6.

The Hunting Game

This chapter explores the position of farm dwellers in the hunting scenario as performed on the trophy-hunting farms in the Karoo. It seeks to identify cultural imaginaries/images linked to different categories of people and their place on the hunting farm. Furthermore, this chapter presents farm workers’ experiences on the farm beyond the realm of the hunting game. It becomes clear that farm dwellers form an integral part of the trophy-hunting scenario while their performance in the game obscures the shifting power configuration in post-apartheid South Africa where they remain outsiders.

Following Dahles (1990) I interpret hunting activities in this chapter as a ritualised game expressing certain values and meanings. In the English tradition hunting is considered a sporting game tied to specific rules. The word *game* therefore refers to both the wild animals that are hunted as well as the fact that hunting is seen as play (Dahles, 1990: 265). Trophy hunting is viewed as a game because it is designed as leisure activity for hunting clients from overseas, guided by specific interactions, rules and rituals for the duration of the play (Huizinga, 1955). The play performed by hunters, farmers and farm workers are interpreted to understand which mechanisms generate “new organizational practices and institutional forms” in democratic South Africa based on racial classification mechanisms (Sallaz, 2010: 295). Different categories of people hold specific positions and perform specific tasks in the hunting field. The social order performed in the hunting field is illustrated in the first part of this chapter that gives a detailed account of an Eastern Cape trophy hunt. Farm workers always perform as trackers and skinners who have specific tasks at different stages of the hunt. Their ‘closeness’ to the wildlife, both when it is alive and when it is dead, indicates a low position in the hunting hierarchy. The way they are imagined and positioned in the hunting field resembles the fiction of an old colonial order where natives accompanied settlers into Africa’s wilderness to hunt wildlife. But the context of the hunting field, the world beyond the game,
has changed dramatically. Within the limited space marked by private property boundaries trophy hunting becomes a social drama (Turner, 1980) representing South Africa’s painful transformation process. The second part of the chapter zooms in on the place of farm workers in the hunting scenario. This place is symbolically expressed during a specific phase of the hunting game, namely the making of the trophy-hunting picture. The ethnographic material presented shows the images, the ways they are constructed in the hunting landscape and the roles farm workers perform in specific transition moments in the hunting game. The third and final part explores the meanings of trophy hunting for farm workers through their stories and experiences beyond the scenario of the hunting game: the everyday realities on the hunting farm. In the end the hunting game is a dramatic expression of the established escaping from shifting power relations in post apartheid South Africa.

A trophy hunt

The trophy hunt starts early in the morning, just after sunrise. Michael and his partner Naomi got up before sunrise to make samis (sandwiches) and lunch packages for the hunting party visiting their hunting farm today. Michael manages ‘Karoo Game Sports’ for the farm owner who lives, and runs a business, in another town in the province. They are packing the vehicle used for the expedition when I arrive at the farm. Soon after that, Professional Hunter (PH) Gert and his dog, a Jack Russell, arrive with client Donald, an American man approaching fifty who is staying in a hunting lodge on another farm in the province. Gert, a young Afrikaner man in his twenties, works as free-lance PH for a hunting company. When he is not hunting he helps out at his family’s stock farm situated on the same road as Karoo Game Sports. Gert and Michael know each other well as both their families are members of the same local farmers’ association. Jovial greetings, firm handshakes, and confident smiles are exchanged between Michael and his guests. The mood is upbeat and Donald is delighted he is accompanied on the bakkie (pick-up truck) by a young female researcher from Amsterdam. Another man climbs out from the back of Gert’s bakkie with a cigarette dangling between his lips. This is Gert’s tracker Mpumelelo.
Photo: The hunting party standing in the hunting field looking out for animals.
The man immediately walks towards Michael’s trackers Bongani and Zola who are standing at the hunting vehicle and they exchange greetings as well. Their bright green suits contrast with the rest of the hunting party who wear outdoor clothing in camouflage colours. Donald wears a green military outfit with a hat to protect his face from the African sun.

Soon, Michael and Gert announce we are leaving and they assist Donald and me climbing into the back of the bakkie. Donald’s hunting rifle is placed in the back as well. We drive into the enclosed 8000 hectare hunting terrain with typical Karoo vegetation; low scrub bushes, grasses, koppies and mountains. The open back of the vehicle enables a proper view of the surroundings. Donald is ‘after’ a black wildebeest for his trophy collection back home in the United States. On the tenth day of his hunting trip he has already shot 15 animals that are on his ‘hunting list’. He keeps this list in his breast pocket to monitor which animal he has shot, from what distance he shot it, and what price he paid for the animal. He came to South Africa “just to get nice trophies, not to shoot to kill” and that he only takes what “is available in abundance”. Lion and rhino are not on his wish list as he presumes they are rare species. He cancelled zebra from his list because the enormous size of the black-and-white hide would take up too much space in his trophy room. He has to make choices. The costs of Donald’s South African hunting experience are about 24,000 US dollars and the avid trophy hunter has already planned his next hunting trip to New Zealand.

During the morning there is time to chat with Donald while we sit in the vehicle. Donald calls Mpumelelo ‘Click Click’ because the tracker speaks isiXhosa that to Donald appears like a series of incomprehensible click sounds. Together with the two other trackers he stands behind us in the vehicle, smoking cigarettes and waiting for instructions from Gert. Mpuemelo and Donald already spent ten days hunting in each other’s company and did not engage in conversation. Donald mentions that in the last ten days he had “nobody to talk to”. He tells me stories of his life while we bump up and down in the bakkie crossing donga’s (dry river beddings, erosion) and rocky terrain. Donald assures me that when he started farming independently in the US as a young man he was “dirt poor”. To illustrate the degree of poverty he experienced during those years he mentions that during the harsh winters he and his family had to sleep in one and the same room because they could not afford to heat more rooms in the
house. He took up more jobs during his early thirties to supplement the income as the agricultural business was just paying for itself and not providing any profits. Against the advice of his doctor who predicted a heart attack if Donald would not calm down, he ran an amusement business next to farming. With his satellite phone he checks up on the business every now and then during this holiday. At the farm in the US he switched from “Negro” to “Mexican” workers as he is of the opinion that Afro-Americans receive too much social welfare benefits and adopt an attitude, he grunts that they “do not want to work hard”. The Republican complains about the rise of minimum wages and tax increases in his country which he blames on Obama’s democrat policies: “that guy is a disaster!” One thing he learned in South Africa is that hunting is so affordable due to the availability of relatively cheap labour: “once you’ve been here you do not want to return”. Then, the trackers behind us are told to look out for wildebeest.

