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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Private game farming and its social consequences in post-apartheid South Africa: contestations over wildlife, property and agrarian futures

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Spaces of privatised wildlife production, in the form of game farms, private nature reserves and other forms of wildlife-oriented land use, are an increasingly prominent feature of the South African countryside. Whilst there is a well-developed literature on the social impacts of state-run protected areas, the outcomes of privatised wildlife production have thus far received little attention. It is argued here that the socio-spatial dynamics of the wildlife industry, driven by capitalist imperatives related to the commodified production of nature and ‘wilderness’, warrant both in-depth investigation in their own right, and contextualisation in terms of broader processes of agrarian change locally as well as globally. The growing influence of trophy hunting and the wildlife industry on private land can be seen as a significant contributing factor to processes of deagrarianisation that are mirrored in other parts of the African continent and elsewhere. In South Africa, these developments and their impacts on the livelihoods of farm dwellers take on an added dimension in the context of the country’s efforts to implement a programme of post-apartheid land reform. Two decades after the formal end of apartheid, contestations over land rights and property ownership remain live and often unresolved. This theme issue explores these dynamics on private land partly or wholly dedicated to wildlife production, with special emphasis on two South African provinces: KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape.

Keywords: private wildlife production; game farming; deagrarianisation; farm workers; farm dwellers; agrarian change; land reform; post-apartheid South Africa

Tourists who leaf through the colourful in-flight magazines of the airlines flying them into South Africa will find numerous advertisements offering them unforgettable experiences in luxurious game lodges isolated in splendid, pristine nature, with wildlife teeming at the doorstep. Those with money to spare are tempted to buy their own ‘piece of Eden’ and invest in one of the many private wildlife reserves in the country. Driving through South Africa’s countryside, they are likely to notice the high, electrified fences enclosing vast stretches of land with signs warning anyone foolish enough to trespass of the dangerous animals awaiting them on the other side.

At the same time, the local media regularly features debates about land reform, with some observers predicting a serious decline in agricultural production resulting from land

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transfers to previously disadvantaged groups and others complaining about the slow pace of land reform. Given the hotly contested nature of land issues within the broader region – resulting from a history of colonial interventions in land use and settler land alienation – and the ambiguous place of land issues in post-apartheid South Africa, the context is a highly politicised one. As the articles in this theme issue show, the issues around private game farming cannot be seen in isolation from pressing questions around land, property and agrarian futures.

To date, there has been little concentrated attention on the socio-spatial and broader agrarian consequences of the move by many private landowners to one or more of the various forms of wildlife production. The latter range from game farms running trophy hunting businesses, through to lifestyle investment opportunities and private nature reserves offering various ecotourism-oriented activities. The social consequences of these conversions of farm land from conventional agriculture to a different land use, one centred on wildlife-based production and/or conservation, have not been systematically studied – indeed, they have been largely overlooked by scholars.¹ This thematic issue of the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* is the outcome of an inter-disciplinary research project which aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.² Through the articles presented here, the thematic issue makes a case for recognising the significance of this land-use change by considering, most centrally: processes of deagrarianisation in the region and further afield; a new spatial politics of land enclosure and contestations over ownership; and the reshaping of the post-apartheid South African countryside in accordance with new forms of commodified nature production (led by both established and new players and dictated by the demands of global capital).

The complexities and contradictions are amply evident, and no single narrative – still less a simple political point – can be endorsed. However, a social critique does need to be made and the detailed ethnographic engagements with farm workers and farm dwellers in the Eastern Cape's Karoo region and KwaZulu-Natal presented here, probe changing relationships on farms and the resilience of private property asserted against other forms of tenure or claims to land. They suggest that a deeper understanding of lives and livelihoods in agrarian contexts is required and raise challenging questions for South Africa's post-apartheid land reform programme.

Drawing on the familiar triad of 'land, labour and livelihoods'³ to understand what is happening on the farms, several contributors go further by looking not only at livelihoods but also questions of place identity and sense of belonging on farms. Farm residents are not just workers. In some cases, they have long histories of living on land that may be owned by a landowner but is regarded as 'home' by resident families, who are perhaps more usefully thought of as farm *dwellers* – a formulation that draws attention to the complex ways in which home, land access and identity are negotiated in the South African countryside.

The research presented here is local in focus, but it also speaks to wider debates. The theme issue moves between the national stage (the actions of the private wildlife 'industry' at the national level and its relationship to the state), to the specificities of place, identity and dispossession in particular contexts. The aim has been to keep in sight broader debates about enclosure, deagrarianisation and the commodification of nature whilst also generating insights into the particularities of place and local agrarian histories. In an iterative process, we 'zoom out' to look at these wider processes, and then 'zoom in' to study the minutiae of histories, spatialities and changing relationships on farms. The next section contextualises the articles by locating these studies within a broader literature.

‘Wilderness’ and wildlife production as a contributory factor in deagrarianisation processes

In the agrarian studies literature, there has recently been a strong focus on the phenomenon of ‘land grabbing’, not only in Africa but also in other parts of the so-called developing world. In the context of a global restructuring of the agrarian sector, recent analyses of large-scale land acquisitions, or land grabs (see, e.g. Borras and Franco 2012; Zoomers 2010), shed some light on these processes. Governments in the global South appear to have little faith in small-scale agriculture as a basis for development (see, e.g. Hughes 2006). There are many instances in which land currently utilised by small-scale farmers is offered to companies for large-scale production, often on the basis that the land is being ‘under-utilised’ by peasant producers (Hall 2011). The land-based livelihoods of rural dwellers appear to be under threat in many parts of the world. Significantly, the majority of the world’s poor today live and work in the countryside (Borras and Franco 2012; O’Laughlin et al. 2013).

This global rush for land is often linked to an expansion of capitalist agro-industry and has been recast by some (including World Bank officials) as an opportunity for pro-poor and ecologically sustainable economic development (Borras and Franco 2012).⁴ Land is acquired not only for agricultural or biofuel production and mining but also increasingly for nature conservation, leisure and lifestyle projects (Zoomers 2010). The latter phenomenon has been referred to as ‘green grabbing’ and is the subject of lively debate among critical conservation scholars and researchers in land and agrarian studies (see Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones 2012; Barrett et al. 2013).

