

# Creating 'third nature' in the South African countryside: Farm dweller futures and the spatial politics of game farming in KwaZulu-Natal

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Paper to the History and African Studies Seminar Series, UKZN  
11 November 2009, Durban<sup>1</sup>

Work in progress: please do not cite

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## Abstract

In the last decade or so there has been a significant shift in the practice of commercial agriculture on freehold farmland in many parts of the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Wildlife is bought and sold at game auctions, while the commercial cattle industry - considered economically marginal by many farmers - is in some areas giving way to various forms of wildlife production. These range from hunting lodges to upmarket private game reserves that offer an expensive luxury ecotourism experience to foreign tourists. This paper uses the theoretical concept of 'third nature' to discuss the creation of private 'wilderness' landscapes of this sort. The paper focuses on the spatial politics involved in the emergence of these new geographies of private wildlife production. These are landscapes shaped by power relations, and our focus is on what Donald S. Moore called 'the situated practices through which identities and places are contested, produced, and reworked in particular localities' (Moore 1997: 87). Clearly, when such changes are made in local landscapes, existing and sometimes long-standing relationships between landowners and farm dwellers are significantly disrupted. Dispossession is a key feature of this changing geography of production, as is spatial marginalisation. It is important to note that the threat of displacement associated with game farming is simply the latest in the series of threats farm dwellers – and in particular, so-called labour tenants - have had to contend with over the last century. Many have maintained a foothold on the land for many years, and in some cases may now be prepared to accept a degree of spatial containment in order to stay on the farm. Yet such changes are not passively accepted by farm dwellers. The introduction of game farming impacts significantly on local identities and sense of place, and is often resisted or contested in various ways. In the current context, following the introduction of land reform legislation in the post-apartheid period, it is also sometimes possible for tenants to leverage state support for their claims to privately owned land.

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was presented earlier this year at the Seminar for Social Inquiry at Wits. Our excuse for airing the paper on two different occasions is that we are assuming a different audience in Johannesburg and Durban.

## 1. Introduction

In many areas of the province of KwaZulu-Natal (as well as in several other South African provinces), a growing number of private landowners/farmers are converting wholly or partially from conventional commercial farming operations, to game farming. This phenomenon needs to be understood in terms of ongoing processes of rural transformation in the South African countryside over a long period. Such rural transformations can be traced back at least as far as colonial patterns of land distribution and the ‘opening up’ of land for freehold purchase in the nineteenth century. As documented in Jeeves and Crush (1997), in the twentieth century farming landscapes, practices and labour relations were irrevocably changed by modernisation and the introduction of industrial farming, as well as by state intervention as the modernising apartheid state attempted to root out informal labour tenancy arrangements and other difficult-to-control practices and relations on farms.

A key theoretical debate in thinking about this phenomenon is the degree to which the trend towards game farming can be seen as a move to a ‘post-productivist’ countryside. After all, game farms – newly created ‘wilderness’ landscapes – involve a quite different form of land-use and radically different associated labour practices. The line between production and consumption is being blurred here in interesting new ways. We would argue that the supposed dichotomy between ‘wilderness’ and ‘production’ discussed extensively by Wolmer (2005, 2007) needs to be complicated. While Wolmer does acknowledge that ‘wilderness’ is socially constructed, the argument needs to be taken further. Wilderness on game farms is both produced (in the sense that animals are bred for trophy hunting or the venison trade) and commodified (by the tourism industry as well); hence wilderness in this context is clearly also a landscape of production. This argument is relatively easy to make in the case of farmers who shift to game farming as an alternative economic strategy. It blurs a little in the case of wealthy business people who buy land to establish ‘weekend’ game farms for their own leisure. In many cases these farms are perhaps more accurately described as landscapes of consumption for wealthy urbanites and industry, enjoyed in a form of compensatory logic as a contrast to the urban landscape of production, where the real money is made.<sup>2</sup>

Again from a theoretical point of view, one can discern in the creation of such potential ‘wilderness’ landscapes a process in which a new, ‘third’ nature is emerging. As David Hughes explains it in a different context, such ‘third nature’ landscapes are sites not of obvious human labour and market-driven extraction (corresponding to ‘second’ nature), but rather sites for the future realisation of – in this case - conservationist dreams. These dreams are of course fuelled by the perceived desires of wildlife tourists and hunters, and they take little cognisance of existing relationships of people to the land. As Hughes puts it, it is ‘speculation, rather than exploitation, [that] produces third nature’. The proposed Gongolo Wildlife Reserve (sometimes referred to as the ‘Gongolo Big Five’ reserve) in the midlands region of KwaZulu-Natal is a fascinating example of such a large-scale dream. If it comes to fruition, this reserve would constitute a large conservation area incorporating about sixteen privately owned farms. A number of the interviews discussed in this paper were conducted in this region and it is clear that different landscape imaginaries and competing productivist/post-productivist visions are in evidence here: not only former labour tenants but also some white farmers expressed scepticism regarding a wildlife-based future. They want to continue with cattle farming, which they know and are good at.

Farmers give various reasons for their decision to switch to game farming or, as some put it, to

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<sup>2</sup> On such compensatory logic, see Bunn (1996). Game farm owners are of very different sorts. In some cases, the land has been sold to multinational corporations which are establishing conservation and breeding programmes on the land; in others, the game farm is a holiday retreat for locally based or international businessmen who want to own a ‘piece of wild Africa’. The latter invariably live off-farm and appoint a manager. In still others, the game farm is intended as an economic concern to support a land-owning family where the farmer has converted from conventional agriculture to game. (see Figure 1 below). And there are various shades and permutations of these.

devote more of their land to 'conservation'. High hopes are riding on the ecotourism industry which, certainly at the top end of the market, is largely based on a hoped-for influx of foreign tourists. Hunting is seen to be less profitable than high-end ecotourism, but there are nonetheless a large number of game farms in KwaZulu-Natal that advertise both locally and internationally for hunters during the winter hunting season. Supporting enterprises such as professional hunting outfitters, venison processing, game sales and taxidermy – both small and large-scale - have emerged too (see Figure 1). Clearly the game farming trend has been fuelled not just by one factor but by a number of different factors coming together at a particular historical juncture. These include: massive cuts in farming subsidies from the early 1990s, the introduction of minimum wage legislation post-1994, and the impact of other rights-based legislation that makes it more difficult to exclude people from private land once a claim of occupation has been established on it. Farmers also cite the increased incidence of livestock theft on farms, making the point that game animals are more difficult to catch and move about than cattle. There also appears to be a financial incentive – land sold as conservation land suitable for game farming is more valuable than the same land sold as unimproved and often degraded cattle pasture.

**THE ALOES GAME FARM, COLENZO**  
**REGISTERED GAME, POULTRY ABATTOIRS**  
**VENISON MEAT, BILTONG, CARCASS SALES**  
**LIMITED HUNTING**  
**DARREN HORNER - 082 885 6522**  
**LIVE GAME SALES**  
**GEORGE HORNER - 082 324 0747**  
**FARM SHOP - VENISON PRODUCTS, GIFTS**  
**SELF CATERING ACCOMMODATION**  
**OFFICE - 036 422 2834 (Lynn)**

**Figure 1: Game farming and supporting industries**  
(Source: fieldwork 2009)

This paper is not primarily concerned with the drivers behind the move to game farming. Rather its main focus is on the spatial politics to which it is giving rise at a local level, on the ground in KwaZulu-Natal. These are contested geographies: in the South African context, it is rarely the case that farm owners make land-use decisions that affect only themselves. For generations arrangements have been made between white farm owners and black families in which the latter are given permission to stay on the farm under various conditions, including providing labour at certain times of the year. Natal has a particularly long and complex history of labour tenancy, and it is essential that current struggles over space on farms in the region are understood in terms of this enduring social formation. The first section of the paper therefore traces this history, before moving in the second section to the spatial effects of contemporary game farming. In this section we examine how the introduction of game farming and the production of 'third nature' or wilderness

spaces on private land, is changing and/or disrupting existing spatial arrangements on the farms. We consider landowners' reinterpretations of the landscape in the switch to game farming, as well as their attitudes to and relationships with farm dwellers still residing on their land. The final section considers the reactions of farm dwellers to changes that often include spatial marginalisation on farms and even displacement from them.<sup>3</sup> A key focus of this paper (and the research programme as a whole) is farm dwellers' sense of place and identity, and the way in which this is impacted by game farming. One aspect of this is the extent to which it is possible for farm dwellers to leverage post-apartheid land reform legislation to strengthen their claims to land, and how game farming might either promote or hinder these claims.

