimately gives us a better understanding of the object of study. Another problematic use of reflexivity is the practice of familiar and comfortable reflexivity (Pillow, 2003) whereby researchers obscure uneasy and unfamiliar situations that challenge their
representations. To counter this habit researchers have argued that showing awkward encounters in the field and exposing social ambiguities and emotional ambivalence might increase the trustworthiness of ethnography (Koning & Ooi, 2010: 17). The constructive power of taking ethnographers’ emotions seriously is asserted by Ybema and Kamsteeg who wrote that fieldwork emotions like loneliness, estrangement, and confusion “can be vital sources of information for the researcher”. Reflecting on such emotions create the critical distance ethnographers, at some point in their research deeply immersed in the field, need to “see things differently” (Ybema & Kamsteeg, 2009: 106).

Several authors have written about the valuable insights into (workplace) relationships that were generated through reflecting on their interactions and emotions in the field (Blee, 1998; Down et al., 2006; Lerum, 2001). Blee (1998) analyzed emotional dynamics of her uneasy field relationships with racist activists in the United States. She identified “fear” as a prominent emotion during interactions with interview respondents. The analysis of fear as a medium of interaction, present and strategically used during the fieldwork period, eventually gave her a better understanding of the ways in which fear operates within racist groups themselves. The reflections on her personal experiences of fear during her fieldwork allowed her to probe beyond her emotional relationships in the field and use the emotional dynamics as analytical tool to get a better understanding of the nature of racist social movements (Blee, 1998: 393). In more “ordinary” research settings Down et al (2006: 104) argue that “emotions are part of everyday life and should be part of everyday ethnography”. Inherent covertness of ethnography produces emotional dissonance to which researchers respond in different ways (2006: 95). The authors reflect on their feelings of disgust, anger and embarrassment during research into the steel works in Australia and elaborate on how they substitute or merged their emotional issues with “traditional gender stereotypes and/or the inherent power, authority and distance of the researcher role” (2006: 102). What the field (or interactions with particular respondents) “does” to you emotionally, generates information about the field once moving beyond the researcher’s personal experience. In the next sections I present various reflections on positionality, research relations, emotions, and ethical dilemmas in the research process, that link to my
understandings of how farmers and workers reconfigure power relations and belonging in the Karoo commercial farming landscape.

The challenges and dilemmas emerging during the research process aroused a range of feelings; excitement, sadness, joy, despair, frustration, fear, inspiration and confusion. Just as the feelings of the research respondents have been an important source for data generation, it is now time to look at the ethnographer’s feelings towards doing fieldwork and various research relations. It is important to take emotions seriously as reflection on my role in the field generated insights on configuration processes in the Karoo.

**Research path through the Karoo’s the trophy-hunting landscape**

The research path was closely aligned to the authority linked to property titles and local understandings of farm relations. It was anticipated that accessing private properties where farm workers live and work would rely on permission from farm owners or managers. The research design initially focused primarily on the life histories and experiences of farm workers in the context of increasing farm conversions to wildlife production. Building relationships with trophy-hunting farmers and understanding their stories required multiple encounters, mostly on farms situated along winding dirt roads up to 60 km out of town. Meeting farm workers on farms proved a delicate process dependent both on the farmers’ approval to be present on the farm and farm residents’ assessments of the implications of engagement with the researcher. The inclusion of farmers’ stories and perspectives resulted directly from the research path I developed throughout the research process. While negotiating access and establishing research relations it was evident that the stories of farmers and workers were interlinked, because they shaped certain *interdependencies* with each other over time. Hence, I now to describe in more detail how I negotiated access to farmers and workers and which methodological strategies I employed to get insights into farm conversion processes as well as the farm dwellers’ position in the trophy-hunting landscape.
On encountering farmers

From the outset I expected farmers to be suspicious about my interests in farm dwellers’ experiences on their farms and I invested in preventing antagonistic relations with them. This immediately presented an ethical dilemma: how would I introduce my research to them? During the initial encounters with farmers I invited them to tell their story about the farm conversion process and their choice to engage in game farming. At a later stage in the process I would gradually shift the focus to the place of farm dwellers on their farms. At the outset it was remarkably easy to establish contacts on trophy-hunting farms with owners and/or managers of the farms. As the farmers all know each other they would often inquire who else I had talked to and which farms I had visited besides theirs. Within the tightly-knit commercial farmers’ network it worked better to approach all trophy-hunting farmers in the locality as some farmers seemed anxious about being the only one providing insight in their exclusive spaces. I deliberately started off with research questions that would interest farmers, topics close to their passion for farming and wildlife. With the exception of one farmer that I only had a brief encounter with in town, I was able to interview owners or managers of all six private hunting operations in the municipality that I had identified during the explorative stage of the research. My impression was that game farmers eagerly engaged in telling their narratives and enjoyed sharing their enthusiasm for hunting, nature and farming in the Karoo. And I was as equally keen to learn about the practice of game farming and hunting of which I knew so little yet. I conversed extensively with game farmers on wildlife species, policies, hunting clients, trophies, rifles, vegetation, hunting, marketing, farmers’ associations, water management, feeding programmes, veterinarians, and four-wheel-drive vehicles. Often these interviews and conversations resulted in walking or driving over the farm which directly linked the knowledge generated to the landscape it was situated in. Inevitably, I was drawn into the world of game farmers and the ways theys make sense of their position in the local configuration as well as in post apartheid society. I then knew their stories deserved a place in my ethnography as well.