As several commentators have argued, the construction of a commodified wilderness is an important contributor to the ‘green grabbing’ phenomenon. As wilderness areas become a scarce and coveted good (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008), various forms of tourism and nature extraction are being implemented which are altering the nature of agrarian relationships and relations of production in ways we are only beginning to understand (Castree 2008; Ferguson 2006). The global drivers include a growing market for tourism and, more specifically, wilderness tourism. In Southern Africa, as in other parts of the world, these processes are reshaping spaces, creating new forms of enclosure, privatising nature and turning it into a commodity (Zoomers 2010).

‘The trouble with wilderness’ – to borrow William Cronon’s evocative phrase (Cronon 1996) – is that popular conceptions of wilderness landscapes often exclude the presence of people. In the African context in particular, there is a long history of visions of ‘wild Africa’, captured within the bounds of game reserves and national parks. These are landscapes occupied by wildlife but not livestock, in which an attempt is made to recreate a ‘pristine’ landscape emptied of human occupation (Anderson and Grove 1987; Neumann 1998; Brooks 2005; Brooks et al. 2011). The marketing of conservation areas as ‘pristine wilderness’ devoid of human influence and presence helps render them inaccessible to local residents. The anti-agrarian bias of nature conservation or so-called ‘wild’ landscapes is very evident and, in many cases, has led to the eviction of local people from protected areas (Brockington and Igoe 2006).

There are also other ways in which conservation imperatives have been seen to be associated with deagrarianisation. The notion of Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) is a case in point. CBNRM was widely adopted as a guiding framework from the 1980s, when attempts to incorporate economic development and poverty alleviation within nature conservation became a dominant trend. The emergence

of this sustainable development discourse, through the 1987 Brundtland Report and the ensuing 1992 Rio Earth Summit, has been extensively analysed and its links to neo-liberalisation agendas pointed out (see, e.g. Castree 2008; Ferguson 2006; Hajer and Fischer 1999). The idea of CBNRM was to develop strategies for local communities to economically benefit from nature conservation by tying their livelihoods more closely to natural resources. This would in turn, it was hoped, secure their support for and involvement in conservation efforts. Since the Brundtland Report, nature conservation has increasingly sought salvation in these 'people-centred' approaches (Adams and Hulme 2001; Hutton, Adams, and Murombedzi 2005).

However, a growing body of critique has demonstrated that this community-based approach to conservation can also be deeply problematic (for an overview, see Dressler et al. 2010). The critique questions whether the dual aims of nature conservation and community development can be fulfilled under a single banner. One argument is that nature conservation objectives become compromised in the process. Other critiques focus on the lack of benefits accruing to local residents, some suggesting that the dominant role assumed by the private sector allows it to gain control over resources hitherto inaccessible to it, at the expense of local residents' rights of access and use (Dzingirai 2003; Hutton, Adams, and Murombedzi 2005; Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008). There is now a substantial literature showing how such programmes often end up effectively disenfranchising local people, who lose control over natural resources while private sector partners involved in these programmes benefit (e.g. Büscher and Dressler 2012).⁵

If conservation strategies in areas under state or communal tenure have led to such outcomes, what then of the creation of wilderness and associated social practices on privately owned land? The spread of these ideologies from formal protected areas and state land to privately owned landscapes, marketed to the tourism industry in very similar ways, is a relatively new and troubling phenomenon that requires more detailed consideration.

There is clearly an increase in private wildlife conservation worldwide (Miller et al. 2012; Barany et al. 2001; Langholz 1996). This trend is often hailed as a positive contribution to meeting conservation targets such as those set by the Convention on Biological Diversity.⁶ In addition, there seems to be an almost universal belief that the new trend will result in economic development and poverty alleviation in developing countries (Suich, Child, and Spenceley 2009). Private sector involvement allegedly results in more employment opportunities for local residents, and hence is thought to offer a solution to rural poverty. This, of course, accords with the broader view that private sector actors are able to more efficiently exploit land-based resources.

The case for conservation on private land is strongly argued in nature conservation circles in Southern Africa (Bond et al. 2004). The commercial exploitation of wildlife on private land, it is asserted, will contribute to economic development and poverty alleviation by generating revenues and job opportunities (Langholz and Kerley 2006). Proponents of private wildlife production in the region refer uncritically to the 'success' of CBNRM in order to argue for the supposed potential of the wildlife industry to contribute to local development (Suich, Child, and Spenceley 2009). Indeed, the rhetoric of CBNRM is used in order to encourage new land beneficiaries to participate in the sector (Ngubane and Brooks 2013). Yet the premise that CBNRM has actually supported rural livelihoods is questionable.⁷

We end this section by drawing attention to the trenchant critique, by scholars writing on the global 'land grab' phenomenon, of the facile argument offered by proponents that

simply negotiating codes of conduct on the part of the private company involved will ensure 'win-win' outcomes for both local economic development and the environment (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009). These scholars warn that, instead, dispossessed smallholders often become 'surplus people' and suffer poverty (Li 2011).

The term 'surplus people' has a particular resonance in South Africa, where it was originally used by the state to describe those marginalised by systematic dispossession and forced removals during the apartheid era (Platzsky and Walker 1985). It is perhaps also relevant to describe the new categories of displaced people being created in the countryside in the post-apartheid period. Land-use changes associated with private wildlife production are tied up with new forms of extraction and concomitant forms of spatialisation. As farming landscapes are transformed into consumptive (and extractive) 'wilderness' landscapes of various kinds, new spatial enclaves are being created through practices of enclosure, leading to new forms of inclusion and exclusion, and with them new groups of 'surplus people'.

The South African context: commercial agriculture, game farming and the precarious lives of farm dwellers

South Africa in the wake of apartheid provides fertile ground for analysis of these processes and their outcomes. The focus is on the consequences of these land-use conversions for poor rural residents, in particular the historically vulnerable group of people who work and/or live on privately owned farm land. Shortly after the first democratic elections in 1994, a government White Paper on Land Policy (Government of South Africa 1997) recognised that '... a major cause of instability in rural areas are [*sic*] the millions of people who live in insecure arrangements on land belonging to other people'.

An understanding of these agrarian histories – specifically the landlord–tenant relationships that have characterised much of the countryside since the introduction of private property in the nineteenth century – is necessary if one is to fully grasp the impacts of the conversion to private wildlife production by private landowners in South Africa, as well as the broader contemporary contexts of agrarian restructuring and state-led land reform.