The data on which our arguments are based derive from visits to and interviews with farm owners and farm dwellers in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands, particularly in the Pietermaritzburg, Estcourt and Colenso areas between 2007 and 2009.<sup>4</sup> (Figure 2) In addition to in-depth interviews, attention was paid to land-use and settlement patterns before and after the switch from conventional farming to game farming. It is intended that in future this aspect of the study will be expanded through spatial analysis using aerial photographs, satellite images and participatory GIS techniques.

## **2. Historical geographies of labour tenancy in the Natal midlands and thornveld**

The region with which this paper is concerned, is located in the central or interior parts of the province, a core area of the former Colony of Natal (1843-1910) known colloquially as the 'midlands'. This shorthand term refers to the region's location between the low-lying coastal strip in the east, and the Drakensberg Mountains in the west. The midlands are further divided into a better watered and thus more fertile region, and a northern section less suitable for farming. The better watered region stretches north of Pietermaritzburg through the 'mist belt' to the higher-altitude, flat grasslands around Mooi River and Estcourt (indicated on Figure 2 as 'Highland Sourveld'). Moving north to Colenso and especially north-east towards Weenen and the Thukela River basin, the land becomes steeper, dryer and wilder. These are the 'thornveld' farms referred to in the paper (indicated on Figure 2 as 'Valley Bushveld'). Game farms have been and are being created in both parts of the midlands. Farms were visited in both areas, and where possible owners, managers and farm dwellers were interviewed.

It is impossible in a paper of this length to do justice to the complex history of this region and in particular the contested portion from Estcourt north to Weenen and Msinga. The reader is referred to a comprehensive historical report on the area written by one of the authors of this paper at the time when land reform initiatives were first being planned (Brooks 1996).<sup>5</sup> Here only the main outlines of this history are sketched as necessary background to understanding contemporary spatial conflicts over game farming.

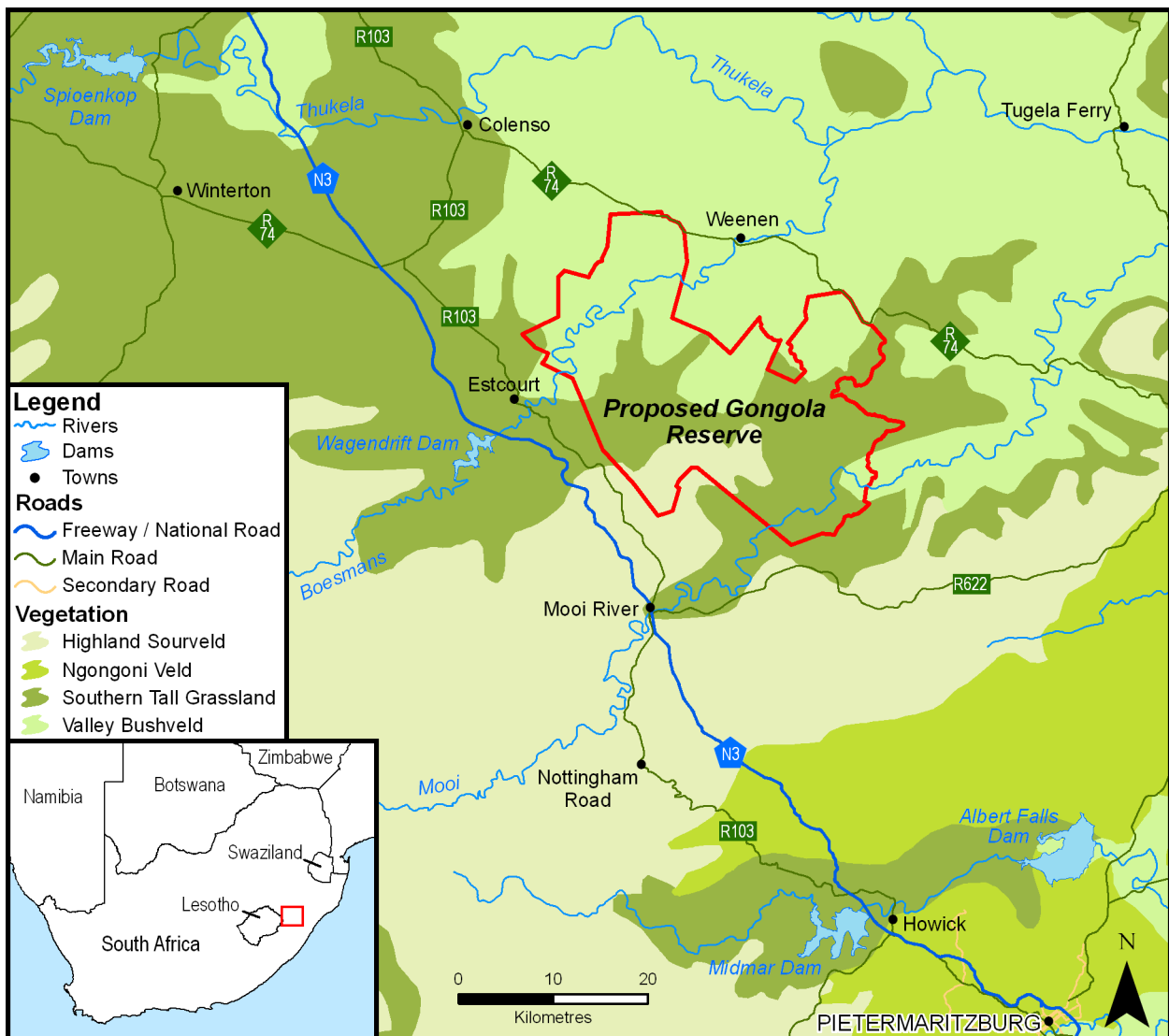
In particular it is the system of labour tenancy that evolved in the region and became an enduring social formation over generations, which needs to be understood: it was largely under this form of tenancy that black people occupied white-owned farms here from the late nineteenth century. The key point to make is that, although land alienation for purposes of white agriculture was a slow

<sup>3</sup> We use the term 'farm dwellers' rather than 'farm workers' advisedly. Due to the particular historical nature of labour tenant relationships in the region, discussed below, not all dwellers on farms or former tenants with claims to private land are really 'farm workers'. 'Farm dwellers' is thus a more inclusive term that includes the range of people who live on (or formerly lived on) farms in the region.

<sup>4</sup> A large part of the visits and interviews were conducted by our students, Khetha Lukhozi, Lot van Brakel and Anemarie Kolk. The research programme is supported by funding from the South Africa Netherlands Partnership for Alternative Development (SANPAD), for which we are extremely grateful.

<sup>5</sup> In retrospect, my comment in the introduction to this report was prescient: 'Planners need to remember that the present land reform initiative is itself merely a part of an ongoing, and necessarily conflictual, process. Whether they are aware of it or not, those involved in attempting to redistribute or return land to rural communities will inevitably be writing the next chapter in an ongoing history of struggle over the land' (Brooks 1996: 9).

process occurring over some years, very few native reserves were designated by the colonial authorities in this region. The result is that by the early twentieth century, most Africans in the southern midlands and thornveld were living on white-owned farms, and mostly under conditions of labour tenancy rather than rent tenancy.