From the back of the car and through radios the trackers pointed out to PH Gert where they locate wildlife. Gert speaks in basic Xhosa with Mpumelento which mystifies what happens for Donald. When the frequency of Gert’s comments start to increase he senses something is about to transpire. He occasionally checks with me if his guides perhaps spot something. Gert tells Donald to be quiet so the client focuses on the bushes and trees around him. From time to time the vehicle is stopped abruptly and through the open window Gert whispers “get ready Donald!” This driving and stopping of the bakkie increases the tension until the moment Gert steps out of the car and tells Donald with a sense of urgency “come!” The excited American hunter is assisted in climbing off the vehicle, shooting sticks are passed on by one of the trackers and Gert and Donald enter the bush together, leaving the rest of the crew and an extremely aggravated Jack Russell eager to catch the scent of wildlife, behind.

Now, hunter and guide engage in a ritualised duet that has to lead to a shot. The trackers disappear from the scene and wait in anticipation. Together, Gert and Donald stalk a troop of wildebeest a small distance from the car. Gert skilfully positions Donald in the shadow of a tree where they stand against the direction of the wind that could betray their presence. The rifle is placed on the shooting sticks. Gert stands closely behind Donald and watches over his shoulder. Their bodies almost touch, their eyes are equally levelled above the
ground, and they gaze in the same direction. Gert whispers instructions into Donald’s ear. The PH is responsible for the ‘right’ kill. It has to be a carefully selected animal and it has to be a lethal shot. Gert fixes Donald’s gaze with his index finger on a wildebeest and assures his client to only shoot once he gives the signal and when he feels confident enough to place his shot properly. With his finger on the trigger Donald adjusts his rifle and aims.

Bang!

The Jack Russell, triggered by the shot, jumps from the bakkie and runs into the field. In the distance black wildebeests run away, except one who slows down and collapses on the ground before he can get far out of sight. Donald’s shot was accurate. Everyone walks into the veld and Michael drives the bakkie to the dead wildebeest. Donald laughs and is congratulated by everyone for his outstanding performance; the animal was instantly killed. The atmosphere is characterized with a mixture of relief and self-assurance after the adrenaline rush just before the kill.

After the successful hunt Mpumelelo, Zola and Bongani come in action. They immediately get busy with the heavy carcass; they drag it to an open patch on the grassy terrain where the animal is turned upright so that it looks as if he is sitting on its four legs, resting in a landscape of undulating hills covered with green bushes. Zola takes a bottle of water from the bakkie to wash away the blood around the shot wound in the shoulder. Gert directs the workers to set the scene for a photo of Donald with his hunted animal. They remove patches of grass in front of the corpse and place a rock under its nose to lift and support its giant black head. Gert continually assures Donald that he got a nice trophy with big horns. But the trophy animal keeps rolling over on its side, disrupting Gert’s imagined setting for the photo. Eventually, Zola is told to lie down behind the corpse to keep it upright. He is the shortest worker and easily hides himself behind the wildebeest’s body by pulling up his knees while his hands clasp the animal’s neck. Then several cameras appear on the scene and Donald is told to pose with his wildebeest. Donald kneels down behind the carcass and makes a joke about placing the butt of his rifle on Zola’s behind. The men laugh. Gert and Michael lie down on the earth and take pictures that place the wildebeest’s horns against the background of the horizon which makes the size of the horns
look impressive. With the photo shoot the hunter has turned the wildebeest into a real trophy he can take home.

Then, the heavy carcass is loaded onto the bakkie by the trackers and we make our way to the skinning shed. The spirits are high and Gert passes on cigarettes through the car window for the three trackers who lit them immediately. At the skinning shed the men offload the carcass and Gert asks Donald how he would like his trophy mounted. Just the head with the horns or perhaps include the shoulders as well? Meanwhile, the trackers disembowel the beast, cut his hooves off, and start capping (removing skin from flesh). It is around noon and Michael passes on chicken *samis* to Donald, Gert and me. The trackers are busy in the shed. As we eat, Gert proposes Donald shoots an animal smaller than a zebra this afternoon, for a special price. He explains that he can organize a discount for Donald who looks tempted to shoot another animal. But he is still worried where he has space left in his trophy room. Michael keeps quiet and continues eating. Before we get back into the bakkie Gert announces that whatever animal Donald wants to shoot today he pays 25% less: “just so you keep that in mind”. Only two of the trackers come along as Mpumelelo prepares Donald’s trophy for taxidermy.