As I established meaningful relations with game farmers I proposed three farmers to engage in a map-making exercise to get a better sense of the spatial
(and social) implications of the conversion process. If they did not have a complete map of the farm, we made a drawing of the farm property in which we traced the boundaries of properties incorporated over time, the erection and removal of fences, the location of roads either used or blocked, the hunting facility sites (lodge, abattoir, office, skinning shed), farm houses occupied or vacated. While constructing the maps I probed for changes over time, removed or new infrastructure, and the presence of residents. The encounters focusing on trophy-hunting practices and the history of the farm conversion were informative and enjoyable for both me and the farmers. Farmers helpfully referred me to their friends, family, colleagues, and invited me to happenings on the farm like wildlife translocation or capturing, hunting trips, or just for tea or instant coffee and a leisurely game drive. This is how they enabled me to see the boundaries and the feelings attached to their landscapes of belonging.

The research interactions with farmers became more complicated from the moment I explicitly expressed the wish to incorporate farm workers’ perspectives in the research. As I gradually shifted the research questions and focus to farm dwellers, my research objectives started to clash with my intention to sustain meaningful relations with farmers. Balancing the tensions this provoked proved a delicate task. There were various responses from farmers once I brought up my interest in the perspectives of farm workers: raised eyebrows, agonised looks, the question “why?”, a proposal to set up a meeting for me in their presence, a polite acknowledgement such as “of course” followed by the message that “you will not spend that much time with them anyway”. All farmers were hesitant to permit research activities on their farms when it meant not engaging exclusively with them, but with the farm dwellers present on their farms. Often I was accused of “getting political” by mentioning labour relations or land reform. One farmer asserted that “tenure rights have nothing to do with the wildlife industry” and another farmer wondered whether I wanted “to contribute to the industry or break it down?” Sensitive subjects were preferably avoided and negated through stating that “this topic is very complex, you must be a genius to study it.” In other words, I was getting closer to the tensions inherent to the social figurations of farmers and workers. Some farmers became silent and broke off the relationship completely as soon as I wanted to enter the world of their labourers. Others inexplicitly resisted by stating that “they do not
have time to talk to you, they are working”. Yet, exceptional individuals did continuously permit access which gave me the invaluable opportunity to penetrate the trophy-hunting landscape and its meanings for farm dwellers as well.

**Being on the farm and writing field notes**

In the original research design it was proposed to do a detailed case study of one trophy-hunting farm, selected with help from research participants, by residing on the farm for a while and engage in participant observation. It was only halfway the field work period that I relocated from town to a hunting farm where I had negotiated participation in the daily running of the farm for at least one week. Up to then I had mostly made day trips to the farms in the area. Ideally case studies are selected according to the problem they want to address; are we looking for extreme, “most likely” or “least likely” situations; do we want to verify or falsify theory or empirical claims? The strategic selection of extreme, critical or paradigmatic cases increases the possibilities for generalizability (Flyvbjerg, 2006:229). In reality though, there is not always much to choose from. Due to the delicate process of negotiating access to farms in the first place, selection purely relied on farmers’ permission to enter the farm. Not just the sensitivity of the research subject was a consideration in farmers’ decisions to let me stay on the hunting farm. The presence of a researcher possibly disrupts the exclusive and costly product sold to hunting clients, or might generally disrupt work practices on the farm. Bearing this in mind I preferred to work without a translator or research assistant on the farms; it was challenging enough to maintain relationships with farmers without the presence of another outsider. Hence, I went to the hunting farm accompanied by only a bottle of red wine and filter coffee to settle in smoothly.

In the months prior to my stay on one of the hunting farms I had visited the farm numerous times to interview the farmer or farm workers, or to do participant observations during hunting activities. I learned that John often expressed ambiguous political opinions and attitudes towards the research project. He was open for debate and felt there was no harm in me studying dynamics on the farm. He allocated me a room in his house which meant I
quickly got familiar with his world meaning John’s daily routines, habits, movements and opinions. This closeness to the farmer was both illuminating and problematic. It was a struggle to spend time with workers alone as I had to constantly negotiate my whereabouts with my host. After one week I inquired whether I should leave, as John had agreed I could stay for a week, but he asserted that there was no need for me to go. My impression was that he enjoyed having me around; someone he could show in great detail what his life on the farm was like. During breakfast we would talk about stories from the books on hunting I found on the bookshelves or in the office and at night we would often discuss the events of the day by the fireplace. In short, it turned out my company in this remote place was appreciated. I offered to pay for lodging and food, but this was declined with a joke about how I ‘paid’ for my stay with my presence. Unfortunately, after ten days I had to leave the farm quite abruptly as John had an accident in which he was seriously injured. He needed care and rest more than a researcher ‘hanging around’ the farm.

While participating in the daily routines and activities dictating life on the hunting farm I was part of the spatial and racial constructions that determine people’s place on the farm. The struggle to engage with farm workers and the self-evident view of me being constantly present in the shadow of the farmer was illustrative of the social distances between people on the farm. During the ten-day stay on the farm I would constantly carry my notebook and pen with me, and preferably also my camera. Because the farm work and activities happened from 7 am until 7 pm, there were days where it was hard to find a moment to note things down. I would be in a four-wheel drive for hours or out in the field with farm workers. I could make some scratch notes during coffee breaks or on the toilet and work those out at night after the farmer went to sleep. Most of the time I was too tired after the intense and eventful days to type properly on the computer so I would just write on paper. Once I returned to my town house I typed everything up on the computer. As I worked out the scratch notes I relived the farm experience and started thinking, and reflecting, about what I had seen and experienced. While I was on the farm I adjusted to the rhythms and ways-of-doing on the farm; I listened, asked and observed as much as I could without paying much attention to my personal feelings about what was happening. During the process of “comprehensive note-taking” (Wolfinger,
2002:90) I sometimes felt amazed about what had transpired on the farm; was I really chased by a rhino? I was also wondering how to document my experiences; how could I know what was relevant to remember and what not? How does an ethnographer decide what to note down? And how do tacit knowledge and expectations play a role in this process?