**Figure 2: The KwaZulu-Natal Midlands region with vegetation types**

The midlands farms were large and their origins quite diverse. In the 1830s, a group of trekboers moved from the Cape Colony across the mountains into the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region, thus challenging the power of the dominant African chiefdoms there resulting in violence and instability. The British were concerned about this, and in 1842 decided to annex the region to the Crown. By then, the short-lived Republic of Natalia (1839-42) established by the Voortrekkers in the area, had already made generous land grants to trekkers subject to the payment of a small annual quit rent. Because the new authorities wanted the trekboers to stay on the land, most of these grants were honoured when the colonial administration began the complex process of assessing existing land grants and surveying and allocating the remaining land. The quit rent system was also retained, although conversion to freehold tenure (ie full private ownership) was preferred by the British.

The process of surveying the colony's farms, begun in 1845, was slow. However by 1860, according to the historical geographer A.J. Christopher (1969), most of the land in the northern part of the Colony (then known as Weenen County) had been allocated to white farmers in the form of large quit rent farms. Other land was surveyed and offered for freehold sale on the market. There were three main categories of farm in the region:

- The larger Voortrekker grants of 7 000 to 8 000 acres close to the Thukela River. Some of these farms had to be cut down in size when surveys revealed their size to be grossly above the limit of 6 000 acres.
- The standard 6 000 acre grants, found mainly in the area around the Bloukrans (Blaauw Krantz) and Bushman's Rivers. A few farms had been grouped together to form larger grants, mostly between Weenen and Estcourt, where the largest farms in the County occurred (one of them reached over 20 000 acres).
- The 1857 Quit Rent grants of roughly 3 000 acres, found in the Mooi River valley and below Weenen. These farms were also scattered amongst the Voortrekker grants where land had not been allocated up to 1857. (Brooks 1996: 13).

Africans who lived on the farms made private arrangements with white farmers and at the same time owed allegiance to chiefs (for example leaders of the powerful Thembu and Mchunu chiefdoms, dominant in the area) who had managed to retain much of their power by forging alliances with the colonial authority. The land tenure arrangements were informal and made between the male homestead head and white male farmer. In this interior region of the Colony, stock farmers were dependent on the labour of people living on the farms, and in the nineteenth century they did not have the power to extract this labour without providing anything in return. Often wages did not enter into the picture: what Africans wanted was access to land for grazing for their stock. In any case most white farmers were themselves poor and did not have money to pay wages. The concession was that the homestead head would guarantee to provide the farm owner with the labour of members of his household, on condition that his male dependents of working age be free to go to the mines or elsewhere to seek paid work for part of the year. This was the origin of the six-month or *isithupha* system, a central feature of life in the region (see McClendon 1995, 2002; Lambert 1995). The characteristic geography that emerged centred on these farms was thus a migratory one, mirroring the oscillating migration of mine workers from the 'native' reserves to the gold mines and back again.

Home however was the farm. The fact that this land was technically the property of a white man was somewhat irrelevant to the people who lived on it. In addition the imagined geographies of black people who lived on the farms differed substantially from those of their putative owners. In the early 1980s Johnny Clegg wrote suggestively on aspects of the spatiality of the thornveld farms around Weenen - many of these same farms now designated game farms or 'wilderness' (and many under land claim by former labour tenants). Each farm has been regarded as belonging to a particular chiefdom or grouping, all hungry to extend their area of influence.<sup>6</sup> Such allegiances are based at least partially on the relationship of these groupings to the land before the advent of colonialism. Clegg talks about the 'phantom geography' in people's heads, a geography over which the boundaries of the surveyed and formally designated farms are rather lightly overlain. As Clegg puts it:

Farm hands [ie farm dwellers, usually labour tenants] ... operated with two territorial models. One was the small model which comprised of boundaries based on the farm on which they resided. These farm boundaries were, however, incorporated into a much larger model which was based on the now defunct boundaries of their 'phantom' districts. Thus the old and indigenous model incorporated many farms and cut through farm boundaries and determined where one worked and which farms were 'in your district'. (Clegg, 1981: 186)

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<sup>6</sup> These include the powerful Mchunu and Thembu chiefdoms, as well as the smaller Mabaso, Qamu, Mbomvu and Majoji chiefdoms.

A further aspect of the arrangement between farmers and Africans in the region ensured that a close spatial connection was maintained between some of the more prosperous midlands farms and those further north in the thornveld. In winter, stock farmers eager to access sweetveld winter grazing would drive cattle north-east from the Estcourt and Mooi River plateau, to the lower-lying Thukela basin. (There were of course no fences and both African tenants and white farmers enjoyed significant freedom of movement in the late nineteenth century).

In the early part of the twentieth century, this spatial connection was retained as so-called 'progressive' or successful midlands farmers began to acquire second farms in the thornveld area. These second or 'labour' farms were acquired in response to the perceived problem of the presence of labour tenants on profitable midlands farms. Labour tenants were increasingly viewed by such farmers as unreliable, too independent, and uneconomic. They and their cattle occupied valuable land on productive farms, and they could not always be relied upon to perform their work duties. From the 1930s, there were growing tensions between African fathers and sons as sons began to abscond and not return from the mines, thus causing the homestead heads to break their informal labour contracts with the farmers (McClendon 2002). The thornveld labour farms were at least a partial solution to this problem. At certain times of the year, people living on labour farms would be summoned to the associated midlands farm to work; thereafter they would return to the labour farm or go on their own initiative to work on the Transvaal mines.

In effect, therefore, the north-eastern region served as a source of private cheap labour for midland farmers. McClendon (1995) discusses this interesting sub-set of Natal labour tenancy arrangements in his doctoral thesis and subsequent book, coining the useful term 'off-site labour tenants' to describe the situation of these people. It is important to note that, apart from the sporadic labour demands of the farmer, farm dwellers on labour farms in the thornveld actually experienced a high degree of autonomy - they lived on land that was not actually occupied by the owner. Given these living arrangements, it is perhaps hardly surprising that these people viewed the land as theirs and may not have fully realised the implications of the legal and survey documents held by the Surveyor-General's Office. However the underlying insecurity of the whole labour tenancy system was to come into sharp relief during the apartheid period.

Even from the 1930s, evictions from South African farms increased as farming operations became more mechanised and as prosperous farmers required fulltime labour to run commercial farming operations (Bradford, 1987). Government began pushing for the mechanisation and modernisation of the countryside (Jeeves and Crush, 1997) and before 1948 had made several attempts to exert greater control over Africans living on white-owned farms throughout the country - for example by trying to insist on formal contracts and charging 'squatters' fees to farm owners for the people living on their land. There were calls from numerous quarters for the state to outlaw the 'feudal' and uneconomic practice of labour tenancy, and during the apartheid period this disastrous policy was finally carried into effect. After several earlier measures had failed to control the practice of labour tenancy on farms, a 1964 amendment of the 1936 Land Act allowed the Minister of Bantu Administration (as he was then called) to abolish the practice in any district in the country. This meant in theory that farm dwellers had to agree to become fulltime wage labourers or else leave the farm; although in practice many farmers were unable or unwilling to offer their tenants year-round employment, so that farm dwellers were not even given this option.

Labour tenancy was outlawed on a district-by-district basis. Exploitative as the system undoubtedly was, in the interior of Natal it had at least provided people with some level of security and access to land. The short-sighted and cruelly draconian policy of outlawing labour tenancy coincided with the era of forced removals of Africans from freehold land designated as 'black spots' in otherwise white farming areas - so the state machinery to enforce evictions was by this stage fairly well developed. Large-scale removals followed, especially in the regions of Natal where labour tenancy

was deeply entrenched and formed part of the social fabric. In the Weenen district alone it was estimated that somewhere between 10 000 and 20 000 people were moved off farms during a period of three years after labour tenancy was declared illegal in the district in 1969 (Surplus Peoples Project, 1985).<sup>7</sup> The dismantling of the social structures associated with labour tenancy led to enormous disruption and even loss of life, as labour tenants evicted from midlands farms, including thornveld labour farms, were relocated to ‘dumping ground’ sites on the other side of the Thukela River in what was by then the KwaZulu homeland. They lost their livestock, their food security and livelihoods, and were forcibly ripped from the farms that had been their homes and on which their ancestors were buried.