But Donald has no desire to hunt for more trophies today. For the rest of the afternoon we drive around leisurely admiring the views and spotting all sorts of wildlife. During sunset Gert stops the car at a scenic viewpoint along a steep hillside where we watch the sky change colours into subtle shades of red, purple and orange. From the cooler box Gert hands out cool drinks, water and chocolates to Donald and Michael. Zola and Bongani receive left-over chicken *samis* which they eat in the back of the bakkie. While Donald and his guides enjoy the sunset I walk around and chat to the trackers. Mpumelelo tells me that he has been working on game farms for ten years now because it earns more than conventional farm work. Nevertheless, without the benefits he would prefer sheep farming and having his own sheep. He explains the hunting days are long and often he is away on overnight trips that separate him from home and his children who are staying in a provincial town. When Gert comes around the conversation ends abruptly.
Photo: Trophy hunter with trophy
Back at the farm house several administrative issues need to be dealt with in Michael’s office before Gert and Donald drive off. Mpumelelo sits in the back of the bakkie and smokes another cigarette made from newspaper. Bongani and Zola leave to their farm houses located at some distance from the main house. They received cash payments by Gert for their tracking activities today. As the night covers the Karoo with darkness Michael invites me for a coffee in the kitchen. He complains about Gert who did not manage to convince his client to shoot more animals today. The leisurely afternoon drive for Michael means a waste of his time and his petrol. He explains that only the animals bring in money for ‘Karoo Game Sports’. Gert paid him in rands for the wildebeest today, but Donald paid his outfitter in US Dollars. Michael feels that they are making much more out of the hunt, than he does. But he does not know what prices Donald pays for his trophies and he admits that he would love to see Donald’s price list that he keeps in his breast pocket.

After the coffee and a long day I say good bye to Michael and Naomi. They sent me off with a warning I often heard in this season: “Look out for the kudus on the road!” In the pitch dark night on my way to town I encounter an ambulance on the winding gravel road. When I phone Naomi later to say that I arrived in town safely, I ask her if she heard the ambulance on the road to their farm. She does not know and says that “sometimes farmers call them for their staff because they do not feel like taking them to town”. I thank her again for the day and then we say good night.

*The ‘perfect’ social order in the hunting field*

The trophy hunting party on the hunt described above consists of the hunting client with his or her guide, a number of trackers and possibly a land owner. This was the case in most of the trophy hunts I witnessed though there are other hunting party arrangements possible as well. There can be multiple hunters or partners of clients accompanying the hunting trip. Since hunting evolved from subsistence strategy to a social activity or ‘sport’ for society’s upper classes it provides a play-ground in which an absolute and peculiar order reigns.
In play there is something "at play" which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. All play means something (Huizinga, 1955).

An important feature of play is that it is situated outside the ‘ordinary’, it is imagined. The illusion of the game offers temporary salvation from ‘real’ life for the players (Huizinga, 1955). It creates order in an imperfect world. This was expressed by Donald, the hunting client, who mentioned the availability of cheap labour in South Africa as a relief in relation to the situation in the United States where labour is relatively expensive. Donald enjoyed the South African hunting game in which class difference was displayed by keeping a distance from the trackers with whom he did not engage in any conversation. During a trophy hunt different categories of people perform specific tasks at specific moments in the hunting scenario.

The hunting field constitutes a temporary and spatially bounded world in which, for the duration of the game, trophy hunting principles prevail over principles guiding post-apartheid society. The ‘rules’ in post-apartheid South Africa prescribe an orientation towards social transformation, inclusion, redress and redistribution of wealth. The hunting game on the other hand is based on (racial) hierarchy, domination, and exclusivity. Contrary to other game farms, hunting fields are not announced on the side of national roads, they are somewhat ‘hidden’ in the commercial farming landscape and only accessible to a specific target group closely aligned to farmers’ ideologies and world views. It emphasizes the secrecy and ‘extra-ordinary’ nature of trophy hunting and the difference with being in the ‘real’ world.

A play-community generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over. But the feeling of being apart together" is an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game (Huizinga, 1955).

International hunting clients and their South African hosts share the love for the hunting game and often hunting clients become friends with their professional hunter or their host on the farm. Most farmers told me their clients keep coming back to their farms and generally stay in touch with them. Both clients and
farmers display trophies on the walls of their homes to be reminded of that magical world in the hunting field, even when they have returned to their ordinary worlds and everyday lives.

Dahles (1990: 231) observed that in the hunting world hunting parties spatially withdraw from everyday life through meeting up in remote and isolated places where a several transformations take place that explicitly distinguishes members from the hunting party from those outside the world of hunting. In the Karoo, the members of the hunting party transformed from farmer's son, American business man, or general farm worker into professional hunter, hunting client and tracker. This transformation is instantly visible in the way the participants are dressed. The hunter and his guide wear clothes in various shades of green. This way they adapt to and blend in with the environment. The ultimate challenge in the hunting game for hunters is to compete with the wildlife. In order to do so they identify with the nature and the animals; they hide themselves, imitate the behaviour of animals and anticipate to possibilities the game might see or smell in the hunt. In competition with the wildlife hunters want to excel in behavioural aspects such as strength, speed, patience, discipline and skill that demonstrates their physical and physiological superiority (as men) once they manage to shoot and kill the animal (ibid.: 235-236). Sports hunters do not only win the game because they ‘killed’ an animal, an important achievement is they proved to be able to constrain themselves during the hunt. The hunting game is part of a ‘civilising’ process and the hunting field a place where self constraint of drives and effects can be practiced and improved (Dahles, 1990: 281). The behavioural code linked to the hunting is charged with moral values determining the ‘right’ way to hunt. This was evident when we saw Gert closely watching Donald to make sure he would be able to place a lethal shot and target the selected animal. Adhering to the ethical codes and rules that guide hunting games is another way to claim distinction and superiority.

From the perspective of the hunters and landowners the hunting game creates an image of the ‘perfect’ social order in the countryside. The hunting farmers allocate themselves a powerful position as they control access to land and wildlife on their farms. Social stratification is also expressed in the hunting field where only the professional hunter and the client carry rifles. This way the trophy hunt constitutes a dramatic expression of a power configuration based on
land ownership. In the following section I focus on the position of farm workers in this power configuration.