There are different strategies of writing field notes and researchers can choose for example “the salience hierarchy” or “comprehensive note-taking” strategy (Wolfinger, 2002:89). The salience hierarchy focuses on writing down what the researcher thinks are the most significant observations. Often these are deviant cases that stand out compared to other cases or because of the researcher’s background knowledge. In my case all interactions and events on the farm seemed important and worth noting down. Therefore the “comprehensive note-taking” strategy was more appropriate; it was basically what I was already doing in my notebook. This strategy is “to systematically and comprehensively describe everything that happened during a particular period of time, such as a single trip to the field” (2002:90). Writing chronologically and extensively from the beginning to the end has the advantage of capturing the rhythms of the people and the social setting under study. The unique time-tables of the people on the farm made me more attentive to different meanings of members in the setting. Another advantage is that by writing down events in the order they really happened (or did not happen) more detail can be recalled, including details that otherwise would seem irrelevant, but turned out to be valuable (2002:91). When I was done writing field notes from the ten-day stay on the farm I generated 35 pages (approximately 30,000 words) of detailed description of life and work on a trophy-hunting farm.

My standard equipment whenever I went out consisted of a recorder, pens and several notebooks. I separated notebooks for language, scratch notes, appointments and contact details, and interviews notes. When I returned home I typed up my notes on the computer and I consistently registered in a digital diary every day’s activities.
Negotiating access to farm dwellers: repositioning myself in the field

The relatively easy encounter with white farmers stood in great contrast to the difficulties I experienced in entering the world of farm dwellers. To encounter and engage with them I applied several strategies for which I persistently repositioned myself in the field. Finding farm workers who had experienced farm conversion processes in the area, or who knew others who did, turned out to result in dead ends and plenty disappointments. I persistently adapted ways to find and negotiate access to farm dwellers. Firstly, I started off-farm through the Cradock Advice Office.

Together with the director of the Advice Office, Xolani Umtu, I went to a parking lot in Cradock’s town centre where farm workers from the farms arrived every last weekend of the month to do shopping, meet with relatives and friends and/or collect social grants. We approached men that transported farm workers and asked them if they knew who was working on hunting farms. We were referred to others who would know more, but who were only coming to town the following weekend. We asked cell phone numbers, made appointments, and then the person would cancel or not show up. During these moments we generally found little enthusiasm to engage with the research as the people we approached on the road side had to take care of other businesses in time before they returned to the farms again. The public spaces in town were not the place to introduce ourselves and we did not have enough time to explain the purpose of the study and establish meaningful research relations.

Xolani arranged some meetings with people whom he knew personally and who had worked and lived on farms. We interviewed them, but they were usually not linked to trophy-hunting farms. Because I worked with help from the Advice Office and others from the Community Centre in Lingelihle, the search was closely linked to their social networks. I assumed they would know people working on farms or people who had lived on farms in the past. Through them I announced my project during an Anglican Church service in Lingelihle. This meant in practice that I engaged much less with people in the coloured township, Michausdal, across the road where many Afrikaans-speaking farm workers and ex workers have their homes. Later in the field work process a reverend (whom I met in Masizame) arranged a focus-group interview with farm
workers living in Michausdal. Nevertheless, these networks were not effective in finding farm dwellers who wanted to participate in the research.

The second strategy was to establish contacts with workers while I was on the farms. After a visit to Smith’s Hunting Safaris on a Sunday I managed to speak with some of the farm dwellers. As I drove towards the exit gate I saw three men walking towards me on the gravel road. I stopped the car, lowered the window and greeted the men in isiXhosa. They returned the greeting and the tallest man reached out his hand to me. This was Sam who carried a Bible in his other hand and affirmed they came from Church service that had taken place on a neighbouring farm. This was the first moment, three months into field work, that I got a chance to introduce myself to farm dwellers. I told them about my research project and that I was interested in the stories and perspectives of farm workers. They laughed when I told them that my Xhosa name was Nompepho. Sam told me his Xhosa name and explained that ‘Sam’ was his English “worker’s name”. He responded positive to my request to come and talk to him on my next visit: “yes, you should come and talk to us too!” At last I found the research path leading to the world of Karoo farm dwellers.

**Power dynamics in the field**

The way engaged ethnographers reflect on their positionality changes with certain conceptualizations and theoretical assumptions about power (Ghorashi & Wels, 2009). Traditionally, engaged anthropologists studied marginalized groups producing texts, with an emancipating subtext, that explained their oppression. This was based on an understanding of power that divided the field into powerful actors that should be resisted and powerless actors to sympathize with. The postmodern concept of power, part of the figurational perspective in this ethnography, assumes that power works through all human (inter)actions, lacking a single source or direction; leaving the engaged ethnographer without a powerful actor to legitimately resent. In other words, everyone is complicit in power structures and discourse, and “subjects are left alone to reflect on their own roles and positions of complicity” (2009: 236). The balancing act of moving between perspectives of farmers and farm dwellers produced ambivalent feelings
and awkward moments in the research process. These emerged especially when I was directly asked to position myself in particular power configurations.

Expectations from research participants: whose side are you on?

The enduring and intensive engagements with both game farmers and farm dwellers in Cradock inexorably created expectations about the outcomes of this study and the consequences for different participants. In different ways I noticed that both farmers and dwellers hoped that the research would be instrumental for their individual or organizational interests.

As mentioned before game farmers were generally eager to share their stories about the farm conversion process to wildlife. In these narratives they elaborated on the valuable contribution they and their businesses make to the new South Africa. They perceived me as a stranger from abroad whom they could convince of their perspectives and beliefs. Ralph Watson mentioned that it mattered a great deal that I was a non-South African studying game farming because it meant I was “non-biased”\(^{161}\). My interpretation of this statement is that he meant I was not part of local configuration dynamics and thus had no particular feelings or attachments to issues dealing with being South African. On the other hand I was often reminded by informants, especially white farmers, that it was easy for me to be critical of them because after all I would eventually return to Europe where I do not have to face the kinds of personal challenges they are facing every day of their lives. Indeed ethnographers seem ideally positioned as relative outsiders able to leave the field again. Therefore, they should reject the arrogance of moral high ground close to the less-powerful alone, and reflect upon their positions through and within discursive practices that they are part of (Ghorashi & Wels, 2009: 244). Whenever I criticised respondents that I considered talking from a privileged position in the post apartheid configuration, I of course did so from a privileged position myself. This realization made me more willing to understand the perspectives and stories of the privileged in the field.