The social upheaval caused by the banning of the *isithupa* system played out differently on particular farms. While many (especially poorer) farmers were opposed to the state ban, as they relied on the people living on their land for labour and were unable to pay wages, some owners undoubtedly used the opportunity to rid themselves of troublesome labour tenants. Certain homestead heads were able to come to an arrangement with a particular farmer to remain on the farm as permanent workers. This has led to situations where it is the more ‘privileged’ farm dwellers of the 1960s, who managed to remain on farms during this period of upheaval forty years ago, who the families now facing displacement due to changes in land-use such as game farming. Another outcome is that such farm dwellers now face competition from evictees who have instituted land claims on the farms. Should those former labour tenants, displaced forty years ago, now win the claim and be awarded the farm, might they not in their turn dispossess the ‘privileged’ farm dwellers and their descendants who colluded with the farmers of that period in order to remain on the land? The in-depth case study of a thornveld game farm near the Thukela Valley, discussed in the last section of the paper, illustrates this well.

In conclusion, the attempt to create a wilderness landscape in the region (and the possible removals and various forms of spatial dislocation associated with this) is just the latest chapter in a long and often traumatic history featuring dispossession and removals. Farm dwellers who survived the period of apartheid removals, would understandably be extremely reluctant to move now and might therefore be prepared to accept the kinds of spatial restrictions that game farming involves and which are discussed in the next section. If the creation of ‘third nature’ on the midlands plains and in the thornveld is part of an effort to realise an anticipatory conservationist dream, then it appears some farm dweller communities are prepared to go along with this dream in order to remain on the farms. However in the contemporary context, farmers’ attempts to create ‘third nature’ and a post-productive countryside in this region of KwaZulu-Natal will inevitably come up against the disrupting counter-narrative of land claims. In cases such as the proposed Gongolo wildlife reserve, farm dweller communities seem to be focusing on claiming the land and refusing to commit to a future based on game farming. It is an open question whether existing game farms that are successfully claimed will continue as such. This remains a contested geography.

### **3. Making ‘wilderness’ on midlands farms: spatial changes related to game farming**

In the contemporary or post-apartheid era, significant changes in the commercial agricultural sector have placed great pressure on farmers in South Africa. Government has drastically reduced public subsidies to the agricultural sector. A sector that used to be heavily protected by state subsidies and tariff barriers is now exposed to global competition and South Africa’s agricultural subsidies are now among the lowest in the world (Atkinson 2007: 65). South African farmers are more vulnerable to international shocks and deteriorating terms of trade, and their debt situation is

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<sup>7</sup> The vagueness of this estimate (between 10 000 and 20 000 people) in itself indicates how little information there was available at the time on these forced removals, which the Surplus People’s Project tried to document in the late 70s and early 80s. Unlike some of the high profile cases of ‘black spot’ removals (removals from African-owned land), these removals seem to have occurred out of sight of the liberal press and attracted very little publicity at the time.



worsening. As a result many have gone out of business. Atkinson (2007: 65) states that the number of commercial farmers in South Africa has declined from about 78 000 to about 45 000 over the past fifteen years. During this same period, government has been attempting to improve conditions for farm labourers by instituting minimum wages. Du Toit and Ewert (2002: 93) argue that the combination of new policies that deregulate trade in agro-commodities and regulate labour standards, far from encouraging equitable social change, has in fact resulted in a systematic trend away from permanent farm employment and towards greater instability for farm workers' livelihoods. Jobs are shifting to casual workers employed through labour contractors, and at the same time farmers are distancing themselves from their 'social responsibility' functions, especially regarding the provision of housing for farm workers (Du Toit and Ewert 2002: 93; Atkinson 2007).

Determined to remain on land that has been in the family for generations, some farmers are turning hopefully to game and wildlife production as a commercial venture. As noted in the Introduction, another trend is the appearance of wealthy foreign or urban-based businessmen who buy up actual or potential game farming land, install a manager and visit on an irregular basis. A number of the game farms or private game reserves in KwaZulu-Natal (particularly those in the coastal Zululand region of the province where it is more feasible to have the 'Big Five' game animals), are owned by wealthy businessmen from Europe. Their motives appear to include the idea of 'doing something for African conservation', and of course owning their own private part of an edenic African landscape; perhaps they also gain tax benefits.

This section of the paper draws on interviews conducted with game farmers located on midlands farms north of Pietermaritzburg as far as Estcourt and Weenen in order to gain a better sense of these changes – in particular associated spatial changes - and the way farm owners view them. Interviews were conducted with farmers who had converted to game farming or were in the process of conversion.<sup>8</sup> Farmers within the proposed Gongolo wildlife reserve were included in the sample. The majority of the farmers interviewed said they had decided to shift to game farming because conventional farming was no longer considered a viable economic strategy. None mentioned the cutback in subsidies, but many did mention low prices for agricultural produce and rising costs of inputs. Most of the farmers cited increased stock theft as another reason to move into game farming. Issues pertaining to new labour legislation, such as the minimum wage for farm labourers, were also cited often, along with the comment that game farming is less labour intensive than cattle farming.<sup>9</sup> To the former livestock farmers, game farming promised to provide better economic returns, and would allow them to stay on the land. To these farmers, game farming seems to be considered another form of production, though many indicated that they also have an interest in conservation. The latter motive was emphasized more by game farm owners whose primary income was derived from business or other off-farm economic activities.

The conversion to various types of game farm is having serious consequences for local people - consequences amounting to a further upheaval, perhaps not of the same magnitude as the removals of the apartheid period but still one of significant proportions.<sup>10</sup> It appears that the production of

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<sup>8</sup> Interviews with farm owners were mainly conducted by Lot van Brakel (2008) and Annemarie Kolk (2008). Khetha Lukhozi worked intensively on a single thornveld hunting farm (Lukhozi 2008). Shirley Brooks and Marja Spienburg also spent time on this farm and together with Khetha Lukhozi interviewed both the farm owner and farm dwellers in February 2009.

<sup>9</sup> This seems in contrast with assertions by Langholz and Kerley (2006) that game farming leads to an increase in employment opportunities. Details about employment before and after conversion are available for only a small number of farmers, but do indicate that many of the farm labourers and dwellers working at the farms before conversion lost their jobs after conversion. This loss of employment opportunities may be exacerbated by the fact that many game farmers buy up neighbouring farms to have more space available for wildlife. More research, however is needed and is currently being conducted by PhD students participating in the research project.

<sup>10</sup> We do not want to give the impression that farm dwellers enjoyed tenure security in the 1970s, 80s or even in the 1990s. Farm dwellers have been evicted for various reasons during this time, including after 1994. Scholars agree that post-apartheid land legislation has done little to safeguard the position of farm dwellers and that evictions have contin-

wilderness requires a number of changes in the spatial organization of the farm and its landscape. This is a unique land-use change, one that requires both a higher degree of spatial control and a high level of invisibility on the part of farm dwellers. The latter aspect had not been important on cattle farms, of course – but on game farms, clients expect to see ‘wilderness’, not people. In addition, game farms are characterised by far more impermeable spatial boundaries in the form of high game fences (often electrified). They often exhibit a marked degree of spatial consolidation, sometimes consisting of several farms that have been merged to create a larger space: many farmers are expanding their landholdings by buying up land from neighbours who are opting out of farming (see also Langholz and Kerley 2006: 4). When farms are merged, internal fences are often taken down, and frequently wild animals are introduced. External fences are then fortified, apparently a requirement of legislation pertaining to game farming. These spatial changes impact significantly on farm dwellers, even though the decision to move to game farming is not theirs and they are not usually consulted.