The place of farm workers in the hunting scenario

Farm workers always perform as trackers in the hunting game, and often professional hunters have their ‘own’ tracker that travels with them to different hunting farms as well. They do not carry rifles and throughout the hunting ritual they are spatially separated from the ones with rifles. There is a strict division of labour and the socializing moments before and after hunting take place in separate spaces as well. During Donald’s hunt for example we saw that Mpumelelo, Zola and Bongani stood by the hunting vehicle in the morning while the rest of the hunting party gathered around the farm manager, Michael. The trackers ate their lunch separately and Donald mentioned he did not engage in any conversation with Mpumelelo during the ten days they travelled in each other’s company. Different social categories and boundaries are re-asserted through symbols and rituals in the hunting game (Dahles, 1990: 251). The trackers wear different clothing ranging from standardised green suits with the emblem of the hunting company to a general farm workers’ overall, often in bright colours. Nevertheless, hunters perceive trackers as integral part of their hunting experiences and emphasize their importance for the success of the game.

This is expressed in the ways hunting farmers talk about trackers. South-African hunter Peter Flack for example describes trackers on his website as “without doubt, the unsung heroes of many successful hunts”. On his personal weblog he reminisces about his experiences with hunting parties in different African countries. He marvels about tribesmen from Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and Botswana (“enigmatic Bushmen”) explaining that “they are the ones who have a deep, almost instinctive, understanding of the animals they follow”. According to Flack, a tracker has “the toughest job in the hunting team” who determines the success or failure of the hunt. Their “legendary

99 Article: ‘Trackers - The Unsung Heroes’.
eyesight” (so much better than “city eyes ruined by years of focussing on the computer screen”), local knowledge and physical strength are unmatched by hunters. Compared to hunters Flack attributes more spiritual qualities and biological talent to trackers and spells out their role in the group: “most important of all, however, a tracker must love to hunt and have a cheerful disposition”, and “must be able to help lift the spirits of the team”. In South-African context Flack however presents a different observation:

Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, many recreational hunters in South Africa no longer experience the thrill of anticipation as the trackers quietly point out signs that show the tracks are growing fresher. On many game ranches dogs have replaced trackers. The plus side is they are always sober.

This statement signals the problematic and complex relations between workers and game farmers on South-African game farms specifically. Workers, stigmatised here as alcoholics, do not live up to Flack’s romantic images of African natives as ideal trackers in the hunting field. In the following paragraph I want to explore the place of South-African trackers in the hunting game through the symbol and ritual related to the trophy-hunting photo.

**Camera shots and the expression of hierarchy in hunting images**

The hunting rifle is one crucial device in the hunting game, the camera is another. In the production of imaginaries it is crucial who uses the camera as “the photographic gaze is about power and domination and submission, and the dominator calls the shots. They did and do still” (Gordon in Ranger, 2001: 3). As we saw in Donald’s trophy hunt much care and attention is given to the moment where the hunter is photographed with his trophy animal. The photo is an essential part of the trophy-making process during the game and marks a moment of transformation in the game. This is the image that the hunter brings from the world of hunting into the world of everyday life. In this section I want to look at the narratives and messages visualized in these trophy-hunting pictures and how they reproduce a power imbalance based on racial categories. Anthropologists have suggested that a higher position in the hierarchy of the hunting game is expressed through distance to the wildlife. This distance is increased through ritual performance (Dahles, 1990: 251). The trophy-hunting
pictures illustrate a distance between hunters and trackers, as well as distance between humans and dead animals. Trackers are the ones who are relatively close to the wildlife during the hunt, both when the game is still alive, but particularly when it is dead.

Trophy photographs have recorded hunting trophies from the mid-19th century and have created “images of white men with dead animals or body parts that told stories of dominance and power of wealthy white colonials over nature and other peoples” (Ryan in Kalof & Fitzgerald, 2003:115). When the camera entered the African continent with the European colonists a proliferation of stereotypical images of so-called natives produced “exotic” and primitive prototypes and pseudoscientific “specimens” that were sent to Europe where it contributed to hierarchical notions of race to “manage and comprehend the ineluctable difference of cultures and people that the colonised world presented” (Garb, 2011:14). Both photography and ethnography were instrumental in documenting the intercultural encounter during Europe’s colonial expansion. But photographs do not register an objective “reality”; they register “ways of seeing and imagining the world, according to conventions and perceptual filters, which produced as much as copied the realities they set out to picture” (ibid.). Photographs are fictions that represent the imagination and conceptions of the photographer. They can be used as narrative tools that serve as “story-telling instruments” (Haraway in Kalof & Fitzgerald, 2003:112). Much care and consideration is given in the field to the moment of the trophy-hunting photo shoot. David, the ECGMA course instructor introduced in chapter four, assured the game guide students “that photo is the hunter’s trophy”.100 The photo tells viewers about the magnificence of the hunt and the bravery of the hunter. A typical trophy photograph shows the hunter with the animal he has shot in the hunting field. The example here, of a hunter with a Kudu trophy, is taken from a South-African hunting magazine101.
Photo: typical trophy-hunting picture
The composition of the image from the South African magazine is similar to the American way of displaying the trophy. The most common trophy image in American hunting magazines consists of a white male hunter positioned next to his trophy animal displayed as if still alive; “eyes open, legs tucked neatly, alertly facing the camera” (Kalof & Fitzgerald, : 117). The hunter smiles at the camera with his weapon prominently visible. Depending on the kind of animal the size of the body or horns are optically enlarged by contrasting them with the size of the hunter’s body and strategic use of the hunting scene such as placing the horns in front of the open sky just above the horizon instead of a messy bush in the background of the trophy stage. There are few traces of blood or killing visible in the picture. The image is a carefully constructed narrative of the hunting experience that obscures the actual death of the animal. It proofs the sportsmanship, virility and masculine prowess of the hunter (Brower, 2005) and in the colonial context it was evidence of Britain’s imperial power (Ryan 2000 in Brower, 2005:24). If black men are present in the image, they are always portrayed as assistants or helpers and always without a weapon when appearing in a photo together with a white man (Kalof & Fitzgerald, 2003). Furthermore, striking is the frequent absence or invisibility of black men helpers in the South African photographs. In this sense, trophy photographs convey stereotypical images of racial hierarchies that contrast the image of postcolonial South Africa.