The history of private landownership is closely linked to the settler land dispossessions that took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Now infamous legislation introduced during colonial and apartheid times (particularly, the Natives Land Act of 1913 and successive laws) prohibited Africans from buying or owning land outside of designated 'native reserves' (later reinvented as bantustans or 'homelands'). Despite this, and despite the state's best efforts to regulate and control black sharecroppers and labour tenants living on white-owned land, a number of families continued to live as labour or rent-paying tenants on commercial farms (van Onselen 1996; McClendon 2002). Farm workers were often allocated small plots of land for cultivation and given limited access to grazing for livestock (Atkinson 2007; Crush and Jeeves 1997).

The position of farm dwellers and farm workers living and working on privately owned land became more precarious with the passage of time (Bradford 1987; Crush and Jeeves 1997; Du Toit and Ewart 2002). An important factor was the development of a modernising agricultural sector. In addition to the ideologically motivated removals that characterised the apartheid era, major capital investments in the 1960s and 1970s began to reduce the demand for labour in agriculture. Through these investments, many white

farmers were able to mechanise major aspects of their production. Due to their increased reliance on capital-intensive production, a smaller and more highly skilled workforce was required, placing tenants in a precarious position (de Klerk 1984; Schirmer and Böhm 2010).

In the late 1980s, South Africa's agricultural sector underwent a process of deregulation. The process began in the mid-1980s but was taken much further after the transition to democracy in 1994. In policies promoted by the IMF and the World Bank (Terreblanche 2002; van Zyl et al. 2001), marketing boards were closed, price controls and export monopolies abandoned and subsidies cut (Vink 2004). A commercial farming sector that had been heavily protected by state subsidies and tariff barriers, suddenly found itself exposed to global competition. South Africa's agricultural subsidies are now among the lowest in the world (Atkinson 2007, 65). Farmers have become more vulnerable to international shocks and deteriorating terms of trade, and their debt situation worsened. Many have gone out of business.⁸

Against this background, a well-meaning post-apartheid state instituted minimum wages for farm workers. According to du Toit and Ewert (2002, 93), it was (incorrectly) assumed that the combination of deregulating trade in agro-commodities and reregulating labour standards would encourage equitable social change. Instead, the introduction of minimum wages in this sector has resulted in a trend away from permanent farm employment and towards greater instability in farm workers' livelihoods. Jobs are shifting to labour contractors and casual workers, while farmers distance themselves from their 'social responsibility' functions such as the provision of housing for farm workers (du Toit and Ewert 2002; Atkinson 2007).

In this context, an international and growing tourism market, following the end of apartheid isolation, offered new opportunities for landowners. An increasing number have shifted to wildlife-based production, often characterised in the literature as 'wildlife ranching' (Suich, Child, and Spenceley 2009; Langholz 1996). The first shifts to game farming occurred in the second half of the twentieth century (Nell 2003), but after South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994, conversions accelerated significantly. By 2006, wildlife was being produced on nearly 10,000 commercial farms (on about half of which, wildlife is combined with continued crop and/or livestock activities). The exact land surface involved in private wildlife production and tourism is difficult to ascertain, but estimates in 2006 varied from 13% to about 17% nationally (NAMC 2006).

Changes in the role of state and market, the deregulation of the agricultural sector and the growth of the tourism market all played a role in the growth of game farming, but this was also facilitated by key legislative changes. Just before the end of apartheid, legislation was introduced that transferred property rights over wildlife from the state to private landowners. This legislation played an important role in the expansion of the wildlife industry. Since then, however, debates have arisen about the need to regulate the industry.

As Snijders (2014) and Kamuti (2014) show, many of the concerns that have been raised pertain to biodiversity conservation issues. However, some debates touch upon the impacts this growing industry is having on much-needed social transformation in South Africa – notably its implications for land reform. For what makes this a particularly interesting case is the fact that this expansion is occurring in a context in which the state is aiming to combat the legacies of apartheid and colonial geographies, alter the legacy of a racially skewed distribution of land, and provide some form of redress to those who were previously disenfranchised and who suffered racial discrimination.

The state land reform programme embarked upon in 1994 includes a restitution component, which allows communities who lost their land through discriminatory legislation to get it back or to receive compensation for the loss, and a redistribution component that aims to transfer land obtained through a ‘willing seller–willing buyer’ process to so-called ‘emerging farmers’ belonging to formerly disadvantaged groups. Despite its transformative intentions, very little has changed in terms of the distribution of land, which remains racially skewed. By 2010, only about 7% of white-owned land had been transferred to black farmers, well below the target set (DRDLR 2010; Walker et al. 2010).

The third key component of South Africa’s land reform programme is tenure reform, and it is as part of this programme that new legislation regarding the rights of labour tenants and farm workers in general was introduced, in the hopes that this would protect them from arbitrary eviction and help secure their tenancy. Following a history of state-sponsored forced removals, one of government’s stated aims is to improve tenure security for all South African citizens, and this is a key platform of its land reform programme. The Land Reform (Labour Tenants) Act passed in 1996 is of particular importance in the KwaZulu-Natal context due to local histories of labour tenancy (see Brooks and Kjelstrup 2014). The Extension of Tenure Security Act (ESTA) of 1997 was intended to protect farm worker rights more broadly. Greater tenure security for farm dwellers and workers is required; yet this appears to be difficult for government to achieve and the efficacy of this legislation has been limited.

Situating the research

The tensions between the various policies and land reforms, as well as the (sometimes unintended) consequences as government struggles to combine its adherence to market-based development goals with redressing apartheid legacies of dispossession, are drawn out by several of the contributors to this theme issue. Drawing on a variety of academic backgrounds – anthropology, geography, history and sociology – the contributing authors address various aspects of the impacts associated with a shift to game farming, ranging from labour relations and employment opportunities, to impacts on land-based livelihood strategies and tenure security, to sense of place and attachment to land.