A typical question as soon as I entered the lives of game farmers was: are you pro-hunting or anti-hunting? In other words, are you with or against us? I

\(^{161}\) Interview 20 March 2009.
responded to hunting farmers that I had nothing against hunting practices in principle. My personal biography helped me adapting smoothly to the world of hunting in the Karoo. As little girl visiting my family in the rural parts of The Netherlands I had often been confronted with hunting practices of my relatives and the stories of my grandfather’s poaching activities. Although I have been a vegetarian for most of my life, I have no objections to meat consumption as long as the meat is not produced in the bio industry. Therefore I could relatively easily reconcile my feelings concerning animals and nature with those of the farmers I met in the field. And try many flavours of Karoo meat dishes, and game meat. This proved a huge advantage. A farmer once joked after I assured him I was not a “bunny hugger”\(^{162}\): “Good, otherwise I would shoot you”. The extreme defensive, and aggressive, attitude towards me showed me the explosive dynamics and relations farmers have with people who are not part of their world or do not share their worldview.

An equally insistent demand to position myself came from the Cradock Advice Office in Lingelihle. One of the NGO employees asserted me “you can be our spy!” He hoped that I would be willing to take photos and report on farm workers’ conditions on the farm to him so that the Advice Office could have more information from the remote farms. Once I shared an experience I had with a farmer who had made rather crude remarks about black people and Xolani picked up the phone exclaiming “tell me who said this to you, he is a racist, we have to report him to the police!” During such instances I disappointed him by insisting on my position as independent researcher who could not use information directly for other purposes than the research. Nevertheless, I found other ways to assist the NGO as I do think their work is important and that researchers’ should find ways to contribute to the field to bridge academic and societal objectives. This NGO suffered from a chronic lack of funding. There was no transport to go and visit people who needed assistance and could not come to the office. Together with a colleague I assisted in preparing funding proposals for the Office and we worked on a strategic plan

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\(^{162}\) Bunny huggers are for example animal activists who display emotional attitudes and rejection towards any form of animal exploitation. They are a nightmare for commercial farmers who increasingly feel they need to justify their way of life to people who have no personal attachments to the land or the animals living on their farms.
for the organization. These activities were informative of the institutional environment. It taught me a lot about the ways people were organised in the past and how these structures have changed under democratic South Africa. The involvement with the NGO generated insights on the political lay-out of the township and the local municipality.

The political structures became even more visible through the national elections and service-delivery strikes that took place during my field work in 2009. Some informants who witnessed my participation in ANC gatherings took this as a positive signal.

**Reflection Report 29 April 2009**

William Kingston replied in an email that he thinks it is a very good idea to “work together” and he also was “very impressed” to see me at the ANC rally just before the elections. It often happens that people saw me somewhere or heard from somebody that I am in town before I even meet them.

This helped in making connections with in this case the private labour consultant and other figures from the local political elite, but possibly also had disadvantages as especially the impoverished working class and farm dwellers are increasingly disconnected from local ANC networks. The absence of farm dwellers in the waiting lines for the voting stations or during service delivery protests signalled their outsider position among the working class population residing in town.

Starting up the Cradock Running Club has been another way to contribute to local developments while I was in the field. As I have become an avid runner in the course of this PhD project, I literally ran into local runners while exploring routes and tracks around town. Together with them I we decided to organise a ‘Cradock Four Fun Run’ to announce and celebrate the foundation of the new sport’s Club. The process of establishing a Board consisting of people from Cradock’s different communities, fund raising activities, and stimulating people to run together provided numerous insights on the complicated transition South Africans are making during the post apartheid era. Distrust and cynicism complicated the efforts to work together in organizing the event and defining the structures of the Club. Again spatial and racial constructions that shaped social divisions often complicated processes. There was often disagreement
about the venue where we should meet or what the ‘Cradock Four Fun Run’ exactly represented, and for who. Do the Cradock Four represent the black community only, or can they be a symbol for the rainbow nation? The start and finish at Lingelihle stadion caused much confusion. Why use a run-down stadion if there is a modern maintained one in town? Eventually, we convinced locals to cross social and physical boundaries they had never explored before. The establishment of the Cradock Running Club showed that there is hope as long as people have a common goal and are willing to discuss difference and the stereotypes that keep distances intact. The ‘Cradock Four Fun Run’ in January 2010 was an event to remember.
Farmers’ resistance to the research project

After three months fieldwork, I was confronted with farmers’ resistance towards the research project. It became clear that there were members of the wildlife sector that had taken notice of the research activities through their networks (not by personal contact with the researcher) and who subsequently attempted to control the research process. This was partly a response to the proceedings at an academic seminar in May 2009 called ‘Game Farms and the Impact on Traditional Agricultural Labour’ at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. Nomalanga Mkhize, who was doing fieldwork on tenure security of farm dwellers in the context of farm conversion in the same WOTRO project, and I presented and discussed our work-in-progress and preliminary findings there to an audience that consisted mostly of academics and some listeners from local NGOs as it was open to anyone interested in the topic. During the discussion it became clear that there was a representative of a regional local game-farmers association in the audience. He felt that game farmers were excluded from this event and therefore he claimed we engaged in a biased project telling a “one-sided” story. The game farmers’ notes of the seminar were sent via email to PHASA members (Professional Hunters Association South Africa) that “warned” game farmers for researchers who hold negative perceptions towards the game-farming industry. During a farm visit some of the project’s researchers were confronted this email.