*Trackers’ performances in the hunting game*

The fact that the hunting game ends in death for the some of the ‘players’ is problematic for hunters as violence does not match well with the concept of ‘play’ (Dahles, 1990: 237). To overcome this fact hunters ‘undo’ or obscure the death of the game by performing rituals aimed at restoring the status of the animal by attributing meaning. The preparation for the trophy-hunting photo shoot is one of those rituals whereby the game is prepared for display in the ‘real world’. From the perspective of the hunter the game is presented in its natural

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102 Interestingly, the death of game trophies is avoided through the practice of ‘green hunting’ whereby the hunter darts an animal, mostly rhino, with a sedative instead of shooting it dead. While the animal is ‘asleep’ the trophy-hunting picture is made after which the animal is woken up again and walks back into the field.
habitat, with dignity, as worthy opponent in the hunting game. The trackers perform crucial tasks during this transition moment as visible in the pictures on the following page.

The hunting field is the stage for the display of the trophy and the photo shoot. Trackers prepare the animal and the environment to create a perfect image of the animal and its environment. They remove grass patches and search for stones and twigs to decorate the scene. Once the animal is positioned in a dignified way in the landscape, the hunter sits with it and has his picture taken. The hunting client’s guide twists and turns his body to capture the right angle. In the field I heard that it is considered unethical for hunters to place their feet on a dead animal because once it is dead the game and the competition is over and there is no longer need for the hunter to show his domination. Sometimes tracker’s bodies were used to create the perfect portrait, as happened during Donald’s trophy hunt:

The closeness of the trackers to the dead wildlife indicates their position at the bottom of the hunting hierarchy. The photos reveal power relations between the trackers and the hunter and his guide. In trophy hunting images, weapons are usually placed behind or on top of the carcass of the hunted animal (Kalof & Fitzgerald, 2003:117). Donald placed his rifle on the tracker’s behind and his other hand rested on the animal’s dead body. This touch can be read as a symbol of possession, in the picture the body of the wildebeest finally becomes the hunter’s trophy. The place of the worker behind the wildebeest is telling for the social order in the hunting field. His ‘wild’ status is expressed by his reduction to the realm of the animals and the vegetation in the field.

Moreover, in the narrative of the trophy-hunting photo the tracker is not just an unsung hero, he is an unseen participant as well. Trackers perform crucial task in the hunting game, but their presence is obscured in many photos that are taken out of the hunting world into the ‘real’ world. The anonymity of Africans in photographs has a long history which persists in the interactions observed on trophy-hunting farms. Garb (2011:14-15) characterizes the archive of colonial photography by the anonymity of the Africans portrayed.
Tracker removes grass patches in front of the dead animal

Left: professional hunter and farm manager take trophy picture while tracker observes. Right: professional hunter and farm manager shoot trophy-hunting picture.
Constructing the trophy picture.
They have no names, no individuality, no identifying idiosyncrasies. Instead it is race that marks and defines them as ‘native types’ and ethnic exemplars. This is the stock-in-trade of colonial kitsch that served to naturalise perceptions of Africans as close to nature, belonging to an earlier stage of civilization and imbued with a sexuality and subjectivity that is ineluctably different from the Western colonising Westerner.

Trophy-hunting practices and representations express a particular racial formation that starkly contrasts South Africa’s ideal to form a non-racial society.

Trophy photographs go home with the owner of the camera (the hunting client and/or the professional hunter) and they reproduce narratives about racial stereotypes and ‘unspoiled’ African wilderness. Some of these photos find their way into the homes of trackers who participated in hunting safaris. Several farm workers showed me plastic files in which they keep images and pictures sent to them by hunting clients or printed for them by game farmers or professional hunters. These photographs were always ‘gifts’ as workers themselves do not own camera’s or take pictures during the hunting game. Although farm workers are integral part of the hunting scenario when they perform as trackers, they remain outsiders in the everyday realities on the hunting farms.

**Behind the scenes: farm worker experiences on hunting farms**

The hunting game and the social categories and performances in the play have been presented as a fiction that creates social order in the worlds of South African farmers and hunting clients. In this section the scenery behind this imagined world is explored further through the experiences of farm workers in every-day life hunting farms.

*Performing as tracker: farm workers’ perspectives on the hunting game*

Farm labour on trophy-hunting farms consists of general farm work and specific trophy-hunting related work such as tracking, skinning, caping, and tourist handling. Farm labour on livestock farms involves infrastructure maintenance (driving tractors for road construction, digging holes, managing water supplies,
building sheds and kraals), domestic work (cooking and cleaning), and animal care. As we have seen in an earlier chapter hunting-related activities are simply added to the farm workers’ portfolios during the conversion process to wildlife. Specific skills for hunting are mostly acquired on the farm during the job. Sam\textsuperscript{103} summarized his work as tracker and skinner in the following way:

So my work, when I am a tracker I check the bakkie (pick-up truck), to see if it’s clean, inside and outside. When I am done I look if the knives are sharp, everything is alright. When it is perhaps seven o’clock I fetch the rifles and put them in the vehicle. Then we climb in and go search for the wanted animal. Once we get him, we make him right and let them take the (trophy) pictures. After that we cut him open and take the intestines out, clean him and put him away. Then we come back here and go to the skinning shed, and skin him.