One spatial change discussed by farm owners was the change from having people scattered all over the farm, to persuading or forcing them to concentrate their homesteads in just one area - preferably somewhere on the margins of the farm and better still, out of sight of any tourist lodges. As noted above, many of the farms in this region have been used primarily for cattle ranching. In the past it had been convenient for resident farm owners to have farm dweller homesteads (*imizi*) located in various different parts of the farm, so that the people could keep an eye on the cattle as well as monitor and repair fences. It was recognised by most of the cattle farmers that farm dwellers would have their own cattle and that these would graze on the farm too and use the same water sources. To prevent the farm dwellers’ cattle from infecting the farm owners’ cattle, the owner would often offer dipping and veterinary treatment to the farm dwellers’ cattle as well. (Van Brakel 2008: 61).<sup>11</sup> Some of the farmers freely acknowledged that the farm dwellers on their land had long historical ties to the farm. One farmer indicated that the farm dwellers staying on his property belonged to the third generation of people living on the farm, and that they had always assisted the farmer’s family with the cattle (Van Brakel 2008: 54). Another said that the farm dwellers were already there when he bought the farm twenty years ago.<sup>12</sup>

Before the conversion to game farming, at least one group of farm dwellers would typically be living close to the owner’s house and sheds so that, as one farmer said, ‘there are no delays in getting to work’ (Van Brakel 2008: 44). This living arrangement also meant that there was always a group of people close at hand to be called upon in case of problems, such as a fire or reports of cattle breaking through the fences. While some farmers mentioned that there were certain disadvantages to this spatial proximity, such as being called upon at any time of day or night to adjudicate in disputes or take people to hospital, the inconvenience seems to have been outweighed by the emphasis the farmers placed on keeping a close eye on farm workers and knowing what was going on amongst them (Van Brakel 2008: 44). This situation has now changed decisively, as in a sense with game farming the farm dwellers become redundant and are better out of sight. This is illustrated by the example of a midlands farmer, discussed below, who eventually moved the farm dwellers on his farm right away from the main buildings and tourist lodges because the residents were too noisy and had unsightly livestock.

Once the farm owner shifts from cattle to game, the spatial arrangements described above are no longer deemed appropriate. The farm has to be converted to a ‘wilderness’. There is now quite a substantial body of literature analysing the emergence of ideas about wilderness areas and national parks as ‘pristine’ landscapes devoid of humans (Wolmer 2007; Brooks 2005; Beinart and Coates

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ued unabated since 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Most farm dwellers were also allocated small plots for cultivation.

<sup>12</sup> However the businessman owner of a thornveld hunting farm, warned us to be sceptical of farm dwellers’ claims to have lived there a long time. ‘Is that what she told you? No, I don’t think that old *gogo* was born on the farm’. (Interview, 24 February 2009). The interview was conducted by Shirley Brooks, Marja Spierenburg and Khetha Luhozi.

1995).<sup>13</sup> In her study of the development of an Eastern Cape game farm, Kelly Luck (2005) found that this is indeed the kind of landscape vision deemed most suitable for game farms. As the farm owner told her, 'I want to get the game farm running properly by the next hunting season'. Luck ascertained that this meant the occupiers and their cattle would be relocated, their houses would be demolished, and the old farm rubble cleared away. In building his new lodge this farmer wanted to create a picture of the farm - now a 'private game reserve' - as uninhabited and unspoilt bushveld, a landscape conforming to a generic wilderness ideal (Luck 2005). In theory, farm dwellers' land rights are protected through the Land Reform (Labour Tenants) Act of 1996 (LTA) and the Extension of Security of Tenure Act of 1997 (ESTA). Yet the existence of these laws does not seem to prevent farm dwellers being moved off or to the edges of game farms (AFRA 2003; Luck 2005).

On only one of the seven properties studied by Van Brakel in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands were farm dwellers allowed to stay exactly where they had been prior to the farm's conversion, and to keep their cattle (Van Brakel 2008). Even in this case, the farm dwellers had to sign contracts with the owner limiting the expansion of their herds. Some of the owners interviewed were strongly pursuing the legal eviction route. One farmer had filed an eviction order against the sole remaining family living on his farm, on the grounds that this family had continued to build up its cattle herd after the conversion of the farm to game farming, despite the fact that they knew this would conflict with the farm's primary land use, game. He also argued that the family had other sources of income that would allow them to live elsewhere. This farmer won his court case and the family had to sell its cattle. Once the family has moved off the land, the owner plans to destroy their houses and fields in order to 'restore the area to its original state' (Van Brakel 2008: 56).

When farm dwellers are allowed to remain on the game farm, assumptions about how much and what kind of contact tourists desire with farm dwellers, strongly influence decisions about the space now allocated to them. Often they are spatially confined to the edges of the farm. For example, the owner of a midlands game farm had managed to persuade the farm dwellers living on the farm to move from their existing dwellings. He had first offered them housing close to the lodges that were built to accommodate tourists. The farm dwellers were allowed to take their small stock with them to the new housing. After a while, however, the owner decided that the sight of families living with their goats and chickens 'was not good for the lodge'. He then constructed a bamboo screen 'to keep them out of sight of the tourists', but this did not work as 'they were still making too much noise'. He finally decided to move the families to the edge of the farm where he constructed houses for them and provided them with a water reservoir and a fenced field where they could grow crops for their own consumption and for sale to the lodge (Van Brakel 2008: 42-43).

A common argument made by landowners to justify the spatial marginalization or displacement of farm dwellers, focuses on the latter's safety. Especially when big game is introduced, they say, the people living on the farm '...would effectively become prisoners in their own homes, it is no longer safe to live there' (Van Brakel 2008: 54). 'If a hippo escapes we have a big problem' (Van Brakel 2008: 56).<sup>14</sup> They have to move. Once moved to the edges of farms, farm dwellers usually find large parts of the game farm rendered inaccessible to them: in many cases the entire farm is protected by electric game fences, making short cuts difficult or impossible.

In the case of the Thukela valley thornveld hunting farm on which we worked, the presence of a large out-of-bounds area interfered with long-established routes through the area. In addition, dams on the farm previously used to water farm dwellers' livestock in the dry winter season were now out of bounds. In the winter of 2008 when research was being conducted on the farm, the farm dwellers

<sup>13</sup> Exceptions are sometimes made for people who are considered sufficiently 'primitive', and living 'in harmony with nature' (see e.g. Neumann 2000; Draper et al. 2004) – and for tourists of course.

<sup>14</sup> Most owners however claim that farm dwellers still living on the property can enter and exit free at will, as well as receive friends and family – as long as they make sure that they close the gates again.

drove cattle to the dam even though they knew it was not allowed - much to the annoyance of the game farm manager who was trying to run a professional hunting operation. (Winter is the hunting season on KwaZulu-Natal game farms). (See Figure 3). From the point of view of the farm owner, a Durban businessman, this was seen as disrespect for his property. As he said in exasperation, 'These people don't understand boundaries; they cut fences, they don't respect private property' (Interview, February 24, 2009).



**Figure 3: Cattle drinking 'illegally' at the dam inside the game farm**

This owner was particularly aggrieved about these sorts of transgressions because he felt he had gone out of his way to accommodate the nine farm dweller families on his land, by gifting them land of their own in exchange for their undertaking to keep away from the game reserve section of the farm. As he informed us, the total area of the original farm, purchased in 1991, was 1305 ha. Some years ago, he had legally transferred 250 hectares of this land to the community for their dwellings and cattle. All the homesteads except one (whose members refused to move) were rebuilt within this area and were fenced off from the game farm. The game farm consisted of 1055 hectares, just sufficient land on which to build a hunting lodge and run it as a hunting farm.<sup>15</sup>

This introduces another apparent spatial strategy being employed by game farm owners to 'resolve' the farm dweller issue. Perhaps ironically, some owners have seen in the government's land redistribution strategy another way to get farm dwellers out of potential game farming land. In the last decade or so, the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) has been facilitating land transactions through its redistribution programme, providing farm dweller households with grants that enable them to buy land offered for sale on the open market. (In effect, the land is bought by government on behalf of the farm dwellers). This policy also contributes to the new spatial arrangements on farms in the midlands, as a number of farm owners have sold part of their land - or, if they owned two or more farms, their 'spare' farms - to government. This strategy has certainly been adopted by some game farmers for whom labour tenants possess little economic value and are often viewed as a nuisance.