Then, on the 10th of June I received a phone call from the chairperson of the national branch of WRSA (Wildlife Ranching South Africa) requesting the texts of the seminar presentations. The man expressed his concerns whether we had access to the “correct” information. He insisted on knowing who I had approached so far: “we do not know who you know so you should tell me who you approached”. He expressed that he felt “it is important to get the right information as perceptions are a big problem in this field”. Then he offered his assistance in providing contacts for the research project, effectively wanting to control the research process. We agreed that I would email him an outline of our research project so that he could inform WRSA members in the Eastern Cape. Together with the project team I drafted an email in which we outlined the
research project, including a statement on standards of ethical conduct in academic research projects.

**Excerpt from email to chairperson WRSA, sent 12 June 2009.**

Being a PhD student working towards a doctoral thesis, I am affiliated to academic institutions which require certain responsibilities and accountability on my side. Having said this, I would like to emphasize again that as much as I take the responsibility to clarify my research, I cannot disclose the identity of my respondents without their explicit approval and I cannot exclude perspectives that perhaps contradict the perspectives of others. I trust, and hope, that you will respect these academic, ethical norms and values of the research process.

Thank you for showing an interest in the research and I hope I have informed you sufficiently for now. Repeating what I said in the phone call, I would be interested in meeting you and learning more about your personal views on the topic.

We never received a reply or discussed this email or his efforts to direct the research focus towards the perspective of the wildlife industry. Another representative of the wildlife industry sent me an email through one of my farmer respondents and requested more information about the research objectives and proceedings as well.

**Email: dated 16 June 2009, sent to me through game farmer on 17 June 2009.**

I believe that you have recently met with Farmer X of Farm X in the Cradock area. I am involved with WRSA-EC, (Wildlife Ranchers South Africa, Eastern Cape Chapter) and would like to meet with you regarding your research that you currently conducting on farm staff, and the effects caused by Game Ranching/Farming. I am sure we could contribute to your studies in a favorable manner.

Let me know if you come through to Grahamstown so we could setup a possible meeting.

To this email I replied by accepting the invitation to meet whenever I would visit Grahamstown. We eventually ran into each other in Cradock later that year during a symposium on the profitability of agriculture organised by Agri-EC
(provincial branch of commercial farmers association) where the WRSA representative gave a presentation on the benefits of wildlife farming for the Eastern Cape. During the break we chatted briefly, he said he was the brother in law of the man that attended the seminar in Grahamstown, and then he mentioned to his colleague who was listening to our conversation that “she made the same allegations that I was talking about [in the presentation] at a seminar at Rhodes”. He referred to perspectives questioning the benefits of game farming and how they impact the industry negatively. He added “you should have used national statistics like I did”. And then he abruptly turned around to start a talk to someone else.

These experiences were telling for my research path and interpretations as it appeared that game farmers felt uneasy or threatened by the investigations into their spaces which triggered the question what exactly was at stake for them? Meanwhile, I wondered how these interventions would affect my relations with farmers on the trophy-hunting farms in Cradock. I returned to John Smith of Smith’s Hunting Safaris to confront the developments with lead in my shoes expecting the farmer had become suspicious of my intentions. When I arrived at the farm everything seemed normal and I waited impatiently for the subject to come up in the conversation. As we were having the usual instant coffee in the office after I interviewed one of the farm workers john mentioned:

**Field note 10 June 2009**

John: “You caused quite a thing in Grahamstown...”

I said that I was relieved he brought up the subject and that I felt very unhappy about the stories going round lately.

John: “It is because of the problems with the nature conservation you see”.

I affirmed this as I was familiar with game farmers’ struggle with government departments involved in policy making and the regulation of game farming.

John: “Game farmers feel threatened, where do they belong?...We are a small, tight community, like a family, there is jealousy, but we look after each other...Now you should be careful in future what perceptions people get from your research, because people just grab one thing and change its meaning; like what happened with ‘canned hunting’ or ‘apartheid’”.
John’s response suggested that WRSAs reaction to the seminar should be understood in the context of game farmers’ difficulties in asserting their place in the countryside, and particularly their relations with government. In the farmers’ view the community is misunderstood (by the department of agriculture and conservation) and he compares this “misunderstanding” with conflicting meanings people attribute to hunting, like different meanings people gave to ‘apartheid.’ This logic is linked to a common perception in the white farming community that ‘apartheid’ has been misinterpreted and demonised by the international media that tagged apartheid South Africa as a ‘wrong’ society and burdened white South Africans with a bad reputation abroad. Farmers like John Smith like to tell foreigners like me what “really happened” during the apartheid era and argue that it was not as bad as the media portrayed. This defensive behaviour signaled white farmers’ need to justify the past and deal with emotions of complicity, guilt and insecurity. Fortunately, despite resistance from some game farmers John Smith agreed to let me stay on his farm for a while. After six months in the field I was able to reside on a farm for a week to experience what work and life on a trophy-hunting farm is all about.

The contestations over interpretation continued into the multi-stakeholder workshops in South Africa our NWO-WOTRO research project organised in February 2011. During this event (which was repeated in 2012 in Kwa-Zulu Natal) we “checked” (Schwartz Shea & Yanow, 2012: 106) our interpretations with members from the wildlife industry and farm dwellers. The chairperson of the WRSA had tried to control the research process attended and again expressed his disagreement with my interpretations of power relations and social configuration processes on the trophy-hunting farms. On his farm everything was different, so he argued, and my qualitative data was too subjective to make any generalizations according to him. Moreover, he mentioned that I was merely engaging in “white-farmer criticism” and that I should not talk about race as “race is out of the window”. And then he suggested that black professional hunters can work on state-owned properties. He claimed that the focus on trophy-hunting farm was very narrow as most farms in the Eastern Cape are mixed, including his own. My critical points about employment generation and power relations on the farms he found inappropriate as his staff benefitted from hunting activities:
Their personal hygiene and their pride have improved over time, like what happens in evolution. Due to the hunting they have acquired skills and language abilities. The clients bring stuff for them and I had to increase the labour force to cope with all the spin offs!