“Being a tracker” is only one part of Sam’s work on the farm. Most mornings he walks into the fields to check water pipes and fence lines. After breakfast he reports in the farmer’s office and receives further instructions for the day. These instructions are communicated in the form of orders “you take a tool and fix this” or “go there and check where the animals are.” Then the farm workers leave to work until lunch time or further instructions. After lunch they report again at the farmer’s office and once more at five pm when the working day is over. One day I stood with the male workers in one of the farm sheds towards the end of the working. The men were doing nothing in particular and seemed to be waiting for the clock to turn 5 pm. Joseph turned to me and said:

We must keep this place a bit messy so that when John comes there is quickly something to do. I cannot stand with my hands in my pocket like the owner. He can, he can even sit! But not me you see.\textsuperscript{104}

Such everyday forms of resistance reduce the sense of farmers’ authority. Lingering, foot dragging, insubordination, feigned ignorance, or false compliance, are typical power differentials of outsiders who challenge power relations on the farm. They avoid direct confrontation with authority and rather make use of implicit understandings to undermine the power configuration.

\textsuperscript{103} Translated from Afrikaans by author. Interview 10 June 2009.

\textsuperscript{104} Field note Wednesday 19 August 2009.
(Scott, 1985). In this symbolic battle the farmer perceives the behaviour of the farm workers as their natural inclination to avoid hard work. They are stigmatized as lazy and short-term thinking by the farmer who then believes it is necessary to affirm his authority on the farm.

Within this configuration of power hunting activities like tracking and skinning are easily incorporated into the farm workers’ portfolios. Usually, they are simply told to do it. Hunting activities regularly occur at odd times and start very early in the morning in faraway places. Sometimes even beyond the borders of South Africa. Joseph was for example asked by the Collin to join a hunting party abroad which he refused. He told Collin he had no desire to experience hunters going after elephants. He was concerned about his family in case something would happen to him in a far away hunting field inhabited by Africa’s most dangerous game. In this case Joseph managed to define a limit to the availability of his labour. Such negotiations are not always possible. Especially workers residing on the farm are perceived by farmers as available at all times. The farmer sometimes just drives up to the workers’ compound to request some men to assist him in repairing a fence or fetching an animal that escaped from the farm. Under South Africa’s new labour law farm workers should be paid overtime when they work more hours than fixed in their labour contracts. But these new rules imposed by the post-apartheid government do not match the implicit understandings between workers and farmers on the farm, and are difficult to enforce.

One way hunting farmers deal with the new rules is arguing that overtime is ‘compensated’ by hunting tips clients pay to their hosts. These tips are paid in US Dollars to the farmer who distributes them as bonuses at the end of the year in December. Farm workers on hunting farms generally receive an extra couple of thousand rands every year. It is unclear which percentage of the tips stays with the farmer and workers prefer to receive the tips directly from the clients. Some workers who left farms during the year report that they never received their share of the tips and one worker said that in the rare case a hunting client tipped him without the farmer being aware, the tips were more generous than the bonus of the farmer. Hunters on average tip 50 to 100 US Dollars a day. The common procedure in the Karoo is that tips are presented to the farmer. This way existing dependencies between farmers and workers are reinforced. Farm
workers rely on farmers for money loans, transport, and material goods. Nowadays they still expect and receive goods from farmers ranging from clothes to airtime used for communication with relatives in town. On hunting farms old ‘ways of doing’ are easily inserted into the converted farming landscape.

Within the trophy-hunting landscape the place of black farm workers (men) is confined to stereotypical subordinate positions like tracker or skinner. The qualities associated with tracking are coupled to a lower level of civilization as professional hunter Johan observes:

They [farm workers] are good with knowledge of nature and so on, you know they are good with wildlife, but to take Americans out on a hunt you need to be able to drive and be a friendly person who can communicate with clients and he needs to like hunting.

The ethnic identification linked to trackers contributes to racial formation and racial classification on the farm. The Afrikaner PH assumes that workers know how to work with wildlife and that they lack the social capabilities to work with overseas visitors. Johan explicitly draws a cultural boundary by saying ‘they’ which emphasizes the difference between farm workers and people like him. He does not question where he got his driving and communication skills from. They are perceived as natural differences instead as results from education and socialization processes in a racially segregated society. To communicate with hunting clients you generally need to speak English. The lingua franca on commercial farms is Afrikaans and farm workers in the Karoo mainly speak isiXhosa and Afrikaans. As we saw in the case of Donald and Mpumelelo, trackers do not communicate with clients. Interestingly, farm dweller Paul Andersen explains that the distance between hunting clients and trackers serves to construct a perfect hunting world for the client:

They [trackers] constantly communicate through radio in Afrikaans so that clients do not understand what they are saying. The professional hunter’s Xhosa language is insufficient. Poor clients, they do not know anything! ...When the

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105 Translated from Afrikaans by author. Interview 6 January 2010.
Because foreign clients often do not know the environment well they rely on their guides and the helpers to hunt successfully. Paul reveals that the inexperienced hunters sometimes remain uninformed so that the facilitators can manipulate the hunting field in order to make sure the client will be satisfied and rewarded for their payments. The farm labourers working in the backstage of the hunting field’s play ground marvel about the ways client hunters are ‘deceived’. They observe their own role in the hunting game as part of their employers’ strategies to make a profit out of African wilderness. Paul continued telling me about an example whereby he manipulated the hunting game. While the client is left in limbo, the trackers were instructed to prepare the hunting field and call the PH when the scene was set. Paul announced to the PH when they finished their preparations and then the client came out to a particular place on the property where the hunting party ‘unexpectedly’ discovered an animal suitable as trophy. Paul laughs as he recalls how delighted the client was with this ‘discovery’. He first took a picture of the animal while still alive, then shot it, and then posed with the dead body for the trophy-hunting picture.