<sup>15</sup> Although the owner informed us that the hunting enterprise had not in fact proved all that profitable. He said he was disappointed at the returns, especially given the amount of effort and money he had put into the game farm; stocking it, building the lodge, employing a Professional Hunter (PH) to manage it, and so on. (Interview, February 24, 2009)

For example, one farm owner interviewed by Lot Van Brakel had sold 600 hectares of his land to government. The twenty-five farm dweller families who were living on his farm had each received the standard land reform package settlement grant of R15 000 per household, and collectively had bought the 600 hectares. The farmer felt well satisfied that in doing this he had not only washed his hands of the problem but had achieved a viable spatial solution that would facilitate the development of his game farm. He mentioned that he actually thought the land a little too big for the farm dwellers' needs: in his view, 400 hectares would have been sufficient. However he had decided to sell this larger plot of 600 hectares - which bordered on a highway - for a specific reason. This land sale, he said, rendered his remaining property more 'defendable' [sic]:

When I say defendable I mean that they know that this is their side, and this is mine. There are two fences, it is a wide area. Defendable because fire cannot get across, defendable against their animals, that they cannot cut the fence and push their animals on my piece of land because I have better grass - because they do cut the fence and push their cattle through. [But] they cannot do that with a river, or a road or a highway, because there are two fences. So it was a better boundary than just a fence through the middle of a field. (Van Brakel 2008: 53).<sup>16</sup>

Many of these issues come into play in the area of the proposed Gongolo Wildlife Reserve, a large block of farms located between Mooi River and Weenen (see Figure 2). According to the proposal put forward by the sixteen landowners, these farms will be grouped together and transformed into a 'wilderness' landscape (see Figure 2). The reserve would be about 40 000 hectares in extent. One rationale given by landowners for this still-to-be-realised 'third nature' dream is that 'there is a decline in their (the landowners') livestock grazing and cropping, and ... this has resulted in scores of people becoming unemployed'. Put this way, it can even be argued that Gongolo will be beneficial for farm dwellers as well as owners. As one of the farmers, Graham McIntosh, claims:

In terms of the economic potential of the wildlife projects it is only the beginning of what could be a R1-billion development. At least five times as many permanent jobs as there currently are on the farms will be created (McIntosh 2002).<sup>17</sup>

This decline was confirmed by a feasibility study commissioned by the landowners, which also set out 'a plan for converting the land use from agricultural to wild life reserve.' (Mokhele nd)<sup>18</sup>

The presence of farm dwellers clearly stands in the way of realising the Gongolo dream. But McIntosh for one dismissed the problem in a cavalier fashion in a 2002 article published in the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper:

The challenge will not lie in dealing with the farm workers and farmers, most of whom will have to relocate. The farm workers already have been made very generous offers in terms of land, guaranteed employment and assistance with relocation. (McIntosh 2002)

McIntosh did concede that not only are there farm dwellers actually living on the farms, some of whom have land claims, but there are also claims lodged by former labour tenants removed in the apartheid period after the banning of labour tenancy. However, McIntosh encouraged the then KwaZulu-Natal Land Claims Commissioner, Ms. Shange, to 'leverage' these 'legally dubious' land claims to 'add critical mass in creating a sustainable and extremely viable ecotourism enterprise'. The sub-text here is that the game reserve should be established and the area converted into a recognised conservation area. Then land claimants, if successful (and McIntosh does not think they have a good case), could be paid out or given alternative land rather than returning to the midlands farms. It is just a case of 'managing claimants' expectations' (McIntosh 2002).

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<sup>16</sup> Such owners were keen to present the sale of land to the farm dwellers as a positive change for the farm dwellers. As one of them remarked: 'They have their own piece of land, they can do what they want now, they are not dependent on me, they are not under ... eh, the European [sic] is not looking over them anymore' (Van Brakel 2008: 54).

<sup>17</sup> Graham McIntosh, 'Rural land restitution goes for broke in KZN', *Mail and Guardian* online, 14 June 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Tsietsi Mohkele, 'Learning from Gongola', nd AFRA publication.

However this is not an empty landscape that can easily be converted to fulfil a post-productivist conservation dream; there are seriously clashing views of the land and its use and ownership that cannot be so easily dismissed and/or incorporated into the landowners' optimistic vision. In a piece written by Tsietsi Mohkele under the auspices of the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA), an NGO which advocates for farm dwellers' rights in KwaZulu-Natal, a very different picture emerges - one closely linked to the unique history of the farms:

The area has a long and troubled agricultural history, fraught with removals, evictions and the banning of labour tenants from farms ... There are ... over 1100 men, women and children who reside as farm dwellers on the farms in this area, and call it 'home'. They point to ancestral graves spanning many generations and often claim that the white landowners found their ancestors there and took the land from them, and they want their rights and land restored. It is estimated that the number of *restitution* claimants is at approximately 1000 (500 from AmaChunu and another 500 from AbaThembu), and *labour tenants* [claimants] number approximately 127 from both AmaChunu and AbaThembu. These people are asking why the government (particularly the DLA) has not followed the law to protect their rights, and why the government appears to be supporting the very landowners who throughout history have deprived them of the rights they thought the post-apartheid State would restore. (Mohkele nd)<sup>19</sup>

It is however important to note that, even amongst the Gongolo landowners, not everyone has truly bought into the 'third nature' dream of a wilderness landscape replacing cattle farms. An alternative perspective was provided by one of the owners, an accomplished cattle breeder, who only reluctantly decided to convert his farm to game farming, and only because he felt outnumbered by the pro-game farming group in Gongolo. This farmer expressed considerable regret about the possible conversion; he indicated that he saw the landscape as 'a place for cattle, not for the "big five"' (Van Brakel 2008: 44-45).

Due to a series of problems and complexities – not least the land claims – the Gongolo game reserve has not yet been established and so the farm dwellers are still living on this farmer's property. On his farm, the cattle move every half year from the high fields to the lower lying thornveld, where a relatively large group of farm dwellers is living. The farm owner fully appreciates that these farm dwellers are reluctant to move, since they have been living in the thornveld for at least three generations. During this time, they have always assisted the owner's family looking after the cattle. The farmer is concerned about where the people will be moved to once the reserve is established. Their current dwelling place, he says, is perfect for cattle and there is no alternative place he knows of that would be able to support their cattle. It is surely significant that this farm owner was the only landowner participating in the research who remarked on the importance of cattle for farm dwellers' livelihoods. He was fully aware that, as he put it, without cattle 'they miss the opportunity for a capital injection by selling cattle for R4000 a beast' (Van Brakel 2008: 59). Some of the other farmers maintained that cattle were merely kept by farm dwellers as a status symbol – a serious misunderstanding of farm dweller livelihoods.