The various responses of stakeholders in the field mainly confirmed the explosive nature of relations in the field. When I visited Cradock in 2011 to share my research interpretations I was accused of being a ‘communist’ by one of the local farmers. It was a challenge to engage farm dwellers in the workshops as they feared exposure or repercussions when staying away from work. These proceedings indicated the sensitivity of the subject and the nature of power relations in the field.

**Gender and racial categorization**

My positionality was partly determined by how I was perceived in the trophy-hunting field. The ways I was gendered and racialised by research participants demonstrated the classification systems at work in local configuration processes. An interesting question is how such aspects of my identity aided or constrained access to research encounters in the field (Schwartz Shea & Yanow, 2012: 117; Walby, 2010). Sexuality, race and class positions are intertwined and played out differently in field relations. Research bodies seem to be assumed “male, middle class, Caucasian-European, capable of unfettered physical mobility, and a-sexual” (Schwartz Shea & Yanow, 2012: 116). Engaging more fully with our positionalities enables a better understanding of the knowledge produced that are “written up as research findings” (Cupplès, 2002: 388).

Being a young, foreign, and white female definitely helped in getting accepted in the male-dominated hunting field. It resulted in many sexual remarks and authoritarian attitudes towards me that made me renegotiate my personal boundaries and showed me different expressions of masculinity in the field. During one of the photo shoots depicting an American hunter with his trophy he teasingly remarked “Cannot you come and lie here?” When the shooting seemed over he insisted I would pose with his rifle and trophy. Instantly, I felt like being turned into some kind of a trophy myself. Indeed I felt like I repositioned myself in this cross-cultural research setting away from home where
my sexuality was re-shaped as a “landscape of desire” and men perceived me as desirable and loose (Cupples, 2002: 383). I personally re-negotiated to what extent men were allowed to approach, cross, or even violate, my personal boundaries of what I thought was acceptable behaviour. Ethnographers write that cultural sensitivity towards the research community often results in different behaviour regarding sex and sexuality, than at home. We might be more or less prepared to resist normative understandings of sexuality, to risk offending members from the research community, to hide or expose our sexuality (Cupples, 2002: 384). I told research participants that I was engaged in a serious relationship back home (which I was initially) which did not seem to matter as men kept proposing sexual engagements; in hunting terms their behaviour made me feel like a free-roaming single woman available for wild encounters. My research objectives considerably shifted the level of tolerance and intimidation I accepted. During one instance, when a male research participant literally grabbed me and insinuated that I would end up in bed with him, what I immediately thought of were the consequences my rejection would have for the research process. Luckily my refusals did not harm the key research relations I depended on for my study, as far as I am aware. Reflecting on these sexualized moments revealed the strong sense of masculine prowess present in Cradock’s commercial farming landscape.

The ways farm people responded to my presence and behaviour in the field were informative of how they attribute certain positions and behaviours according to gender and race categories.

Fieldwork reflections September 2009:

Although the male farm workers expressed appreciation for my attempts to understand their language, their work and their life histories; at some stage they also started to utter concerns about me “doing what they are doing”. One cold afternoon after a heavy rain with hailstones as we were standing in the workshop after our return from the field one man explained to me “a woman is like an egg you see, and men are hard... where a man can walk up a mountain even seven time, for you one time is enough”. Interestingly, they consider themselves strong, fit and able to work even under the worst weather conditions in the field. But that’s just not appropriate for me. What do white women do I asked? Joseph answered: “They can go to town and go to book clubs, you see!”
Getting my hands dirty and walking through town or the veld completely went against the ways men and women, black and white, live together in Cradock. Research participants always commented on my strange and ‘dangerous’ behaviour. When I travelled with a black farm dwellers sitting next to me in the car I would hear from my travel companion: “you do not see this in Cradock, we always sit in the back”. When a white person from town would see me walking along the roadside to Lingelihle, or run alone along the banks of the Fish River, they stopped their cars and tell me that I was crazy and that someone could harm me. Racial and gender classifications are intimately linked to themes of security, belonging and power.

Invisibility and mobility

The last challenge shaping the research path was the search for farm dwellers and meaningful ways to engage with them in the field. My feeling of despair grew as I experienced many dead ends and unsuccessful attempts to get access to their worlds. Reflecting on why it was hard to find and engage with farm dwellers who had left farms, or even workers on trophy-hunting farms, ultimately gave insight in their connections and disconnections. Slowly but surely the research path directed me to spaces and places from where I started to see and understand the Invisible Great Trek.

Time was an issue as it took much longer than expected to access game farms and engage with farm dwellers working and/or residing there. Eventually I generated bits and pieces of life stories and experiences linked to several conversion processes in the region instead of pursuing a single case study. Searching for these bits and pieces was a time-consuming exercise. Throughout the research process I tried to trace ex-farm workers/dwellers; tried to find out where they went and what they were doing now. Because many workers left farms a long time ago (farm conversions started more than 10 or 20 years ago) I depended on other people’s memories and willingness to assist me in finding them. My fieldwork experience in searching farm dwellers has theoretical and methodological implications. Themes of accessibility, (in) visibility, and mobility
characterized the fieldwork process, like it characterized the lives and mobility of farm workers.