The presence of clients on the hunting farm potentially alters the relation between farmer and worker. Farm workers’ experiences with hunting clients varied. A group of farm workers who were dismissed from a hunting farm and waiting for help in Cradock’s Advice Office told me a story about the way a hunting client undermined implicit farm rules by seeking to make contact with the farm workers. The visitors would offer sweets and clothes to the staff that served them during their stay on the farm. This was stopped by the farm owner and the clients told the workers they would not return to the farm because of the way the workers were treated. On another farm Timothy worked for a client who promised to send pictures and money through the post as soon as he was back in his home country. Indeed, the package arrived at the farm with the photo, but without the money. Timothy assumes the client did send money and that the farmer took it as the mail was addressed to the farm owner. Generally

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106 Translated from Afrikaans by author. Interview farm worker 14 January 2010.
107 Field note 18 February 2011.
farm workers referred to hunting clients simply as ‘whites’ or ‘Texans’ whenever they did not know much more about the visitors. A considerable distance remains between hunting clients and farm workers in the set up of the hunting farm, and the hunting game.

**Farm workers’ concerns in the trophy-hunting landscape**

For the hunting client and his guide the hunting game provides enjoyment and a sense of adventure. Moreover, it is a commercial transaction from which both players gain something: a livelihood and a trophy. The needs and concerns of farm workers in the trophy-hunting landscape are quite different and result from the asymmetric power relations on commercial farms.

Tracking sometimes means waiting. Waiting for animals to appear in the right place or waiting for the sun to go down or temperatures to drop. During a hunting day in winter, Joseph is instructed to track a rhino family from a hill top through his binoculars (‘bino’) and communicate his observations through mobile phone with the hunting party. He mentions he would get another job immediately if he could find one. He has been in this place for over nine years. While looking through the ‘bino’ he points out a patch of thick bushes where the rhinos are apparently hiding, but my inexperienced eyes can still not locate the animals. Through his cell phone Joseph advises the professional hunter (PH) how to approach the animals. He provided information, such as the direction of the wind, and gradually guides the hunting team safely to their target. Rhinos are dangerous game and it is crucial to avoid a charge or attack by this mammal with the potential to kill. As most trackers I have met on farms and hunts, Joseph is armed with a bino, but not with a shooting rifle. He is upset about this and mentioned “do you see we have nothing to protect ourselves?” He also mentions that he is not insured in case something happens and he worries about for the fate of his wife and three children in a worst-case scenario where he is attacked and injured by wildlife. Perhaps he thought about an accident that happened a year earlier. In June 2008 two male farm workers were killed by a wildebeest when they walked in the Karoo veld.

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*109 Field note 25 March 2009 – Cradock Advice Office.*
According to Luvuyo, black farm manager, white farmers are still reluctant to arm their workers as a result of the violent history of the region. They fear retribution.

Most game farmers with lions on the farm send their workers in the field just like that. They tell them to just walk on the neighbour’s side of the fence. And if there are lions on that side too, they do not care…In the olden days it was impossible for a black man to carry a weapon. He could kill the farmer. That is why farmers do not give guns to their workers.

Wildlife attacks, escapes or accidents are real risks on the hunting farm, but they are concealed by the supporters of the industry who rather emphasize the adventurous aspects of wildlife farming and hunting. Game farmer John joked while we drove through the veld:

We once had a rhino that was darted from the front so he attacked the client. The PH then jumped to rescue and the client was fine but the PH told me he was stiff for a week!111

This kind of story presents the PH as a hero who saves the life of his client. Furthermore, since rhino horn is believed to have a stimulating effect on the libido the ‘stiffness’ of the PH refers to a week-long erection by which the PH proves the masculine prowess. Most importantly in this story the unexpected behaviour of the rhino is accepted as part of the game. Although dangerous game is certainly able to kill the hunter instead of the other way around, danger in the hunting game is mostly pretence because various protective measures assure the safety of the client. They are guided by a trained and armed professional hunter for example. Moreover, there are safety rules and behavioural codes that the hunting party takes into account. The trophy hunt is constructed in such a way that for the hunting client, risks are a regulated reality.

For farm workers on the other hand, risks are a reality they have to face without the insurance of protective measures taken care of by the farmer. Naturally farm workers narrated risky encounters with dangerous game in a completely different way. They happen not during the hunting game where

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110 Field note 5 February 2011.
111 Visit hunting farm 20 April 2009.
safety procedures are observed closely, but at times when the client is absent and farm workers are maintaining, repairing or travelling in the wildlife’s habitat. Farm worker Paul remembers how one day he and another farm worker were instructed to track a rhino that had to be shot dead because it was behaving ‘crazy’. As the two men stalk the rhino Paul suddenly notices the rhino detects his stalkers. Paul immediately turns around and flees as fast as he can. When he reaches a fence he climbs over and watches how his colleague is charged and attacked by the alarmed animal. The rhino lifts the human body from the ground with its horns and throws it around before it runs off anxiously. Paul goes back for the injured man and helps him in the bakkie to take him to the farmer. After the accident the injured farm worker never returns to the farm. According to Paul he left to stay with family elsewhere in the country. The farmer never told me about the accident with the farm worker.

During fieldwork I witnessed an incident in which two men were badly wounded. To my knowledge there was no media coverage, no outcry in the local community, no consequences in terms of people leaving the farm, no court case, and no police involvement. Just local rumours and a relieved remark from one of the farmer’s family members:

I am so glad nothing happened to you; it would have made international headlines!112

Wildlife incidents with farm workers make no international headlines and national headlines only sporadically. Although farmers deny the potential danger of wildlife encounter for their farm workers on game farms, they do enclose the tourist lodges and their own houses to prevent such encounters (and probably also to prevent people from coming in). When this was mentioned to game farmers in one of the research project’s multi-stakeholder meetings in the Eastern Cape in February 2011, a participating farmer argued that it is still “more dangerous to go into a township”, than to live on a game farm. This farmer disregarded worker’s experiences and substituted it with his own idea of safety which dominates current discourse on security in South Africa (see for example Manby, 2002). Another farmer, in an attempt to discount worker’s experiences,

112 Field note 20 August 2009.
mentioned during the workshops that very few game farms have dangerous
game on their property. A year earlier I asked Steward Burns, a Karoo game
farmer, whether he was considering introducing dangerous game to the species
list on his property. Steward replied:

I think about it all the time, but we have children here; my son. We want him to
be able to walk around freely.