The research presented here was undertaken in two widely varying contexts, providing fruitful cross-country comparisons of farm worker and farm dweller histories. In the dry interior of the former Cape Colony – the arid and sparsely populated Karoo region – large farms were surveyed in the early part of the nineteenth century and formed part of a colonial frontier that was somewhat removed from the violent confrontations over land taking place nearer the coast, which resulted in the creation of the ‘native reserves’ of Transkei. Some of these Karoo farms have been converted to game farming, in particular trophy hunting, and two of the studies (Mkhize 2014; Brandt and Spiereburg 2014) are located here (See [Figure 1](#)).

In KwaZulu-Natal, there are different histories on the land. Surveyed farms in this region were closely juxtaposed with former ‘native reserves’, creating a complex patchwork of agrarian relationships and tenure arrangements (See [Figure 2](#)). At the time of the introduction of private property on the densely settled east coast, in the wide strip of land between the coast and the Drakensberg Mountains, large numbers of Zulu-speaking residents of the then Natal Colony negotiated labour tenant agreements with

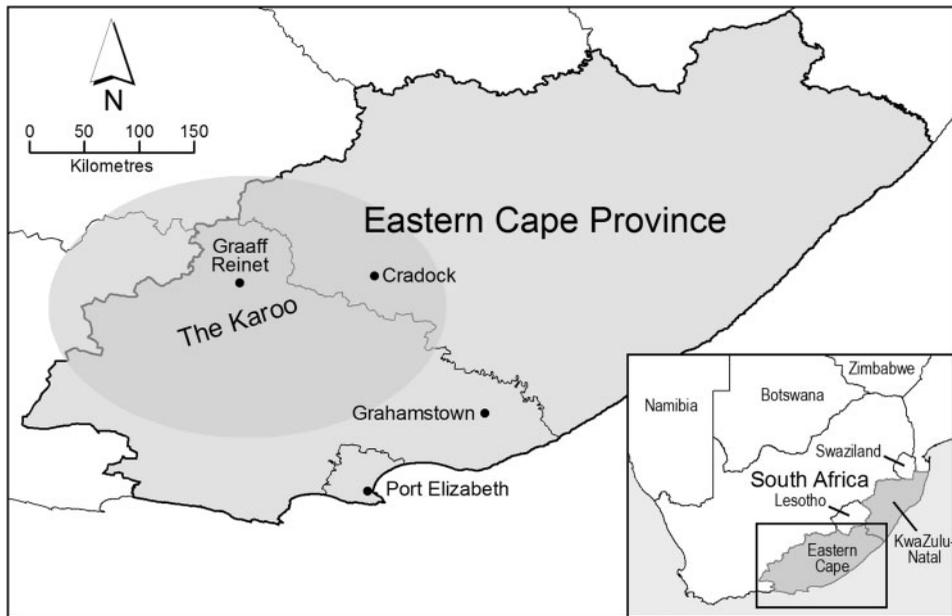


Figure 1. Eastern Cape province, showing location of the Karoo.

landowners (in some regions absentee landowners). They received permission to live on private land and graze their cattle there, in exchange providing labour from their households when necessary. The phenomenon of labour tenancy, which is characteristic of only a few parts of the country (including sections of KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces), gives agrarian histories in these regions a particular character (see, for example, Wisborg et al. 2013). Poor families living on these farms regard them as home, and as a political statement, they and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) representing their interests use the term ‘farm dweller’ rather than ‘farm worker’ to indicate this.

Related to these histories, but also influenced by other factors, we have noted a very different orientation to land reform in the two provinces. In the Eastern Cape, the provincial authorities have been hesitant to target game farms for land redistribution (Andrew et al. 2013), and it appears that there are no restitution claims on game farms in the Karoo, possibly because of the long history of the farms under private ownership. Mkhize (2014) argues that, in the Karoo, dispossession has been a long-going and cumulative process and thus the introduction of game farming does not mark a distinct break (although it may consolidate previous dispossession and make its reversal less likely).

In KwaZulu-Natal, the situation is rather different. As Kamuti (2014) shows, private landowners active in the game farming sector in the province view the state’s land reform programme as a serious threat and express anxiety around the future of land reform in the region.⁹ A number of game farms have been successfully claimed under the Restitution of Land Rights Act or through labour tenant claims, and in some cases, these farms have been transferred to land beneficiaries under the condition that the new owners run them as game farms (see Ngubane and Brooks 2013). In some cases, the transfer has taken place

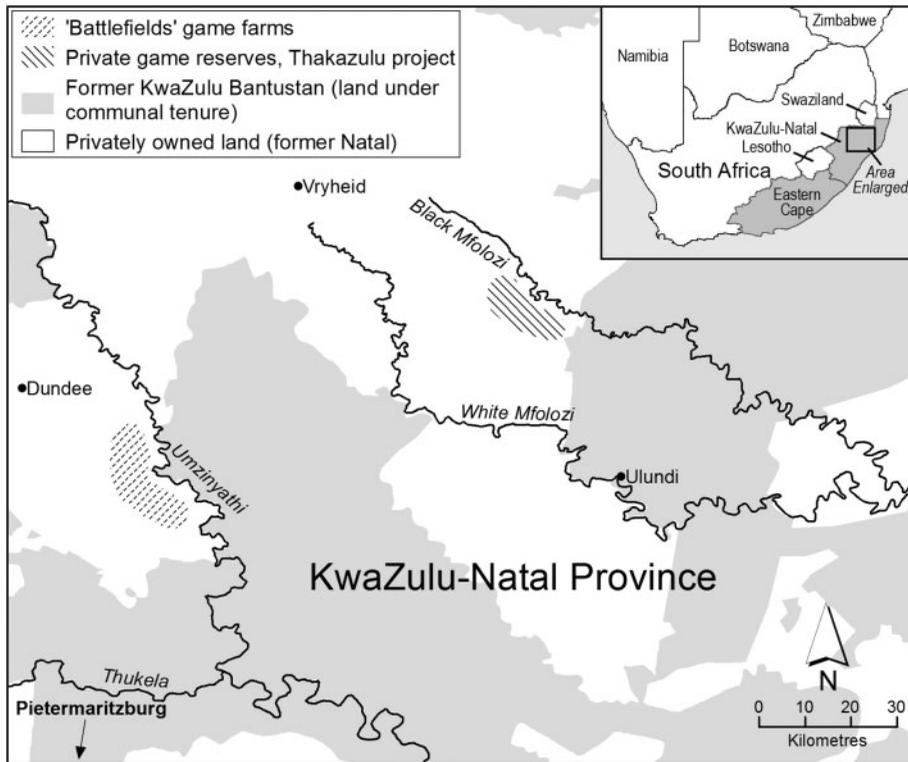


Figure 2. Northern KwaZulu-Natal province, showing location of case study (private) game farms in the context of communal lands (see Brooks and Kjelstrup 2014; Josefsson 2014).