*On interviewing and observing mobile people*

The research design was structured around life-history interviews with farm dwellers and ex-farm dwellers to document their experiences linked to farm conversion processes in the commercial farming landscape. In practice it was challenging to pursue these interviews as it was hard to find a suitable place to do this, or sufficient time to engage in long interviews in which I could reconstruct life trajectories of farm dwellers. Time and language constrains disabled the interviews I had imagined. Farm workers spoke multiple languages during interviews and conversations; English, Afrikaans, and isiXhosa. Mostly we started talking in English or Afrikaans although most farm dwellers could express themselves best in isiXhosa of which I had too little understanding to comprehend nuances. Throughout the thesis I have presented quotes in English, either translated from isiXhosa or Afrikaans or slightly adapted to make the quote readable without changing its meaning.

While I was on the farms the men worked full time and the women part time, and they engaged in other activities when they did not work for the farmer such as cleaning, cooking, or looking after the children. The formal interview setting of sitting at a table in the farmers’ house or the workers’ house with a recorder in between me and the respondent was helpful in getting particular types of stories, but they were not “Great Interviews” (Hermanowicz, 2002) that generated intimate details of farm dwellers’ feelings and perspectives. It did not invite farm workers to tell stories and I increasingly felt the setting was not right. After an hour of talking lunch break would be over or the farmer would want us to participate in an activity or something else would disrupt, and often end, the interview or conversation. The most valuable insights were generated during participation in farm workers’ activities on the farms. The moments where we were walking and talking gave me a better sense of their routines and feelings about their position on the farm, than the formal interviewing. Once I showed a worker the cuts and bruises on my hands after offloading a truck load of wires
and he remarked\textsuperscript{163} “now you know what it feels like to be a farm worker so it is good”.

Moving appeared a meaningful practice in the research process as it developed. Moving \textit{in between spaces} became the thrust of my fieldwork experiences; moving in the veld, from the farmers’ house to a worker’s house, from town to farms, from one farm to another, and from the city-centre to the township. The emerging mobilities paradigm urges for a movement-driven social science in which movement, potential movement and blocked movement of people, ideas, objects and information are conceptualized as constitutive of economic, social and political relations (Urry, 2007:43). Scholars in this “mobilities paradigm” proposed “mobile ethnography” and methods “on the move” whereby the researchers “walk with” and “travel with” research subjects in order to more fully engage in their worldview (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007:40). Being on the move with farmers and workers enabled analysis and interpretation of the meanings they attached to particular places and the relationships formed in those places.

As it was hard to directly engage with farm dwellers while being on the farm, I decided to engage with them outside of the farm context. This proved an effective research strategy. I started joining workers during their time off to Church or their family homes in town. For farm workers it was convenient that my wish to track their movements provided them with transport. Gradually a mutual interest emerged in planning travels and activities together. It was during these trips between the farms and town that farm dwellers told stories by pointing out the farms where they were born, where they had worked, where they had met their spouse and so on. While on the move with farm workers in the commercial farming landscape I learned most about their mobile life trajectories and attachments in the region. As soon as I could I would note down these stories and work them out on the computer. During the fieldwork process I generated many, often fragmented, pieces of information about personal trajectories gathered on trips, during Church sessions, during tea drinking, that I reconnected and linked up again during the writing process. This way, the research path made me see farm dwellers’ mobile lives in the Karoo.

\textsuperscript{163} Field note Wednesday 19 August 2009.
Concluding remarks

This is the place where the research path linked to the making of this ethnography ends. I have aimed to present a transparent account of the research process, how my research relations shaped my interpretations and how reflections generated insights into social configuration processes in the trophy-hunting landscape in the Cradock area. Through reflexivity I linked dynamics shaping the research path to reconfiguration processes in the field. Negotiating access to trophy-hunting farms, power relations and farm dwellers’ mobilities were key themes emerging during the research process. They provided many fieldwork challenges that required various methodological strategies that I discussed generously in this chapter. The value of this elaboration on the research process however ultimately lies in the emergence of an ‘Invisible Great Track’ shaped by the mobile lives of Karoo farm dwellers anticipating to post apartheid uncertainties. Without exploring my frustrations, confusions, anxieties and other fieldwork emotions, I would not have been able to track and see the meanings of their journeys.
Summary

*Tracking an Invisible Trek* explores how farm conversions to wildlife utilization for trophy-hunting shape contemporary mobilities and shift power configurations in the commercial farming landscape of South Africa. Through this research, I seek to understand the experiences and positions of black farm dwellers in conversion processes to game farming, i.e. resident farm workers, tenants and their families who consider the Karoo as their home. Proponents of game farming associate the wildlife industry with tourism opportunities and economic growth. They often claim that game farms contribute to job creation and rural development. On the other hand, critics warn that game farms possibly have adverse impacts on processes of social transformation, agrarian labour markets, and land reform. This ethnography contributes to the understanding and interpretation of these processes, as well as contemporary meanings of land ownership and hunting practices in post-apartheid South Africa. It aims to unfold how commercial farmers and farm dwellers in the Karoo re-configure power relations and their sense of belonging in the context of farm conversions to trophy-hunting activities.

The interpretive framework departs from a figurational perspective derived from the work of Norbert Elias. This approach to the sociology of power insists that in every empirical context interdependent individuals develop particular patterns of behaviour with each other over time, and that the actions of individuals can only be understood within the dynamics of the social configuration process that they are part of. More specifically, I employ and adapt Elias and Scotson’s notion of *established and outsiders* *figurations* to study the balance of powers on Karoo trophy-hunting farms. This approach requires a focus on the relational dynamics of farm conversions and this study therefore includes the perspectives and stories of farm dwellers, farmers, professional hunters, and state representatives who together shape social formation processes. I thus investigate how farm conversions are legitimised by commercial farmers and hunters through their perceptions of who belongs in what place, and what that place should look like. I explore the emotions and feelings farmers and farm dwellers associate with rural landscapes, and how these perceptions and
emotions shape farm dwellers’ decision-making and life trajectories. The emphasis on how power relations and notions of belonging are configured through perceptions and feelings offers additional insights into debates on agrarian change, nature conservation and rural development.