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<sup>19</sup> The land claims in this region are complex. Broadly, some of the claims fall under the Restitution of Land Rights Act (1994). Such restitution claims were made in the late 1990s but a number are still being gazetted as the Commission works through its backlog of claims. To make a successful claim under this Act, one has to prove that dispossession occurred due to a racially discriminatory piece of legislation (eviction by an individual farmer would not count, for example). The banning of labour tenancy, it could be argued, was such a piece of legislation. Other labour tenants have made claims not under the restitution programme, but rather under the 1996 Land Reform (Labour Tenants) Act which specifically protects current or former labour tenants from eviction and may secure them a place on farms. The third aspect is the land redistribution programme. In 1996 the northern district around Weenen was chosen as the pilot land redistribution district for the province of KwaZulu-Natal (see Brooks 1997). In this programme, government buys up land from willing sellers (farm owners) on behalf of groups of farm dwellers, who then can become owners themselves. All three aspects are at play here. The first two involve different type of land claims and have the potential to end up in the national Land Claims Court.

The final section of the paper turns to consider the issue of game farming and its associated spatial and other effects from the point of view of farm dwellers themselves.

#### **4. Contesting marginalisation: game farming and farm dwellers' sense of place**

Spatial changes such as those described above are not easily imposed upon or passively accepted by farm dwellers. There is an ever-shifting forcefield of power relations that plays itself out in these transactions. In his contribution to an edited book titled *Geographies of Resistance* (1997), Donald S. Moore draws our attention to 'the situated practices through which identities and places are contested, produced, and reworked in particular localities' (Moore 1997: 87). An understanding of the situated practices through which space is both constituted and contested, requires one to attempt in-depth ethnographies of farm dwellers on specific farms, their lifeworlds and relationship to place. A preliminary study of this sort has been done on a thornveld game farm and much of the material in this section is drawn from this study (Lukhozi 2008).

The shift from cattle to game farming effectively renders long-term farm workers, people who in this area of the country are generally former labour tenants, economically redundant. This is part of the context within which new geographies of spatial marginalisation play themselves out. Against this situation of economic redundancy is set the tenacious sense of connection to place possessed by many long-term farm dwellers - a sense of belonging expressed daily through situated practices of cattle keeping, cultural ceremonies, communication with ancestors at the site of graves located on the farms - and supported (to some extent at least) by post-apartheid land laws and the land reform programme. Other scholars have noted that wildlife conservation projects often bring about both spatial and economic marginalisation for local communities, especially in Africa (see Brockington and Igoe 2006; Brockington et al 2006; Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2006; Neumann 2000).

This is not however a simple case of imposing spatial dispossession on passive people. This section considers the transactional nature of the (re)constitution of space on game farms in the midlands. While no-one can claim that the relationship between farm owner and tenants or farm dwellers is equal in this context, at the same time farm dwellers as well as farm owners also have a role in shaping the new geographies of the farm. The very tenaciousness of their continued presence on the land, even if they agree to spatial restrictions, is testimony to the power that farm dwellers hold in this context.

Landowners often profess themselves both baffled and frustrated by the depth of farm dwellers' attachment to specific places - but it is surely hardly surprising, given the history of dispossession that informs farm dwellers' decision-making, that they are often reluctant to be prised from 'their' places on the farm. Inducements such as the offer of freehold ownership of another piece of land are often rejected. One game farmer interviewed expressed his frustration at this form of 'resistance':

The only families I've got are five families left who live in the thornveld ... There was another piece of land that I had, and I said, Why don't you buy that [with the government money]? And settle there? ... But they said, no, they wanted to live down there. They didn't want to move. (Kolk 2008: 65)

His wife filled in more detail:

We had a big meeting and to cut a long story short they turned it down. They said they would like to stay where they are. This is just the old folks not the children. So I said, You are depriving your children, because with more classrooms we could better educate them. More teachers, we could incorporate people from other settlements. But they said no. (Kolk 2008: 65)

In-depth participatory research was undertaken on the thornveld hunting farm already referred to, with members of nine farm dweller families who remain on the land despite the introduction of game farming. It is important to remember that these families are those who in the late 1960s were sufficiently useful to the landowner that when labour tenancy was banned, they were not evicted from the farm. Certain families continued to stay on the farm after the evictions at the discretion of the owner, and they continued working on the farm or on other farms owned by the same man. (In the past, this farm appears to have functioned as a labour farm and there was no resident landowner). After the troubles in the area died down, from the early 1970s, the arrangement was that these farm dwellers were paid R10 and a 50 kg bag of maize meal on a three month basis in exchange for their labour; and they remained undisturbed on the farm (Lukhozi, 2008). Elderly labour tenants described their former life in these terms:

**Respondent 1:** I grew up in this farm. I started working on the farms when I was 15 years old ... We were working at Richmond farms – Richmond is a place when you pass Pietermaritzburg. I worked on the farms up to this age.

**Respondent 3:** I was born here and in our days I worked on the farms ... cropping, weeding and reaping on the maize fields.

**Respondent 4:** We were looking after the livestock, so we didn't have the chance to go to school. (Lukhozi 2008)<sup>20</sup>

This continued until the late 1980s when game farming was introduced. The current farm owner, a Durban businessman, has owned the farm since 1991 and he introduced big game such as rhinos. This is the same farmer, mentioned above, who transferred 600 hectares of land to the ownership of the farm dwellers in the hope that this would solve the land issue. However it appears that legal ownership of the land actually meant less to the farm dwellers than the offer that, if they respected the boundaries of the game farm, they would be provided with alternative lands for cultivation.<sup>21</sup> A number of promises were made by this farm owner as an inducement to persuade the people to move away from their existing scattered homesteads into the 600 acres on the edge of the farm, so that the rest of the land could be used for hunting. However the promised cultivation fields never materialised:

**Respondent 1:** We grew up planting maize, *amabele* (sorghum), and pumpkins in the fields and it was nice, but with the introduction of game farming, we were told not to use our fields anymore because there would be game and the fields were locked inside the reserve. The farm owner promised us to terrace all these mountains with his big machines [earth moving equipment] - but these mountains are still standing. It was better before the game farming; the big problem now is that cattle become sick, dripping mucus and saliva. Because of this game infecting livestock with fever, cattle are not growing to an old age and the goats are so pathetic and the dip is locked inside the game reserve. It's very unpleasant. (Lukhozi 2008)

Clearly at some level the labour tenants continue to regard the whole farm as their territory, and the game farm as illegitimate. Whether this attitude would have differed significantly had the farm owner fulfilled his promises is impossible to determine; however the presence of graves, old homesteads, dams and former fields elsewhere on the farm suggests that this could never have been a neat spatial solution. At one level, the farm dwellers appear to have accepted their spatial marginalisation as a necessary evil and as a prerequisite for remaining in this place. On the other, they bitterly resent the new restrictions and ignore them where necessary and when possible. An old pathway through the thornveld down to the Thukela River continues to be used – there is no alternative. The spatial barrier of the fence is clearly resented:

**Respondent 4:** We are not allowed to get inside the Game Reserve because there is game.

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<sup>20</sup> All the translations from isiZulu are by Khetha Lukhozi.

<sup>21</sup> People were also afraid of the rhinos, which may have been a factor in their initial acceptance of the fence which separates the game farm proper from the rest of the land. Currently the fence is often cut for cattle to go through.



We cheat and get inside because it's the only way to the other community on the other side of the reserve.

**Respondent 6:** Game ill-treated us. The time we were staying with the cattle farmers, it was not like this. Game ill-treated us; it made us to be fenced-off. (Lukhozi 2008)

In the winter, all the conflicts seem to become more concentrated. First, it is hunting season and game guards employed by the land owner (most of them from the Durban area) actively patrol the farm and carry out unpopular actions such as shooting and poisoning farm dwellers' dogs. Game guards are given a financial incentive for killing dogs found inside the game reserve section of the farm: in addition to their monthly payment, they are paid for the number of dogs they kill, as these are assumed to be hunting game (Lukhozi 2008). Secondly, water sources in the community area dry up so there is little access to water for the farm dwellers' cattle. As one of the farm dwellers explained:

**Respondent 3:** Water sources that we had dried out ... We no longer have access to water sources from the farm and our livestock are suffering as well. (Lukhozi 2008)

As discussed above, during the 2008 winter season, cattle were driven to the dam which is located within the game reserve (see Figure 3). The farm manager and game guards drove cattle back when they found them in the game reserve section, but complained that local people immediately drove the cattle back and deliberately left gates open.