on paper, but the power and control in running the operation remains in the hands of the former owners; social relations in these contexts seem to remain surprisingly unchallenged (Josefsson 2014). At the same time, the transition to game farming has not been accepted passively – these are also landscapes of violence. Jonny Steinberg in his (2002) book *Midlands*, which dealt with farm murders in this region, foresaw the response as potentially a violent one:¹⁰

Across the district, blacks speak of the coming game farms as a betrayal ... There are no tourists yet. The idea is still in its infancy. But there are many plans and lots of talk, and for the peasants in the area, it is war talk. (227)

Outstanding or unresolved claims on land scheduled for transformation from conventional agriculture to wildlife production are evident in many parts of the province. An interesting example is the proposed Gongolo Wildlife Reserve (GWR), briefly discussed by Kamuti (2014). The proposed GWR would combine a large number of privately owned farms to create a vast wildlife estate (Brooks et al. 2011, 2012).¹¹ Kamuti describes how the promoters of the GWR convinced provincial authorities to support the project despite labour tenant and restitution claims on the land lodged by farm dweller communities.¹² In other parts of the province similar projects have been implemented, with serious consequences for farm dwellers despite post-apartheid land legislation such

as the Land Reform (Labour Tenants) Act, which in these instances was not effective in contesting the power of private property (Brooks and Kjelstrup 2014).

One final aspect requires attention here. This is the claim, mentioned in the previous section, that private wildlife production has a role to play in rural development and job creation. Proponents of the expansion of game farming claim that this is a win-win strategy, beneficial both for nature conservation and for (local) economic development. Especially in the more arid regions, farming wildlife is advocated as a much more beneficial land-use option than livestock farming (see Snijders 2014). Representatives of the wildlife industry claim that game farming is a solution not only to environmental problems associated with commercial agriculture but also to the problem of decreasing profitability of farming and the lack of economic prospects for poor rural dwellers. Based on self-administered surveys among owners and managers of a number of large eco-tourism ventures in the Eastern Cape, Langholz, and Kerley (2006) conclude that private wildlife reserves not only offer more employment opportunities than conventional agriculture but also higher wages. Many private game reserves have corporate social responsibility programmes through which they justify their existence (see Brooks et al. 2012).

These claims require investigation. What are the job opportunities created by these wildlife ventures, and for whom? What do local residents lose and do the new opportunities compensate them for these losses? As with CBNRM, one of the problematic conceptions underlying positive expectations of the development opportunities offered by private wildlife production is the idea of an abstract community of 'the poor' who are to benefit. Little attention is paid to the benefits of people's land-based livelihood strategies (which are generally lost when land is converted to wildlife); to local socio-economic differentiation, or to aspirations and the meaning various groups attach to the concept of development (see, e.g. Bond 2001). Increasingly, 'development' seems to be equated solely with jobs created, and hardly any attention is paid to the nature of the jobs on offer to the poor or how remuneration compares to the benefits from previous livelihood strategies (Li 2011).

In addition, the impacts of farm conversions need to be analysed according to the specific mode of wildlife utilisation. The survey carried out by Langholz and Kerley (2006) was conducted among eco-tourism ventures in the Eastern Cape catering mainly to the high-end of the tourism market. Research conducted in our project suggests that this subsector of the wildlife industry does generate more employment than the livestock ranches they replaced (Andrew et al. 2013). Wages are often paid on the basis of the tourism sector dispensations, which at the time the research was conducted set minimum wages at a higher level than wages paid in the agricultural sector. However, most farm dwellers could only access low-income service jobs rather than the more lucrative jobs such as wildlife guiding. Further, the eco-tourism market appears to be subject to more fluctuations than the market for hunting, rendering the jobs somewhat unstable (*ibid.*).

For other subsectors of the wildlife sector, such as hunting, venison production and the breeding of wildlife for trade, there is a net loss of employment opportunities compared to the agricultural enterprises that are replaced. Brandt and Spierenburg (2014) and Mkhize (2014) show that this subsector is far less labour intensive than the eco-tourism sector. Even Langholz and Kerley (2006) mention that one of the reasons farmers gave to explain their decision to shift to wildlife-based production is that it is less labour intensive. Dispossession is a fairly common outcome (Brooks and Kjelstrup 2014).

It is important not to uncritically allow the language of entrepreneurship and job opportunities to replace rights-based approaches to development, including rights of access to natural resources. Looking at job opportunities alone is not sufficient to evaluate the impact farm conversions have on farm dwellers. The conversions also impact on the place – literally and figuratively speaking – of farm dwellers on the farms.

Introducing the articles: inclusions and exclusions in private wildlife production

The contributions to this theme issue fall into two main categories. First, attention is given to the game farming sector itself, its organisational strategies and its relationships with other key players such as the state and conservation scientists. Second, the focus shifts to particular spaces and places where a range of histories, spatialities and outcomes for farm workers and farm dwellers are playing themselves out on privately owned land in often obscure corners of the South African countryside.

Sector debates, alliances and unexpected bedfellows

The first article, by Dhoya Snijders, details his engagement with organised game farming or ‘wildlife ranching’ during the period 2009–2012. Snijders engaged with national organisations in the sector such as Wildlife Ranching South Africa, as well as attending meetings of the government-led Wildlife Forum. (Like many of these organisations, the Wildlife Forum is based in the country’s administrative capital Pretoria). He also traced documentary records of earlier meetings, allowing for a deeper understanding of how these debates developed over time. Through his interactions with industry representatives and other stakeholders in these spaces, Snijders is able to offer a unique insight into the debates within the sector and the discursive strategies being pursued by the game farming lobby in its quest to establish itself as a major player in the economy. Overall, he shows a strengthening alliance between the state and capital around the importance of game farming as a contributor to the South African economy.