I found that South Africa’s power configuration is shifting as a result of post-apartheid reform policies and increasing market liberalization that produce significant contradictions in the nation’s transformation process. A profound aspect of this process is that farm dwellers and commercial farmers experience this as a threat to their sense of belonging and their future in democratic South Africa. Farm conversions are interpreted as a particular response to such perceptions of uncertainty and insecurity, contributing to an increasingly divided countryside. The kind of relations emerging out of this process are presented through four established and outsiders configuration dynamics that are at work in the Karoo.

The first dynamic concerns the multiple layers of established and outsiders configurations that shape local patterns and relations. An important aspect of this is that relations with the state shape relations in particular places. In the post-apartheid political context white commercial farmers are being repositioned as outsiders whose land ownership and privileged status are continuously questioned and debated, especially in the media. I argue that under these circumstances the self-acclaimed established, namely white commercial farmers, increase (social) distance to outsiders, namely black farm dwellers, and re-assert their established positions through racial and spatial constructions in the commercial farming landscape. In the game farming landscape physical boundaries are solidified with higher fences and electric wires; and social boundaries are reinforced through a persistent racial hierarchy repeatedly performed in the hunting game. Moreover, the closeness of farm labourers residing on farms is gradually disappearing, as a salient feature of this restructuring process on the Karoo trophy-hunting farms is the shedding of permanent labour.

The second figuration dynamic illuminates a discrepancy between the feelings game farmers have about their place in the post-apartheid society and their actual position on the land. The fear and loathe of the idea of land reform exists next to continuous investments in game and property to expand their business.
That farm conversions occur despite the contested status of its economic viability and sustainability suggests that these places are not just about economic land-use choices. Converting to game partly expresses a political choice to create a place where white farmers feel they belong and where they can re-assert their establishedness in the country. This process is supported by farmers’ global connections through the trophy-hunting industry consisting of like-minded souls that enable access to capital and investment opportunities in the Karoo.

The third established and outsiders dynamic provides insights into the ways farm conversions and power relations are legitimised through claims about belonging and nativeness in wilderness landscapes. Game farmers, who present themselves as custodians of nature, envision trophy-hunting landscapes as ‘original’ places for indigenous species and ‘pristine’ nature. In the process of conversion they erase traces of colonial occupation and dispossession as well as remnants of pre-colonial land use practices. Just like settlers during colonial occupation, settler descendants ironically recreate the image of Africa’s ‘empty land’ to legitimize postcolonial land transformations. The question of who belongs in this wilderness landscape presents another paradox. Black farm dwellers on the one hand are an integral part of the social order in the hunting game, perceived as natural talents for tracking and skinning activities. On the other hand they are portrayed as incapable of becoming independent ‘subsistence’ farmers. Just like national policy discourse, land ownership patterns and entitlements in the Karoo are made sense of through racial categories. To understand the position of farm dwellers in trophy hunting landscapes, I propose the term incorporated outsiders to show how the white farmers and the hunters, incorporate outsiders into their ideal social order that retains power imbalances.

Farm workers on hunting farms attribute different meanings to the wilderness landscape. Their narratives do not include ‘pristine’ landscapes. On the contrary, game farm workers and dwellers resent especially the presence of dangerous game when there are no fences to separate the animals from them, or when they work unarmed during trophy hunting activities. In this sense, belonging on the farm is mainly restricted to those who appreciate the aesthetics of its design and the emotions associated with this; adventure, pleasure, wilderness. Moreover, they are partly replaced by foreign labourers, notably
Zimbabwean men, who fit the native servant image, but only stay temporarily without claiming or demanding belonging in the Karoo. For the established they support the increasing distance between local established and outsiders, but their presence on the local labour market increases competition, violence and tensions among the rural working classes.

Farm dwellers’ mobile histories and presence as the labouring class in the Karoo have shaped interdependencies and mobility patterns in the commercial farming landscape. The meaning of this mobility is the fourth and last figuration dynamic that reveals the contours of farm dwellers’ *Invisible Great Trek*. I argue that their decisions should be interpreted as a response to changing interdependencies that makes their situations often more precarious. I found that the farm increasingly means a place of work and not home. They anticipate the disappearing job opportunities, and contribute to the increasing distance between established and outsiders by ultimately envisioning their homes off-farm. They create homes in the RDP housing projects extending rural townships where they often remain outsiders as well. The power configuration, shaped by long-term processes of land dispossession and racial segregation, is spatially imprinted on the *land* as well as the *minds* of the rural population. Farm dwellers act primarily within the given landownership structure. Their claim to belonging in the Karoo is expressed through making the township near the riverbanks of the Great Fish River their home.

Through applying established and outsiders relations in a dynamic way multiple layers and internal stratifications emerged in the shifting and overlapping Karoo power configurations. In this thesis I illustrate how farm dwellers, through relations with farmers and the state, took part in processes of *outsidering* shaping their decisions, experiences and sense of belonging in the Karoo. Trophy-hunting landscapes confirm and reinforce the power of rural elites to determine the environment in which they can belong, at the cost of such possibilities for an increasingly impoverished working class.

What are the political implications of landscape transformations in 21st century Karoo Midlands? It will come to no surprise that I strongly suggest a critical stance towards the idea that game farming presents a win-win situation for nature conservation and rural development. It is highly questionable that (all sectors of) the wildlife industry will transform the countryside as long as it
divides the rural population spatially and racially, premised on asymmetric power relations on the farms. The paradoxes, contradictions and divisions presented in this ethnographic account deserve immediate attention from government and civil society organizations aiming to address farm dwellers’ needs and rights to belong in post-apartheid society. The *Invisible Great Trek* demands attention, visibility, 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.