Spatial confinement is resented not only for these obvious practical reasons, but also because the new spatial restrictions strike at the heart of older geographies of belonging on this land. The older generation in particular are upset that they are denied easy access to places on the farm that carry significance from their past. As part of the research, farm dweller respondents were given disposable cameras and asked to take photographs of places or objects on the farm that are important to them and that give them a sense of being 'at home'. Some took photographs of cattle, or of places located in the community area. For example, one woman photographed the garden or cultivation patch she had made in a rocky area near her homestead. She explained that the garden was important to her because it had taken her years to clear the land of stones, which she had picked up one by one and removed from the soil so that she would be able to till it and plant crops. Another person took a photograph of his yard, including his dog, explaining that he felt at home there with his wives and children (Figure 4).

However many of the respondents took photographs in areas of the farm that are now supposed to be 'out of bounds' to them. They explained the images they had chosen to photograph in terms of past personal histories that are now denied to them. Some photographed the fields that were used for cropping before the game farming was introduced. Certain hills or 'mountains' which are now located inside the game reserve, were also photographed (Figure 5). They have local names unknown to outsiders and as places they possess both personal and community significance:

**Respondent 6:** On top of that mountain, Mpompolwane Mountain, we have cultural things there. Like for instance, we play drums on top of the Mpompolwane Mountain, if one of the young men in the community gets a lover.

**Respondent 7:** Mpompolwane Mountain is where we used to fetch fuel woods and got courted by the young men, as young ladies whilst we were busy fetching wood. (Lukhozi 2008)



**Figure 4: Yard of farm dweller (photograph by respondent)**



**Figure 5: Mpompolwane Mountain (photograph by respondent)**

Located on the slopes of a second hill, known as Vula-Ngiphume Mountain, was a maize field that had previously been used for a rain-making ritual known as *Nomkhubulwane*. This field would be sown with maize crops and pumpkins, but ‘for the birds, not for our own use ... it’s where we, both elders and children, sing and plant maize not for us but for birds in begging for rain, in dry seasons’ (Respondent 6) (Lukhozi 2008).

In addition to the difficulty in accessing significant parts of the farm, other changes associated with its conversion to a hunting farm are also perceived rather negatively. One of these is the bush encroachment that must have occurred in the twenty or so years since conventional farming gave way to game farming. Not only are the former cultivation fields out of bounds, but the lack of activity in maintaining them has changed their character completely:

**Respondent 6:** Like over there [pointing to the area formerly used for cultivation], we used to play there ... in winter and it was very important in our childhood; we liked playing in that place. All that now is covered with bush and no longer easily accessible. (Lukhozi 2008)

The loss of the fields, a recurring theme, also meant that old patterns of cultivation had been fatally compromised and the community was no longer self-sufficient in food. This is perceived as a cultural loss too:

**Respondent 6:** In our days we grew up not purchasing *impuphu* (maize meal), it was produced from the maize fields, where we also get melon fruits, pumpkins, *yonke lento yesiZulu etshalwayo* and all other Zulu traditional cultivated foodstuff. Now there is nothing important left, we are just staying because we were born into this place and there is no longer that nice feeling.

**Respondent 2:** It was nice before, we were planting beans and *izindlubu*, traditional jugo beans and Bambara round nuts, and we were not buying anything other than salt. Now we are not cropping anymore, we are buying foodstuff from the supermarkets and we are not used to that. (Lukhozi 2008)

With regard to the bush encroachment, some farm dwellers argued that the land was now barely recognisable and that the introduction of game farming had given it an almost sinister aspect:

**Respondent 2:** We used to love our place, with its green grass and trees but not these ones we have now. Now these trees are very dense and they are growing in front of us. Like, previously you were able to see and identify a cow from that far and even realize which one is it - so and so. And tell the boys to go and fetch them from there. But now you can't see anything because it's very dense.

**Respondent 6:** There is a difference of course, because of these trees like these - they were not here. Of course they were not here, for instance you were able to see a hare over there from here. And say, there is hare. There is a big difference because of these forests. Someone who left; when s/he comes back they may be confused because of these dense forests. They even become terrified, assuming that fierce animals might come out. (Lukhozi 2008)

Despite these changes for the worse, most of the farm dwellers still expressed strong feelings of attachment to the place. They were asked whether they would ever leave the farm voluntarily, and most said they would not. Usually this was linked to people's long personal histories on the farm, and most importantly the presence of graves. Continuity with departed ancestors was important and older farm dwellers expected and hoped that both they and their children would be buried on the farm.

**Respondent 3:** To start with, this place, I was born into it and this is why I chose to live in it.

**Respondent 6:** My father 'gave birth' to me in this place, my grandmother and my mother were here and I have lived here since then.

**Respondent 1:** I would miss my father (*izingane zakwethu*), my brothers and sisters left in the place. Secondly, I wouldn't be seeing their graves and if I wanted to see them I would have to pay for the transport to take me from that place to the old kraal (homestead) site [on this farm].

**Respondent 4:** I would miss these beautiful trees and the family members' graves.

**Respondent 1:** I don't think about leaving this place, I wish to live all my life here and to be buried in the place where my father was buried. In fact, even my kids if they feel that they are satisfied with the place, they could be buried here as well.

**Respondent 3:** To leave this place? um ... no I don't wish to. No I will wait until I get served in this place [ie receive development from the government]. Because there is no

place I think of, other than this. (Lukhozi 2008)<sup>22</sup>

Other factors that farm dwellers value are the quiet nature of the farm and low crime rate (as one respondent poetically said, ‘only the birds sing here’); the easy availability of fuelwood; and the fact that they can keep cattle.

The next stage of the story is still playing itself out on this game farm. The farm has been successfully claimed by former labour tenants and the owner has recently been paid out for it. The Land Affairs department would like the former owner to continue to run the farm in partnership with the farm dweller community on a leasehold basis – but this Durban businessman says he does not really feel the same about the place now that he is no longer the owner. (Interview, 24 February 2008). There is also the question of whether or not the small group of labour tenants who negotiated forty years ago to stay on the farm, will be able to reach an agreement with the displaced claimants, who may now want to return. The tenant families we spoke to had in one sense got used to the game farm and were happy for it to continue. They seemed to have become somewhat dependent on the farm owner. One said he knew there was money in game and that game farming was a good thing. The problem was that they had not been involved in actively managing the game farm and did not know how to do it. (Interview, 21 February 2008). If the former owner withdraws, the future of this small group of farm dwellers may again look rather bleak. But it is taken for granted that, whatever happens, they will find a way to stay on the farm.

## **Conclusion**

This paper is a preliminary attempt to try to think through some of the spatial politics involved in the current conversion of land to game farming. This process is of course happening in the context of a somewhat flawed land reform programme - one which does however provide farm dwellers with some degree of leverage in negotiating their futures on farms in KwaZulu-Natal. The micro-level struggles over identity and place are fascinating, and the research programme has begun to uncover some of these. At the same time, as social science scholars it is important to begin to theorise some of the broader social and cultural processes at work here. Are we seeing in this move to game farming the emergence of a post-productivist countryside in South Africa, and if so, how does this differ from similar processes in other parts of the world? Is it useful or in any way illuminating to characterize struggles like those around the proposed Gongolo Wildlife Reserve in terms of a postcolonial “third nature” project similar to that described by David Hughes for the Great Limpopo Transfrontier park? It is clear that such projects by their very nature take no account of the complex histories of people on the land. What *is* the future of farm dwellers on game farms? People whose labour is no longer required, but who are continuing to defend long histories on farms; do they become barely tolerated residents, squeezed into a small corner of the farm and kept as far as possible out of sight and out of mind? We would very much appreciate suggestions on how to take the analysis further.

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