Snijders is interested in listening for silences and in identifying the mechanisms through which some narratives and perspectives are silenced in the dominant forums. He picks up on significant tension around transformation – the game farming industry is dominated by white landowners and within this, by Afrikaans-speaking white males – and notes that narratives about Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) are paid lip-service, while actual social transformation or empowerment does not make it onto the agenda.¹³ Further, Snijders draws attention to the discourse coalitions entered into, sometimes only on a short-term basis, with potential allies including scientists involved in biodiversity conservation.

This said, in general, the game farming industry appears to regard researchers in conservation science with scepticism, while environmentalists (so-called ‘greenies’) are generally met with outright hostility. At the heart of these debates is the issue of trophy hunting, the mainstay of the game farming industry. Views that are critical of hunting are not present in the forum – the narrative is that nature conservation is best achieved through hunting. Yet attempts to place the industry on a more scientifically informed footing are often regarded with suspicion, as industry representatives are concerned that this might lead to the curtailment or tighter regulation of hunting and game farming on private property, thus impacting the game farmers’ ‘bottom line’.

Viewed at the level of particular provinces, the debate looks a little different. Tariro Kamuti's article shows how game farmers operating in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, whilst largely able to ignore local government structures (district and local municipalities), have been unable to dodge the issue of land reform which has emerged to delay the implementation of ambitious private wilderness schemes in the province.¹⁴ In this province, successful land claims have already resulted in the transfer of a substantial number of private game farms into the hands of land beneficiaries (Ngubane and Brooks 2013). Game farmers, together with the provincial hunting organisation, the KwaZulu-Natal Hunting and Conservation Association, regard land reform as a real and present threat and have adopted various strategies in response (Kamuti 2014; Ngubane and Brooks, 2013).

Another aspect highlighted by Kamuti is the alliances forged by game farmers in their particular contexts. Both Snijders and Kamuti mention the lack of a coordinated national government policy on game farming. Snijders points out that after 1994, the powers of provincial government had to be recalibrated with new national government departments responsible for agriculture, as well as for environmental affairs. Game farmers in KwaZulu-Natal appear to have decided that, on balance, maintaining the historically close alliance with the local provincial conservation authority, Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife (EKZNW), is to their advantage – despite the fact that its primary biodiversity conservation mandate might at times clash with the economic imperatives of game farming. As Kamuti shows, the provincial conservation authority has a decades-long history of involvement with private landowners, for example, selling excess animals from the protected areas to landowners at game auctions and assisting in the establishment of nature conservancies on private land.

In comparison with the national wildlife industry representatives described by Snijders, then, many of these farmers appear a little more open to arguments from scientific research endorsed by the conservation authority. While grumbling about the bureaucracy involved with the cumbersome permitting system and Threatened or Protected Species (TOPS) regulations administered by the province,¹⁵ there is pride associated with the fact that strong measures are taken by the conservation agency to exclude from the province so-called 'freak' or hybrid species (such as white springbok and golden wildebeest) which are attractive to some members of the hunting fraternity elsewhere in the country.

There are interesting resonances here with the game farmers of the Karoo, discussed in the next section (see Brandt and Spierenburg 2014). Landowners in these contexts are proud to assert that they are playing a significant part in nature conservation, and this is a key justificatory narrative for the land-use conversion to wildlife production.

Stories of African (game) farms: a range of histories and spatialities

The focus then shifts to the farms themselves, i.e. the social, spatial and historical dynamics at play on the ground in particular contexts. As several contributors to this theme issue emphasise, the move to game farming represents a consolidation and (re)assertion of claims to private property (Brandt and Spierenburg 2014; Mkhize 2014; Brooks and Kjelstrup 2014). The extent to which these claims are directly contested varies in different contexts. Contestation is a key theme. It would be incorrect to portray the actions of private landowners as meekly accepted by those with insecure forms of

property rights or labour relations. However, the degree of contestation varies. As agrarian trajectories are redirected to game farming and other forms of wildlife production (not only commercial game farming and trophy hunting but also ecotourism and biodiversity conservation in private nature reserves), particular kinds of engagements are either inhibited or facilitated by a range of factors, including the socio-economic context and local power structures dominant in the specific farming community, the history of land-based livelihoods in the region, and established relationships between landowners and their workers/tenants/residents on the farms. The extent to which the state land reform programme has been able to assert its authority in reshaping relationships in the particular province or region is also an important factor.

The richly textured studies of social and spatial dynamics on farms in the Karoo region of the Eastern Cape Province and in KwaZulu-Natal enable us to explore these differences and tensions in more detail. As well as bringing out important regional differences, these locally situated investigations serve as a lens through which to view wider questions of agrarian restructuring, land dispossession, post-apartheid labour relations and changing social relationships in the South African countryside.

The article by Nomalanga Mkhize, which focuses on the semi-arid Karoo, provides a framing context for understanding processes and outcomes in this region. Mkhize's work fruitfully raises the historian's question about continuities and discontinuities in social processes. In this instance, Mkhize comes down on the side of continuity – i.e. she sees game farming as mainly representing an extension of long-term, existing processes of displacement from land. Rather than an abrupt break, or discontinuity, she sees 'land consolidation and labour rationalisation [as] continuously occurring processes with adverse social outcomes for the landless' (Mkhize 2014, 208). In the Karoo, she argues, there has been an ongoing dynamic of displacement rather than an abrupt dispossession. The roots of present-day processes lie in the particular organisation of labour relations on the settler farms from the mid-nineteenth century. Since the 1980s in particular, and the end of state subsidies to farmers (which led to a major restructuring of the labour market), there has been an accelerating efflux of workers from the farms into small rural towns like Cradock. Many cannot find work or access land, so they end up in informal housing on the edge of the towns. Game farming and its effects must be seen in this broader context.

Substantial continuity can also be identified in the current expansion of private wildlife conservation on privately owned land. As Mkhize notes, the landowners involving in game farming in the Karoo are generally members of a local gentry and representatives of long-established landed capital in the region. Recent work by David Gess (2014) confirms that the settler elites of the eastern Cape Colony invested heavily in private wildlife conservation on their farms from the end of the nineteenth century and that sport hunting on private land was always linked to an interest in conserving particular species.

