

Contemporary Struggles over Land, Power and Labour in the Context of Private Trophy-hunting Farms in the Eastern Cape, South Africa.

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Commercial farmlands in the Eastern Cape are increasingly being converted to game farms. This trend has sparked off academic and popular debates on the links between nature conservation and rural development in South Africa. The actual experiences of farm workers and dwellers with private farm conversions to wildlife-based production are notably absent. This study shows a local example of how such conversions in the Karoo shift local social configurations and power relations in the commercial-farming region. Ethnographic methods were used to study established trophy-hunting farms, their gradual conversion processes and the socio-economic context in which this took place. During one year fieldwork (2009) in the Eastern Cape the researcher has engaged with, and interviewed, both (ex)game-farm workers and game farmers; and observed practices on several trophy-hunting farms. It was found that farmers and workers in the Karoo are re-affirming their community boundaries in different ways. For example, farmers enclose land with high fences and workers invest in township RDP-houses. Besides these physical shifts in boundaries, the various meanings attached to these developments are of interest here. It is argued that farm conversions to wild-life based production signify more than an economic change of production; it gives an example of how the contemporary social order in commercial-farming is defined, and legitimized. In short, the current struggle over power, land, and labour is described and analysed through the lens of game-farm conversions and trophy-hunting practices.