Farm workers perceive a disregard of their safety by game farmers. In the
following excerpt Timothy, talks about his feelings as he worked on Smith’s
Hunting Safaris.

**Excerpt interview with ex game farm worker, 19 January 2010: on safety**

T:...these people we are hunting with you see, they are safer than us. They are
holding guns, and we are carry their water and all of that stuff you see. When it
comes, an animal comes there, you will not be safe and they cannot even shoot
because they can shoot to you, you see. That is the more dangerous.

F: Can you remember an incident or do you have an example of a moment
where you felt this is actually dangerous?

T: Yeah, at the time when other buffalo’s went outside the fence you see, to the
next farm, then they did not use a chopper, they were using us to just chase
these things away. But when I was working, I was with Joseph that day you see,
we started to chase this buffalo, but it turned to us and...

F: stormed you?

T: Yes, and we were very lucky because we were going to the old river,...the
bakkie that we use was standing there (far)! With John (farmer) you see, you can
see how safe he is, he is sitting on the bakkie. We have to chase this buffalo, and
this buffalo chased us... And that day I felt that no I can lose this job I do not
go. Because I did not think that, we were so lucky because the buffalo having
four feet and we got two feet so we cannot do anything, we were safe because
of that river. If there was no river, we should maybe be dead.

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113 Interview 26 November 2009.
F: And did you discuss this with John, did you tell him?

T: No, I did not discuss anything. The thing is, he saw it! He saw what happened that day, and I was angry, and Joseph also was angry. Because he was standing at a distance and he knows that this is very dangerous, but because of him he wants to be safe, and he does not care about us, as long as we chase this (buffalo) away. So, that is when we did not talk even. Because I was too angry, you see. He was supposed to be at the back of us with the bakkie so that if anything will happen, we will go into the bakkie you see.

F: So you felt even more unsafe because he was not ready to rescue you or do something.

T: Yeah and the thing is he was caring about his bakkie; bakkie should be damaged, what about us?

Emotions that spring from this story are fear, insecurity and anger about the injustice of being placed in a risky environment without any safety measures. While the farmer is protected by the steel body of his vehicle from the buffalo’s aggressive threat, workers are expected to roam in the field, unarmed and unprotected. These experiences take place behind the scenes of the hunting game and beyond the sight of the hunting client. For farm workers they are part of the living conditions on the hunting farm. Timothy’s only weapon to respond to this situation was contempt silence towards John.

Behind the scenes of the hunting game there exists an uncontrolled and messy reality. The unpredictability of working with wildlife is different from the highly structured, ritualised and organised hunting game. John alludes to this distinction:

Hunting is one-track minded. To me life is like a golf game, it looks easy and sometimes it is easy, you just hit the ball and it goes, but there are also a lot of skew balls that go a totally different way than you expected; to manage the farm is a lot of unpredictable aspects.114

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114 Field note 16 August 2009.
Unpredictable aspects on the hunting farm are for example animals regularly escaping their confinement through riverbeds. It is a costly affair to bring them back. Helicopters might be needed to drive wildlife back into the direction of the game farm or animals have to be sedated and transported back in massive steel trucks. It often is a day-long operation to do so. Understandably, neighbouring farmers do not appreciate the unexpected wild visitors that damage their fields and fences and game farmers have to make sure they maintain good neighbourly relations if they want the valuable wildlife returned to their farm alive. It is exactly during these unexpected situations and behind the scenes of the hunting game that the ‘real’ risky business is taking place.

Farm workers’ living arrangements on the farm property differ considerably to that of farm owners or farm visitors. Their distance to the wildlife is smaller and the chance of encountering wild animals bigger. Farm workers often live in an unenclosed area, located away from the farmhouse, where they are exposed to the presence of dangerous game like buffalo. The lodge and farmer’s houses on the contrary, are enclosed when there is dangerous game on the farm. Marvellous who works as cook on the Watson’s hunting farm divided the hunting farm spatially in a ‘safe’ space (the lodge) and ‘dangerous’ space (outside the fenced compound). When he leaves the lodge kitchen he feels that “once you are out of the gate, you are out in the wild”. Nomandla refers to a similar spatial division on Smith’s Hunting Safaris:

We are used [to wild animals] because there is nothing we can do...When there are clients [and] when we come from work late in the evening we just walk home, we are not afraid anymore, we are used to it, there is no other way.

Nomandla indicates that it is has become ‘normal’ that the domestic workers on the farm face the risk of being attacked in the dark on their way to the worker’s houses. In some instances the women adjust to the situation by avoiding risks. They ask the men for example to fetch wood for their stoves with the tractor so that they do not have to walk around out in the field unprotected.
The world of hunting: farm workers as incorporated outsiders

In this chapter I have shown that farm dwellers form an integral part of the trophy-hunting scenario on the Karoo hunting farms. Their performances as trackers and skinners are part of the ‘perfect’ social order constructed by hunters and farmers during the hunting game in which hunters are the ‘civilised’ and farm workers the ‘wild’ participants in the game. Behind the scenes of the hunting game this ‘perfect’ order is disrupted by shifting power relations part of to post apartheid realities. On trophy-hunting farms power configurations are formed and legitimised through placing different categories of people in specific positions in the hunting scenario. These categories are based on race, ethnic and class differences that are expressed during the hunting scenario, as well as through spatial and racial constructions on the hunting farms. From this perspective farm dwellers remain perpetual outsiders on the trophy-hunting farm. Their perspectives and experiences reveal how their safety concerns are structurally disregarded and how their performance in the hunting game contributes to stereotypical images of black Africans in wild Africa. From the hunting game and farm dwellers’ experiences on the hunting farm I move in the next chapter to the institutional environment in which the farm configuration is embedded.