The nature conservation narrative is clearly of central importance in this context. As Femke Brandt and Marja Spierenburg argue in their article, white landowners are vigorously asserting their (ongoing) rights to the land through an environmental discourse that is premised on the key role they claim to play in conservation. This justificatory narrative is spun in an ecological context where game farming or wildlife production is presented as the best and most ecologically sensitive land-use option. By asserting that 'the Karoo is not suitable for small-scale farming', and *is* suitable for game, landowners

implicitly argue for the legitimacy of their own ‘continuing spatial and social organization of the landscape’ (Brandt and Spierenburg 2014, 233).

This focus on spatiality opens up interesting new avenues in thinking about current social dynamics on the farms. Throughout the country, the ‘game fencing’ required by law to enclose privately owned wildlife (higher and less permeable than normal fencing) is creating new forms of exclusion and inclusion, blocking off old access routes across farms (Brooks et al. 2011) and further entrenching the ‘sealed-off pockets of wealth’ embodied in private game farms and reserves (Mkhize 2014). Beyond game fencing, land consolidation is also part of the picture as several farms are often combined to create viable trophy hunting farms. Due to the wildlife-based nature of the land use, the presence of farm dwellers in these environments is actively minimised as far as possible and evidence of buildings and former farm worker dwellings is removed (Brandt and Spierenburg 2014; see also Brooks et al. 2011).

Like Mkhize, Brandt and Spierenburg are sensitive to the restructuring of the labour market on farms in the region. Their article links this more directly to the trophy hunting industry and the spatial changes and reorganisation it necessitates. Drawing on detailed ethnographic research conducted on trophy hunting farms outside Cradock, they show how the historical trajectory of a (relatively) mobile labour force in the Karoo has been intensified as workers on game farms are increasingly forced to find places to live off-farm. Some workers on trophy hunting farms have been able to establish formal homes in town whilst retaining employment on the farm – although others have, of course, lost access to the labour market entirely. In one sense, as Mkhize notes, the establishment of a home in town provides a valued degree of independence from the landowner/employer. However, the reorganisation also serves to increase the physical and the psychological distance between the place of work (the farm) and home (increasingly off-farm), thus undermining any claims farm dwellers in this context might be able to make to the land and to belonging on the farms (Brandt and Spierenburg 2014).

These developments also speak to the veiled or subterranean nature of the land issues in this region. A striking feature in the Karoo context is the apparent absence of overt engagement with private landowners over game farming (or indeed other controversial issues). Brandt and Spierenburg (2014, 228) describe a ‘silent, seemingly uncontested, process of spatial reconfigurations’ (game fencing, farm consolidation, and so on) related to the new land use. One explanation for the lack of overt protest is surely that farm workers are dependent on the goodwill of the landowners in order to keep their jobs. Scholars like Atkinson (2007) have pointed to the enduring nature of paternalistic relationships between farm owners and farm workers in the Karoo region.¹⁶ Whatever the reasons, the contributors remark on the fact that land reform and land claims are not openly spoken about in these contexts, but tend to remain a silent (and silenced) subtext. As already noted, there are apparently no land claims on any Karoo farms. Land laws passed as part of government’s tenure reform programme, such as ESTA, appear to have had little effect, partly due to the particular history of labour relations in the Karoo region. Regulation by the Department of Labour appears equally inadequate.

Things are somewhat different in KwaZulu-Natal. As Mkhize (2014) suggests, citing the Association for Rural Advancement Report (2004) ‘Resistance to game farms has been most visible where historically entrenched labour tenant populations have retained an autonomous and extensive livelihood base on white-owned farms where land has been “the central component of the livelihood’s asset base”’. The articles by Shirley Brooks

and Liv Kjelstrup (2014), and by Jenny Josefsson (2014), trace the impacts of private wildlife production in the northern KwaZulu-Natal countryside where some labour tenant families, indeed, retained their place on privately owned land into the post-apartheid period. Here the social, political and ecological context provides fruitful ground for comparison with the Karoo.

In the case documented by Brooks and Kjelstrup (2014), the process of dispossession was extensive, abrupt and very recent in comparison with the experience of farm workers in the Karoo. The question of the broken agrarian trajectory takes on a different complexion in this context. There certainly were ongoing processes of dispossession on the farms during the twentieth century – not least the state's attempts to outlaw what it saw as the pre-modern practice of labour tenancy. However, a major difference is that, in this context, a number of farm dwellers have hung on, remaining on privately owned land which they regard as home. Farm dweller lives and livelihoods were viable until very recently on some farms, especially former 'labour farms' in the KwaZulu-Natal countryside, and in this instance, the introduction of wildlife-based enterprises led to abrupt and irrevocable change. The emphasis in these instances must fall on discontinuity and an abrupt break in the agrarian trajectory of farm dwellers.

Brooks and Kjelstrup (2014) emphasise the point that, in comparison with Karoo farm dwellers who generally do not have livestock, cattle in particular were central to the land-based livelihood strategies of the Zulu-speaking labour tenants with whom they engaged. A key dimension of dispossession for the families in this case was the loss of most of their livestock during the relocation process. As Brooks and Kjelstrup show, the impact of this sudden and effective enclosure of land, and the farm dwellers' exclusion from it, meant the loss of their access to grazing land and other common property resources on the farms, and in addition, the loss of home and identities which were closely tied to the land. An important contribution is the attempt by Brooks and Kjelstrup to render these consequences within the life-world of the labour tenants, including their significant relationships to ancestral spirits mediated through the land. Empty now of both people and their livestock, the private game reserves that emerged out of this initiative are sealed-off enclaves and the burial sites within them devoid of significance for visiting eco-tourists, the new denizens of this space.

In this case, the dispossession occurred after the end of apartheid in 1994, and it was resisted by the farm dwellers. There is an irony in the fact that, in this instance, the conversion to wildlife production in post-apartheid South Africa achieved what the apartheid government was never able to do – that is, to expel black labour tenants from white-owned farmland and created a racially purified space.¹⁷ Despite measures taken by the farm dwellers to contest the actions of the landowners and to protest their removal from the land, the ultimate outcome for them was relocation from the farms. As Brooks and Kjelstrup painstakingly document, the terms of dispossession were negotiated in a legalistic process undergirded by post-apartheid land reform legislation, a process in which the Department of Land Affairs (now the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform) was intimately involved.

At one level, the case shows up the state's failure to follow through on basic bureaucratic processes that might have better protected the interests of the farm dwellers during the process of negotiation over their post-farm future. However, Brooks and Kjelstrup go further: they argue that the fundamental issue is the state's failure to challenge the power of private property. If private property is to be seriously contested by groups like

the farm dwellers, clearly, they must be strongly supported by the state. Arguably, the Land Reform (Labour Tenants) Act of 1996 represented a radical opportunity for possible change in South Africa. Viable land-based livelihoods of people like those described in this article could have been supported. But the opportunity was lost.

While there are, of course, sport hunting farms in KwaZulu-Natal, more mainstream forms of (eco)tourism constitute a key motive force behind the land-use conversions described by Brooks and Kjelstrup, as well as those described by Josefsson (2014) in her account of social relations on game farms in the so-called 'Battlefields Route'. On many farms, the extent of spatial purification has not been as drastic as in the case described by Brooks and Kjelstrup, and farm dwellers remain a presence on the land – albeit one that is often pushed to the margins of the farm or placed out of site/out of sight of visitors (see Brooks et al. 2011, 2012).

Josefsson's article describes three neighbouring farms where she conducted ethnographic research. The history of each farm is different: in one case the landowner used violence to evict labour tenants in the early 1990s, while in another case, the farm has been formally transferred to land beneficiaries, families who lived and worked on the farm. The violence of eviction is dominant in the first case, whereas in the second, the paternalistic social relations appear remarkably untransformed despite the fact that the farm workers are now land beneficiaries. A community trust holds the title deeds to the land, but the ecotourism venture is still run by the previous (white) owners who remain on the land and continue to employ the former tenant families as workers in the house and in the ecotourism enterprise.

Josefsson's account places emphasis on the importance of local histories and spatialities, arguing that these are crucial to gaining any real insight into the question of continuity and discontinuity in the South African countryside. Paying close attention to the language and discursive constructs employed in everyday life by people living in these contexts, Josefsson employs the provocative concept of the 'colonial present' to show how in this landscape – a context currently being reshaped by 'Battlefields tourism' (the battles themselves heroic recreations of long-ago clashes between settlers and Zulus) – old, racialised borders retain their potency in the present. The three game farms discussed here are positioned both practically and discursively 'on the frontier' – i.e. on a historically important border between the settler colony of Natal and the old Zulu Kingdom. During the apartheid period, this became one of the many borders between 'white' Natal and the 'black' KwaZulu homeland (See Figure 2). The resonances of the need to defend this space have echoed down the years and are still potent for current landowners. In this context, wildlife production and nature conservation provide an opportunity for defending space that positions game farming in a particular role within the broader politics of the region.

Overall, this theme issue describes a range of histories and landscapes that shed considerable light on some of the social processes taking place in the South African countryside, viewed through the lens of the conversion to game farming. Despite resistance in some contexts, many of the stories are troubling and raise critical questions about the possibilities for continued agrarian trajectories in post-apartheid South Africa. Nomalanga Mkhize (2014) calls for an urgent 're-imagination of the spatial and social landscapes' described here. It is hoped that this special issue will contribute to the ongoing engagement that is required to build a more inclusive future for the country and all its citizens.

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Notes

1. While there is quite a large body of literature on the – often negative – social impacts of state-run nature conservation areas on local rural residents (see, e.g. Brockington and Igoe 2006; Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2006; Neumann 1998), the social impacts of the establishment of private conservation areas have received surprisingly little attention. An exception in the South African context is Luck (2005).
2. The project initially focused on KwaZulu-Natal province and was supported by funding from SANPAD. It was later expanded to include the Eastern Cape. Generous funding from NWO-WOTRO enabled the continuation and expansion of the project, for which we are most grateful (file number W 01.65.306.00). Between 2007 and 2014, the project has funded the research of a number of masters and doctoral students. The project involved cooperation between the VU University in Amsterdam, the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the University of the Free State, the University of Cape Town and most recently the University of the Western Cape.
3. See Lipton, Ellis, and Lipton (1996).
4. There is some debate about the actual extent of the global land rush as well as the extent to which it is a new practice. It appears that many claims may have been staked but not yet taken up in practice, a form of speculation. Whilst there is clearly a need to situate such acquisitions in historical context, there, nevertheless, are some new forms of ‘land grabbing’, the long-term consequences of which require further study (see Kaag and Zoomers 2014).
5. In Southern Africa, similar processes have been observed in the regions’ transfrontier parks (see Dressler and Büscher 2008; Wolmer 2007). The evidence shows that transfrontier parks, invariably with a CBNRM narrative embedded in them, have led either to dispossession and displacement or the realignment of peasant livelihoods away from small-scale agriculture towards ecotourism-based livelihoods (which in many cases have not materialised; Brockington et al. 2008; Spierenburg et al. 2006; Ramutsindela 2004).
6. For a trenchant critique, see MacDonald 2010.
7. Also, as Ngubane and Brooks (2013) argue, the situation on small privately owned farms is very different from that in large communal areas.
8. Atkinson (2007, 65) estimates that the number of commercial farmers in South Africa has declined from about 78,000 to about 45,000 between 1992 and 2007. While the total number of farms has declined, however, the remaining farming units have increased in size.

9. The fact that the state is about to reopen the restitution process to new claims is likely to fuel these fears.
10. Thanks to Jenny Josefsson for drawing our attention to this quote in the context of her research on game farming and violence.
11. Land consolidations are common in the quest to create a commodified wilderness (Andrew et al. 2013; Brooks et al. 2012).
12. It has not, however, gone ahead yet. Land reform in this instance is presented in the media as 'holding up' development. (See Macleod 2011).
13. There are some prominent black-owned game farms in the country. One such is owned by the country's current deputy president, businessman Cyril Ramaphosa, who in 2012 attracted controversy by bidding for a very expensive (trophy hunting) buffalo bull at a game auction. (See *City Press* 20 September 2012). Provinces such as the Free State have developed policy intended to attract more BEE players into the industry.
14. An example mentioned by Kamuti (2014) is the proposed Gongolo Wildlife Reserve (GWR) (see also Brooks et al. 2011; Macleod 2011).
15. See National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004, Chapter 4:2.
16. Although as Brandt and Spierenburg note, the total severing of such relations through the adoption of a purely capitalistic approach to production seems to present an even bleaker outlook.
17. Thanks to Ruth Hall for this valuable insight.

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